CONFLICTING VISIONS, COMPETING EXPECTATIONS: CONTROL AND DE-SKILLING OF EDUCATION – A PERSPECTIVE FROM ONTARIO

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ABSTRACT. This article examines recent Ontario Government regulations that have had a far-reaching impact on the working conditions and job expectations of Ontario teachers. The article explores the restructuring initiatives in education that are associated with these regulations. It argues that although the changes have been promoted in the name of excellence and quality enhancement, in fact, they have destabilized the public school system, resulted in de-skilling of teachers, and may ultimately facilitate inroads into education by the private sector.

POINTS DE VUE DISCORDANTS, ATTENTES CONTRADICTOIRES : UNE PERSPECTIVE ONTARIENNE SUR LE CONTRÔLE ET LA DÉQUALIFICATION DE L'ÉDUCATION

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article analyse les récents règlements édictés par le gouvernement de l'Ontario qui ont eu un profond retentissement sur les conditions de travail et les perspectives d'emploi des professeurs de l'Ontario. L'article analyse les initiatives de restructuration dans l'éducation qui se rattachent à ces règlements. L'auteur affirme que même si les changements ont été préconisés au nom de l'excellence et de l'amélioration de la qualité, ils ont, en fait, déstabilisé le réseau scolaire public et entraîné la déqualification des professeurs, risquant peut-être ainsi de faciliter les incursions du secteur privé dans le secteur de l'éducation.

Background

Criticism of education is not new, but in recent years, it seems to have grown more strident. Much of the debate revolves around different visions of what constitutes a desired education for youth, and conflicting expectations as to the product achieved at the end of formal schooling. Is the purpose of education to help the young to develop character, and expand physical, mental and moral powers? Or should education be focussed on training youth to take their place in the world of work? In other words, education for life or education to make a living? Should schools concentrate

on the basics – language, mathematics and science – as well as prepare students to engage with the world of technology? Or is the traditional notion of a liberal education that embraces humanities and the development of aesthetic appreciation, along with an understanding of science and mathematics, preferable? Should one concentrate on subject disciplines or on broader educational concerns such as problem solving, critical thinking, understanding of how various disciplines interact in the world outside of academia? How inclusive should schools be? When is it wise to stream students by ability or interest?

The conflicting viewpoints are not easily resolved. Perhaps final resolution should not even be attempted. As long as the debate continues with each side presenting the merits of its vision, such discussions can be healthy, contributing to the development of understanding education in the context of the modern world.

However, when the conflicting arguments result in wide-scale blaming of the problems of society on the education systems and on the teachers charged with delivering whatever view of education is currently in vogue, then the debate becomes problematic and destructive. Such is the unfortunate case in Ontario, as the following discussion will illustrate.

Political restructuring in the Province of Ontario

Education in Ontario has been undergoing a 'roller coaster' of changes, particularly over the last decade, leaving teachers exhausted and somewhat cynical about the validity of some of the changes they have been charged with implementing. In part, the varied and often contradictory changes can be traced to the three political parties that have in turn governed Ontario over the last decade: the centralist Liberals, followed by the moderately left-wing, socialist New Democrats, and now the right-wing, business-oriented Conservatives. Each government seemed determined to undo what the previous government had instituted. It often appears that the current Conservative Government, despite its claim of offering a "Common Sense Revolution" to the people of Ontario, has, when it comes to education at least, taken the petty stand that if the previous New Democratic Government championed an approach, then it must be wrong. The very words used by the Education Ministry under the New Democrats must be changed and cannot appear in new curriculum documents. To the current government, some of those words have political implications that do not match their agenda; hence the words are forbidden.

But the ongoing debate over education in Ontario is not geographically exclusive. Nor is the manner in which it is taking place unique to Ontario; that is, accompanied by constant criticism of teachers, demonisation of their federations and unions, and disparagement of the results and products

of the public educational systems. Indeed, Conservative Ontario seems to be following to the letter an agenda of educational restructuring already experienced in Conservative Alberta, in New Zealand, Thatcher's England, and in some of the more right-wing states in the USA (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Dale, 1989; Jesson, 1996; Lawton, 1996; Soucek & Pannu, 1996, Spaull, 1996; Robertson, 1998; Taylor et al, 1997).

It seems that wherever educational restructuring has been taking place, another broader agenda has been in operation, an agenda that has to do with fiscal responsibility, deficit cutting, reducing government support for social services, along with attendant privatization wherever possible. Public education, being a major recipient of government funding, has come under particular scrutiny, along with health and welfare spending. But public opinion does not necessarily support cutting the education budget. Indeed, polls in Ontario showed that citizens would even be prepared to pay higher taxes for education (Robertson, 1998). So any government following an agenda of cuts to social services must take extraordinary means to convince the public of the "rightness" of their stance. In Ontario, the approach was, in the words of John Snobelen, the Conservative Minister of Education at that time, to "create a crisis." This involved convincing the public that education was "broken" in Ontario, and the teachers and their unions were largely responsible for the problems. It also involved enacting new and complicated legislation that would totally restructure education, both from the curriculum angle, and, more importantly, in the way education would henceforth be administered in the province.

The speed with which the new legislation was introduced and adopted was very reminiscent of what had happened to education in Alberta a few years earlier under Ralph Klein's Conservatives. It is no coincidence that one of the trusted advisors to the Klein government was Roger Douglas, former Finance Minister of New Zealand, responsible for the sweeping economic and social reforms in that country, some of which totally disrupted their education system. Douglas recommends that once committed to reform a government must not blink, but must proceed in full haste. In 1993, Douglas wrote:

> It is uncertainty, not speed, that endangers the success of structural reform programs. . . . Once the program begins to be implemented, don't stop until you have completed it. The fire of opponents is much less accurate if they have to shoot at a rapidly moving target. (Quoted in Soucek & Pannu, 1996, p. 46)

This is certainly the model that the Ontario Harris Government is following with respect to education. Despite protests by parents, teachers, school trustees, and boards, over the confusion created by the restructuring, the government refuses to slow down and simply forges on. As part of the program, they announced Bill 160, *The Education Quality Improvement Act*

– a singularly Orwellian title, since the bill, in fact, has nothing to do with improvement to education, and everything to do with a massive power grab with the potential to reshape every feature of public education for years to come (Robertson, 1998, p. 44).

Among the features of Bill 160 are:

> the centralization of funding from local boards to the government (thereby removing from local authorities the right to levy taxes for educational purposes);
>
> setting of average class sizes for elementary and secondary school classes across boards (making it look as though classes will be smaller, when in fact, in many schools, they will be much larger);
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> removal of principals and vice-principals from their unions (thereby pitting them against their teaching staff, and designating them as managers rather than their traditional role of lead educator in the school);
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> the establishment of school councils, including parents, community leaders, and members of the business community (but not teachers or relatives of teachers);
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> the reduction of preparation time and the increase in the number of classes taught per day by secondary school teachers (thus resulting in massive layoffs at the high school level);
>
> a clause nullifying all existing contracts between teachers and their board;
>
> boards must negotiate new contracts under the severely-restricted terms of the new centrally controlled funding formula. Boards have no room to manoeuvre, and teachers, who in many cases have not received a raise since 1991, have also lost the right to use work-to-rule, for example, as a bargaining tool to exact better working conditions or raises. (Robertson, 1998; see also Gidney, 1999, p. 248)

Teachers and their unions (correctly) saw Bill 160 as an attack on their hard-won rights to bargain collectively. Working conditions are no longer negotiable, but have become management prerogatives subject to the whim of the Minister of Education. Moreover, the local school boards which had been reduced in number from 129 to 72 in an earlier "Fewer School Boards Act" (Bill 104), are virtually powerless to influence education. They are left with the unhappy task of settling contracts with their teachers while having virtually no room to manoeuvre under the new funding formula. The formula also equalized grants across the province without consideration for different cost of living, or different populations in different geographical settings across the province. Large urban boards like Toronto with one of the most diverse populations in the world clearly have very different educational needs from a board serving a rural, demographically homogeneous area. This differentiation is not allowed for under the new system. The above legislation has wrested control from local boards and the teachers and

placed it firmly in the hands of the provincial government; teachers are now subject to new stricter control.

In the Fall of 1997, teachers made their concerns known by engaging in a two-week work stoppage. The 126,000 Ontario teachers and their principals walked off the job in the largest teachers' strike ever in North America. The boards, aware that they were about to lose their former rights in educational decision-making, tacitly supported their teachers. Despite the government's massive publicity campaign which attempted to paint the teachers as self-seeking villains, and the boards as weak enablers, the public, by and large was not fooled. The teachers mounted their own publicity campaign to inform parents of just what they would lose in their neighbourhood schools under the restructuring. The parents supported the teachers.

Nevertheless, after two weeks, the elementary teachers had enough; they announced that they had made their point, and would return the classroom the next week. Secondary teachers who had the most to lose from the new legislation disagreed, but without the solidarity of their elementary colleagues, the cause was lost. Reluctantly, they too returned to the classroom. Why were the teachers' unions unable to maintain solidarity in their protest against Bill 160? Perhaps one reason lies in the make-up of the federations. The Secondary School Teachers Federation, under the powerful leadership of Earl Manners, has always been much more politicised and militant than the elementary counterparts. Many elementary teachers, especially the women in the Federation of Women Teachers (FWTAO) were genuinely concerned about children missing more than two weeks of school. It has even been suggested that among the elementary teachers were many single parents who felt they could ill-afford an extended work stoppage. Moreover, it is difficult to maintain a united stance among the members of the five separate teachers' federations in Ontario: the public secondary OSSTF, the English Catholic OECTA, the public elementary men teachers OPSTF, the larger group of public elementary women, FWTAO, and the francophone teachers AEFO, plus the umbrella Ontario Teachers' Federation, the OTF. The contested issue of Bill 160 gave the government a wonderful opportunity to employ "divide and conquer" tactics. They did and it worked. Many women teachers were upset with their federation leadership for caving in. In 1998, the long battle to combine the elementary public men and women teachers' federations came about despite the reservations of many women teachers and a new Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) was forged out of the larger FWTAO and the smaller OPSTF. Did the events of 1997 contribute to the demise of the FWTAO? Ontario still has more teachers' unions than other provinces and as such, Ontario teachers remain vulnerable to a government that pits one federation against the other as part of its strategy to break the teachers' unions.

The legislation was forced through. Nothing was resolved, but bitter feelings remained, especially since the new Minister of Education, Dave Johnson, never failed to keep up attacks on the teachers and their unions. In the fall of 1998, there were a scattering of lockouts and strikes around the province with the result that during September, up to 200,000 students were out of school. In Durham Region, the riding of the current Minister of Education, Janet Ecker, an arbitrated settlement forced the teachers in both Public and Catholic Boards back to work with higher workloads than teachers in the rest of the province. As a result, teachers began working to rule and refused to participate in extra-curricular activities for the next two years. This may account for the most recent draconian measures the Ontario Government has taken against Ontario's beleaguered teachers.

Since taking power, the Ontario Conservative Government has removed one billion dollars from the education budget (all the while publicly promising not to cut money from classrooms – only to reduce bloated administrations). The implications are clear. Schools will have to make do with less – less money and fewer teachers. If the results are disappointing, it will not be surprising. Many fear that the real agenda of this government, backed by big business and transnational corporations, is to destroy public education, in order to make way for privatized technological schools to serve the global economy. (Robertson, 1998, p. 45) It has already happened elsewhere where charter and voucher schools have received government blessing. Such schools undermine the public system, which must serve the entire population, not just articulate elites with special ambitions for their children. Perhaps more disturbing is the threat to Canadian society as we know it.

As Lewington and Orpwood (1994) point out:

> At the moment, public schools are a crucible for Canadian society, spanning the cultural, racial, linguistic and economic diversity of the country. At this point, education is the only institution in the country that can provide the "glue" of shared values and history, providing its citizens with a sense of what it means to be a Canadian. In the absence of a continuing, strong commitment to public education in Canada, those who cannot afford the alternatives will be left to struggle with an already burdened system. As a result, Canada could wind up with a two-tier education system that further exacerbates political, social and economic divisions in the country. (pp. 17-18)

Restructuring the Ontario school curriculum

The above discussion has outlined the nature and manner of the legislated changes to education, and illustrates how central control has been tightened. What is happening to education in Ontario mirrors what has already transpired in other areas of the world driven by governments allied to a neoliberal economic agenda. (See Hall, 1983, Dale, 1989, Grace and Lawn,

1991 on Thatcher's England, and Angus, 1986, on the case of Australia.) How has this agenda played out in the restructuring of curriculum?

Common features of restructured education around the world include results-based curriculum focussing on what students are able to do at the end of a program; and standard discipline (subject) oriented curriculum based on measurable items. (Affective elements are discouraged or eliminated from course content.) Science, mathematics and technology are privileged subjects. An important feature includes externally-developed standardized tests to be administered at regular intervals throughout the program. Attention is paid to preparation for the workplace and career counselling. Ontario has followed the model. All curriculum for elementary and secondary programs has been rewritten with new curriculum documents created, based on a uniform template, regardless of the essential differences of various subject areas.

The development of the course outlines was subjected to a tendering system whereby interested parties in the private sector would bid for the privilege of creating each document. Once a bid was accepted and the contract signed, the director was given a budget and made responsible for setting up contract agreements with potential members of the writing team, overseeing the process and ensuring that various parts of the proposed document (the deliverables) were handed over to the Ministry by the agreed upon date. Failure to do so would result in monetary fines.

Once the new documents were approved (in a process that often bypassed education and curriculum experts and involved members of parliament and representatives from the community), other teams set about to write course profiles, describing activities, time lines and methods of assessment according to a number of rubrics. The rubrics were based on a four-point scale where "one" represented student performance significantly below grade expectations, "two" slightly below, "three" performance at expected grade levels, and "four" above expectations. Sets of exemplars were also collected from teachers around the province to give teachers a notion of performance at each of the four categories. The Ministry also produced a standard provincial report card, mandatory for every board. New texts were quickly written to conform to the course profiles. Unfortunately, many subjects still lack the mandatory-approved texts, and so teachers must create the curriculum from whatever is available in the school–as long as the program conforms to the course profile.

Other elements of the restructuring included standardized testing in reading and mathematics in Grades 3, 6, and 9, as well as a 5-hour literacy test for Grade 10 students. The first trial test took place in October, 2000; results have just been published and are disappointing. Over 30% of the Grade 10 students failed to meet the standard, and in urban centres with diverse

populations the failure rate has reached 50%. It is not known whether students, knowing the test did not count, did not take it seriously, whether the evaluation was appropriate or whether reporting of results has been inaccurate. Some suggested that in Toronto, for example, many ESL students were excused from the test but in the final tally were counted as having failed it. Since part of the writing test involved compositions based on "world knowledge" and familiarity with local and current events, English Second Language students who did write the test may have been at a disadvantage. In mainstreamed schools with large numbers of ESL students, but without designated ESL programs, there was no way for the school administration to indicate that many of their students were writing in their second language (nor for how long the second language students had been in Canada). The low overall scores of the mainstreamed schools suggests that the ESL students did experience difficulties. To an unwitting public, however, the reporting of the results by school without explanations of the make-up of the student body, might cast aspersions on teachers of mainstreamed schools, the implication being that they had not prepared their students sufficiently. The 2001 literacy test had to be postponed from October after someone obtained the test just before the test date and released it to the public. The grade 10 students wrote the replacement test on February 14 and 15, 2002. Results will only be available in May, too late for students who fail to sign up for summer remedial programs. Suspicious teachers and their federations have suggested that the poor results have provided the Ministry with yet another opportunity to defame the public education system, paving the way for privatization of education in Ontario.

All of the curriculum, assessment and policy changes have been implemented since 1998. Teachers are exhausted with having to cope with so much all at once. The new programs and assessment systems are very rigid and seem to reflect the notion of "teacher-proof" education. Certainly there is little room for modification or innovation, and teachers feel that their professionalism and expertise have been seriously diluted; in effect, that they have been subjected to "de-skilling" of the worst kind.

What Ontario has been experiencing as it heads into the new century has been going on for at least the past two decades in the Western World. In the 80s, Michael Apple (1986) spoke of the de-skilling phenomenon and how it has been applied to teachers:

> De-skilling also goes on, where the skills that employees used to need are taken from them, broken down and prespecified at the level of conception and then given back to the employee. The employee's work is rationalized. His or her role is transformed into merely an executor of someone else's plans. . . .

> In a number of ways, this is exactly what is happening to teachers. . . . the form curriculum takes is more and more prespecified and prepackaged. . . . While observations have shown that some teachers do not fully accept what is clearly a process of de-skilling, these observations also indicate both the rapid growth of the use of this kind of material, its increased acceptance for a variety of internal and external reasons, and the difficulty of not employing it given the growing strength of an ideology of accountability, cost effectiveness, and meeting industrial needs. It is actually a rather sophisticated embodiment of technical control, one that is an attempt by the school to solve the contradictory pressures of accumulation and legitimation put upon it. (pp.161-2)

Nevertheless, the platform for curricular restructuring is not entirely without merit. Indeed, most teachers, while offended at the prospect of having their profession de-skilled, would probably agree with some aspects of this conception of schooling, especially where it involves setting clear expectations and employing fair and clear methods of assessment. They are, however, concerned about areas of the curriculum that are neglected. Is only the strictly measurable worth learning? They also worry about having to "teach to the test," rather than educate the child. Still, it is the manner in which the restructuring has been implemented that has caused the most problems.

In Ontario the changes have been implemented with great haste, leaving little or no time for consultation, or even for text writers to prepare materials that would fit the new curriculum. In June of 1998 some teachers had only one day to place orders for new textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education. They did not have copies to study before making their choices. Much of the new curriculum was not even ready and so teachers had no idea which books and materials would be most appropriate. But the Ministry insisted that if books were not ordered that June, there would be no money to purchase materials later. Teachers cynically suspected that the government was looking for "photo opportunities" in schools when the new materials – the first that schools had been able to purchase for years – arrived in September. Were the teachers' fears justified? As of September, 2000, according to the *Elementary School Tracking Report*, organized by the grassroots group "People for Education," schools were experiencing serious problems supplying enough texts and classroom supplies. Their findings are based on responses from 69 of 72 school boards in Ontario, a significant number. According to the *Tracking Report*, province-wide, parents engaged in fundraising to the amount of $30,000,000.00 to supplement school supplies and activities; 42% of schools reported fundraising for classroom supplies; 66% of schools report students sharing textbooks; and 65% of schools report worn or out of date textbooks. (*People for Education Newsletter*, September, 2000). The results of the 2001 Tracking Surveys for Ontario elementary and secondary schools showed that 92% of respondents reported worn or out-of-date textbooks, especially in secondary classrooms.

Clearly schools and boards are experiencing serious problems because of underfunding. Conditions may deteriorate even further now that the government has announced a tax credit of up to $3,500.00 per year per child for parents who wish to enrol their children in a private school. The justification given is to provide parents with greater choice; the teachers' unions and others including People for Education have pointed out that every tax credit of $3,500.00 for private schools will remove the same amount of grant money from the public system, impoverishing further the struggling public schools. (People for Education Media Release, May 24, 2001) The privatisation of education continues.

Consultation is another troubling issue. Teachers believe that even when the government does consult, it does not really listen to voiced concerns, and in any case demands strict adherence to their time lines for implementation, even if the materials are not yet available much less have undergone field testing. With regard to curriculum restructuring, the Ontario Government, once again, seems to follow New Zealand's Roger Douglas' dictum of "forge ahead and don't blink."

It is generally accepted that in order to implement curricular change effectively, it must be seen to be needed by those expected to carry out the changes (i.e., the teachers), that restructuring should not be imposed in a top-down manner, that teachers need to be granted sufficient time to work through and understand the implications of the changes, and resources must be available as support (Fullan, 1991). In Ontario, where the overriding political agenda to eliminate the financial deficit coupled with a 30% cut to personal income taxes has necessitated massive cuts to social spending in the education and health services areas, clearly money for educational resources is in short supply. Moreover, it is obvious that this restructuring is being imposed in a top-down fashion. The speed with which the Minister of Education wishes to impose the restructured system precludes time for testing, and for teachers to become familiar with the new curriculum. The time factor is even more critical since, as mentioned above, part of the restructuring has led to a severe reduction of preparation time for secondary school teachers, along with the imposition of additional teaching duties. Is it any wonder that teachers, particularly high school teachers, are feeling resentful, demoralized and cynical about the whole process?

Ontario schools move into the 21st century: What next?

In 1999, the Conservative Government was again elected in Ontario with a majority of seats but with a popular vote of less than 40%. The attacks on teachers and the public education system have not abated. In May, 2000, the Ontario government tabled the "Education Accountability Act 2000, Bill 74," apparently to tighten some loopholes in Bill 160. Essentially, Bill

74, which, despite grave reservations from both the teachers' federations and the public, was passed into law in June of 2000, strictly defined the number of courses a high school teacher must teach in an academic year (6.67 out of 8 per year or 1250 minutes per week, up from 6 out of 8 classes per year); legislated a new average class size in elementary and high schools; established requirements for teachers' participation in extra-curricular activities (now called co-instructional activities); and set out broad new laws covering school boards' obligations to comply with orders from the Minister of Education.

In addition, the Ministry now requires a TAG (Teacher Advisory Group) program whereby every secondary school teacher must mentor a certain number of students (usually 12-16) per year meeting the group once a week for a total of about six hours per term. The TAG program is meant to provide students with help in academic and career planning as well as to provide an opportunity for early identification of academic or other problems. This program adds to teachers' workloads, but is not included in the new 6.67 per year course requirement. In fact, the .67 additional teaching time is being made up in part in a team-teaching arrangement of the newly required civics and career planning courses, such that students have one teacher for half the class of approximately 75 minutes and another for the remaining 38 minutes, not the best arrangement from a pedagogical perspective.

The government has been most disingenuous in the introduction of the new workload requirements for teachers. To the public they tried to sell the notion that they were only interested in increasing the quality of education and in providing students with more time with their teachers. However, critics have pointed out from the beginning that this legislation is more about reducing the number of teachers required. By assigning an extra class to teachers for one of the two semesters, obviously fewer teachers will be required to teach the school's course offerings. Students will not be taking extra classes but their teachers will be teaching more classes and will have more students overall. Therefore, they will have less time for individual students, and the government will be able to remove more money from the education budget. Earl Manners, President of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, estimates that the Bill 74, the Accountability Act, will result in 1000 to 1500 fewer public high school teachers required in Ontario.

Although the Minister also announced some extra funding to lower the average secondary school class size from 22 to 21 students, boards and teachers were unimpressed since average class size still admits a range from under 10 to over 35 students per class. Needless to say, suggestions from the boards and the federation that the length of the school day be increased to

make up for the additional required time without having to find an extra .67 of a class for each teacher has been rejected outright by the government.

What has been viewed as a particularly vindictive and probably unenforceable part of the new Act makes extracurricular activities (now called "co-instructional" activities) as an obligatory requirement of a teacher's duties not subject to the bargaining process. Principals will be given the authority to assign co-instructional responsibilities to teachers not already involved in such. Teachers, most of whom previously participated voluntarily in such activities outside of school hours, and even on weekends, strongly resent being forced to do something they always gladly volunteered for without extra remuneration. Nowhere else has anything comparable been legislated, although it does resemble somewhat the British *School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document, 1990*" (Grace, 1991, pp. 8-9). The wording in the Ontario Bill states:

> It is the duty of a teacher to be in attendance at any time in any day during the school year, whether or not a school day, on school premises or elsewhere to participate in assigned co-instructional activities. Co-instruction duties assigned to a teacher may not be restricted by conditions in a collective agreement. (Cited from *People for Education Newsletter, 4* p.1, Sept. 2000)

A particularly problematical element of the legislation is the fact that co-instructional activities will not be subject to the collective bargaining process any more. To date, the Minister, Janet Ecker, has not yet proclaimed this section but has reserved the right to do so at any time she pleases. In fact, this part of the bill may not be enforceable since once it is proclaimed, any teacher who does not perform assigned extra-curricular activities when asked will be considered to be on strike even if the teacher is still teaching all assigned classes. Is it a coincidence that it is the riding of the current Minister of Education, Ms. Ecker, where teachers in both the Catholic and Public Boards have withdrawn from extra curricular activities ever since the harsh settlement of 1998 imposed upon them a higher workload than anywhere else in the province? The Minister never tires of voicing her outrage over the graduation ceremonies that have been cancelled or the sports teams that have no one to coach them. However, as a result of the "co-instructional" clause in Bill 74 plus the added .67 class and the TAG program, virtually all high school teachers in Ontario withdrew from extra-curricular activities, not just those in Durham County. Fortunately, the government relented somewhat on the workload for secondary teachers allowing remedial work to count as teaching time. As a result, after contracts were settled in 2001, most teachers happily returned to their volunteer work in extra-curricular school clubs and sports teams.

There is no doubt that this part of the legislation in particular has caused serious problems for school boards trying to negotiate new contracts with

their teachers. With one more factor removed from the purview of collective bargaining, is it any wonder that concern is growing about the precedents being set to restrict further labour negotiations and to extend regulation over educational professionals? (See OCUFA commentary on the Education Accountability Act, May 11, 2000).

Principals too, were most unhappy about being given the role of the "heavy" with the power to assign the extra activities on resentful teachers. When Bill 160 took principals and vice principals out of their federations, many saw it as a deliberate attempt to weaken the teachers' unions and to drive a wedge between school administrators and their staff. No longer would schools be a collegial place of colleagues working together towards a common goal with the principal as lead teacher. After Bill 160, principals became managing administrators, separate from their staffs. Bill 74 drives the wedge in deeper. It will certainly do nothing to improve already sagging morale in the public system.

A further unpopular element in the new legislation involves compulsory testing of teachers. Upon graduation from an Ontario Faculty of Education, new teachers will be required to pass a standardized test before receiving certification. Since the Ontario College of Teachers refused to develop the test, deeming it unnecessary since the Ontario faculties of education have all undergone accreditation for their standards and programs, the Ontario Government, at great cost, hired the Educational Testing Service to prepare a test, even though this American service is unfamiliar with Ontario school law. The Ontario Principals' Council became the local partner to ensure local content in the test. Ironically, because of portability of qualifications laws (part of the NAFTA agreement), teachers from outside the province hired to teach in Ontario, will be able to postpone taking such a test for a number of years. Only graduates of accredited Ontario faculties of education need a successful score in order to receive certification. Needless to say, the faculties are outraged at what they see as a vote of non-confidence from the government directed toward both the faculties and the government watchdog, the Ontario College of Teachers.

Practising teachers will have to undertake mandatory professional development courses to keep them current in their subject areas. Originally, the Government had intended to put in place mandatory written tests for all teachers in keeping with a campaign promise to require all teachers to take and pass re-certification examination every three to five years. In a recent announcement, the Minister of Education has confirmed that practising teachers will be required to take fourteen courses at their own expense (seven compulsory and seven optional) over a five-year period in order to retain their certifications. Critics had pointed out the cost of such an exercise, that no other professional group was required to undergo such

constant evaluation and scrutiny and that written standardized tests would do little to weed out incompetent teachers knowledgeable in their subject area but unable to communicate with students or inspire them to learn. Some wondered if the tests were to be subject specific, just who would set and mark the tests, and how many tests would be required, given the vast array of possible subjects taught in the province. The Ontario College of Teachers also counselled against written tests although they support ongoing professional development, as, in fact, do most teachers who already take up-grading courses every year. The latest pronouncement of the Ministry of Education regarding the Professional Learning Program (PLP) states that each course must be at least 5 hours in length with some kind of final assessment. This reduces the burden of the unwanted program, but cynics have commented that the latest version may be another way to undermine the current system of upgrading courses run through continuing education and graduate departments of faculties of education. Is this yet another way to encourage private interests to become providers of pre-packaged 5-hour short courses? Exasperated teachers, through their unions, have vowed to defy the requirement even though it may mean a cancellation of their teaching certificate. The heavy-handed manner of the decision to implement the PLP (40,000 teachers have already received letters informing them that they are to start the program immediately), suggesting yet again that Ontario's teachers are a lazy, incompetent lot that need constant surveillance and regulation, left no doubt that this was just one more attack on the teaching profession in Ontario. The fact that teachers in private schools will not be required to undergo the recertification program, or perhaps even hold a valid teaching certificate, gives the unions and faculties additional proof that perhaps the real agenda of the government is privatisation, not quality control, as is claimed.

Under Bill 160, the boards had difficulty negotiating contracts with their teachers. Bill 74 gives both Boards and the Federations even less room to manoeuvre. In addition, a great number of teachers are now leaving the profession because they have reached retirement age, or simply because they have lost the will to go on as teachers in such a poisoned climate. This at a time when teacher shortages in the UK (see Grace & Lawn, 1991), New Zealand and the United States have resulted in governments trying to attract teachers from all over the world by offering huge bonuses to teachers in certain speciality areas (Carvel, *The Guardian*, March 30, 2000).

Indeed, problems with teacher supply is already evident. The People for Education Group reports that during the school year 2000, parents volunteered 2,848 days per month province-wide in their children's schools and this was not simply to go on field trips or help out in the classroom. Parents were volunteering in English as a Second Language programs, to help keep the school office open, to provide lunchtime supervision, and to keep school

libraries open. In the *Elementary School Tracking Report* (2000) parents and boards indicated that only 68% of schools have a library staffed by a teacher-librarian, compared to 80% in 1998, and only 18% of schools have a full-time teacher-librarian. The number of schools with ESL programs is down 24% since 1998 according to the tracking survey. Moreover, it is reported that the number of elementary schools with a full-time principal is down 10% since 1998 and only 37% of Ontario elementary schools have a specialist Physical Education teacher, down 10% since 1998. What is equally troubling is the report that 30,000 students in Ontario are on waiting lists for special education services. (People for Education Newsletter, 4:1, Sept. 2000) The 2001 *Elementary School Tracking Report* (June, 2001) notes ongoing problems with Special Education assessments and placement. According to their analysis, now 37,000 students province-wide are waiting for special education services, a 15% increase since 1999/00. This includes 58% waiting for assessment, 28% waiting for an IPRC (individual program review committee), and 14% waiting for an appropriate Special Education program (2001 Survey, p. 3).

Things are liable to get a lot worse in Ontario before they improve. The provincial affairs columnist for the Toronto Star, Ian Urquhart, in an article (May 13, 2000) "Why teachers? And why now?" commented that it looks as if this latest blow (Bill 74) was wholly manufactured by a government keen for another confrontation with the teachers. The teachers' unions were ready to deal and seek a compromise. Urquhart says:

> . . . a compromise could have been achieved that would have saved face for the unions and the government, and kept teachers, parents and students happy.

The government decided to tough it out risking more turmoil in the schools. Cynically, they are convinced, according to Urquhart (May, 2000) that

> whenever they fight with the teachers, they gain in popularity. The unions continue to believe that the government's ultimate goal is to undermine parents' confidence in the public education system so they will demand alternatives in the form of charters and vouchers.

It is certain that Bill 74 represents another attempt to break the Ontario teachers' unions. The unfortunate course of action in Ontario can only result in harm to its young people, especially disadvantaged youth. To add to the problem, in 2001 when there was already a serious shortage of teachers in all areas, but especially in Mathematics, Science, Computer Science, and French, applications to Faculties of Education around the province were down by 30%. Young people had seen the attacks on the public school system and have decided that despite the certainty of finding a teaching position, it was not worthwhile to become a teacher under current conditions. This year applications to Faculties of Education are

rising again especially in areas of business and computer science, but perhaps that is more a reflection of the imploding high tech dot.com companies, and problems in the economy in general, than in confidence in improved relations between the government and teachers.

To conclude, the legislation (Bills 160 and 74) that centralized the power for decision-making over education to the provincial Ministry of Education and Training and away from school boards and teachers certainly illustrates how control over teachers and what they teach has been tightened. The rapid restructuring of the curriculum with new course outlines – all tailored to a uniform template; the reduction in secondary schools of the number of possible courses overall while expanding compulsory courses over the four year program to 18 out of 30; the course profiles, rubrics, exemplars for standards, uniform report cards across the province, standardized testing including the Grade 10 literacy test, success in which is a requirement for secondary school graduation; all illustrate the growth of central control and de-skilling of the profession. As noted above, the new curriculum restructuring reflects a "teacher-proof" notion of education – something that ironically may soon be needed, given the severe shortage of teachers now and the need to hire parents and non-qualified teachers to oversee classes.

Teachers in Ontario, then, have faced restrictions on the conditions under which they work and negotiate their contracts, as well as a loss of control over the content and subject matter they teach. This is coupled with increased monitoring and accountability through the standardized testing program and the initiatives for constant recertification of practising teachers. Gerald Grace documented the causes leading up to teacher supply problems in England and Wales over a decade ago (1991). He could have been speaking of Ontario teachers entering the 21st century when, referring to events of the 1980s in England he stated:

> [T]he professional gains of six decades of struggle have been weakened or eliminated by one decade of concentrated and rapid ideological attack from central state agencies. The social democratic consensus in policy making has been decisively broken and replaced by New Right doctrines, aggressive in many respects to the interests of organized teachers. . . [O]rganized teachers have experienced reversals or threatened reversals in every sector of their relation with the central state. Professional autonomy in the school and classroom has been significantly reduced by the introduction of the National Curriculum and by the detailed and highly specified apparatus of assessment and recording which has accompanied it. (p. 6)

The above events have sadly been replicated almost to the letter in Ontario. Today, Ontario teachers derive some hope from the news that the current Premier, Mike Harris, is leaving politics, and that of the five candidates vying to replace him, four have to varying degrees expressed an intent to

make peace with the teachers, should they become leader. A new election might even bring a different party to power, one more favourably inclined to the teaching profession. Still, it is unlikely that much of the repressive legislation or curriculum changes will be revoked, regardless of the party in power. In British Columbia, the new liberal government has begun to reign in teachers' rights by outlawing strikes as a bargaining tool. The attacks from the Right Wing agenda move forward. And in Ontario, teachers try to cope with the chaos that the government has sown. A once proud publicly supported school system finds itself in disarray, awaiting the next blow.

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