Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, Issue #24, February 28, 2003. © by CJEAP and the author(s).

**Moving From Denominational to Linguistic  
Education in Quebec**

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In April of 1997, the governments of Quebec and Canada, through a constitutional amendment, eliminated all denominational rights and privileges respecting education in the province of Quebec. Consequently, Quebec abolished denominational school boards, replacing them with English-language and French-language boards. This paper examines the nature of this transition with an emphasis on what is now the Eastern Shores School Board, an English-language board serving the Gaspe peninsula, the Magdalen Islands, and the North Shore of the St. Lawrence River.

Through interviewing members of the board hierarchy, and examining texts, articles, government documents, and newspaper accounts, it was concluded that the transition was successfully implemented in spite of the magnitude of the reform, and extremely tight government-imposed deadlines. In fact, the most difficult and controversial changes to the education system were those which were ancillary to the actual replacement of denominational school boards with linguistic ones. These were unrelated changes that the Province of Quebec chose to implement concurrently including the amalgamation of same-language school boards serving adjacent geographic areas and the imposition of severe budgetary constraints on boards. The move to a linguistic system, and the consequent elimination of denominational divisions in teacher organizations were relatively non-controversial, both among politicians and the general public. What little controversy that did exist concerned not the protection of religious rights, but the protection of language rights.

Several issues remain to be dealt with by the provincial government, including what was a denominationally divided Superior Council of Education, and the local property tax, now stripped of its denominational protection.

**The Evolution of the Quebec Education System**

In 1867 Quebec entered Confederation with a rather complex denominational school system that was constitutionally preserved by section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867, and which featured the protection of the denominational school rights of exactly two Christian denominations, Roman Catholics and Protestants. Almost from the beginning this arrangement proved awkward. The immigration of significant numbers of Jews in the decades after Confederation strained schools that were explicitly either Catholic or Protestant. As the population became even more ethnically diverse, the strains increased and with the rise of linguistic nationalism in the last three decades of the 1900s, the people of Quebec came to see this denominational system as being increasingly irrelevant to their needs and aspirations. It was during this same period that the established churches, particularly the Roman Catholic church, saw much of their power over the population disappear.

The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s brought with it an increased role for government and a reduced role for churches in the educational system. Schools based on language were discussed but the dual denominational system of the time remained intact but with greater government oversight. This period was also characterized by an increased concern over the future of the French language in Quebec and, by the early 1970s, government action to circumscribe family choice of the language of education of their children was in place.

By the 1980s, attempts were being made to legislate a linguistic basis for the school system within the constraints of the constitution. Many of these plans were highly imaginative, such as forcing school boards with denominational rights to retreat to their 1867 boundaries. Unfortunately for the reformers, the constitutionally preserved rights included the right of denominational minorities to dissent, that is, to break off from an existing school board and create a new one based on religion. This proved to be the Achilles heel of all reform attempts within the then existing set of rights and privileges.

With the release in October of 1996 of the Commission for the Estates General on Education, the idea of linguistic boards was reexamined. This particular study called for the implementation of linguistic school boards throughout the province, including Montreal and Quebec City. According to the report, "confessionality must be unlocked at all levels of the system, so that all students can be taught the shared values that we as a society wish to embrace" (in Boudreau, 1999: 80). The Parti Québécois government of Lucien Bouchard recognized that such a plan could only be achieved through a constitutional amendment, even though the separatist administration indicated that in no way did this decision represent an acceptance of the Constitution Act, 1982. As a result, Education Minister Pauline Marois announced the government's intention through Bill 109 to seek exemption from the denominational restrictions in section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867.

Despite objections from some religious groups, the Quebec National Assembly on April 15, 1997 gave the proposal a unanimous vote of approval. After public hearings in Ottawa, on November 18th of that same year, the House of Commons voted 204-59 in favor of Quebec's resolution, with but one Quebec Member of Parliament, Clifford Lincoln, voting against the amendment (Boudreau, 1999: 82). With the Senate also voting in the affirmative one month later by a vote of 51-17, the last stumbling blocks to removing the right to denominational education in Quebec had been cleared, and, on December 31, 1997, the Constitution Act, 1867, was amended, by inserting the following after section 93 (Smith and Donahue, 1999) "93A. Paragraphs (1) to (4) of section 93 do not apply to Quebec." As such, denominational rights and privileges ceased to apply to Quebec.

Provisional councils were established to assist in the transition from a denominational to linguistic structure, and, on June 30, 1998, these councils ceased to operate. On July 1, 1998, the province's 137 Roman Catholic and 18 Protestant school boards were replaced by 60 French language and 9 English language school boards (Smith, Foster and Donahue, 1999: 2), boards which guaranteed free choice between moral education and Catholic or Protestant religious education.

**The Prelude to Linguistic School Boards**

In examining the traditional roots of Protestant public education on the Gaspe, it is necessary to realize that in the vast number of cases, the region can be approximately divided into two discernible groups of inhabitants, English-speaking Protestants and French-speaking Roman Catholics. This makes the peninsula somewhat unique in that, unlike areas of the province such as Montreal or the Eastern Townships, the Gaspe is relatively homogeneous.

Historically, as was the case in the rest of the province, education for Protestants as well as Roman Catholics on the peninsula was, for the most part, under church control. Until the 1940s, the Protestant schools were administered by a Protestant Board of school commissioners or trustees within each of the municipalities in which these educational institutions were located. By early 1940, The Protestant Committee of the Council of Education was recommending the creation of county central school boards in areas of the province with a significant Protestant population, and, by 1944, a bill was passed in the National Assembly to this effect.

This arrangement remained virtually intact until 1967, when, in response to recommendations contained within the Parent report, the Ministry of Education regrouped all of the small local boards into larger regional Roman Catholic and Protestant boards. As a result of this movement, the Regional School Board of Gaspesia was formed, and charged with the responsibility of providing education throughout the coast, as well as being delegated control over all staffing and related issues.

By 1992, after a quarter of a century in operation, the Regional School Board of Gaspesia amalgamated with two local boards to become Gaspesia and the Islands School Board. It should be pointed out that this board, which provided educational services for the Protestant community along the south shore of the peninsula, as well as the Magdalen Islands was the denominational board in place immediately prior to the transition to linguistic boards. In examining the Gaspesia and the Islands School Board, it is obvious that the schools under its control were dispersed throughout a vast geographic area, with a relatively sparse Protestant population.

On June 30, 1998, a new linguistic board to serve the Gaspe came into effect, and, it is the transition to this particular board that we now be examine. Through an analysis of the various interviews it became clear that the administrative hierarchy of Gaspesia and the Islands School Board were fully aware of the government's plan to pursue a policy leading to the creation of linguistic boards some five to six years prior to 1998. As a result, when the proposal was announced, it came as no great shock to anyone involved with the board. According to the director-general of the board during the transition, the elimination of all denominational right and privileges within the province had been discussed since the 1960s, but, it was not until 1992 that "...the writing was on the wall that there would be linguistic boards". For the current director-general of the Eastern Shores School Board, the former assistant director-general of Gaspesia and the Islands School Board, the movement towards linguistic boards was one which took some 30 to 40 years to reach fruition, but, it was a movement that could not be stopped. By 1996, all school boards had been officially informed by the Quebec Ministry of Education regarding the change to a linguistic arrangement and time lines were put in place to achieve this course of action.

By March 24, 1997, details, while tentative, did begin to surface from the province's education minister, Pauline Marois, regarding how the province intended to move from religious to linguistic school boards over the next eighteen months. According to the minister, under the proposal, often referred to as the "Marois reform", French-language boards would be set up according to the administrative regions of the province, but, as a result of the small numbers of anglophone students, most of the English-language boards would cover more than one administrative region (in Dow, March 30, 1997: 1). This plan was so sweeping that the changes to be implemented in the subsequent months were greater than anything that had happened in the past twenty years.

In the Gaspe peninsula, the six Catholic boards were to be replaced by three French-language boards. However, Gaspesia and the Islands School Board would be amalgamated with six other Protestant boards and part of another, thus creating one large English-language board which would cover approximately 80 percent of the province, from the North to the Maine border and from Drummondville to the Magdalens, and serving some 6000 students.

Among the boards to be merged under the new English-language board were Gaspesia and the Islands, Eastern Quebec, Greater Quebec, Baie Comeau Dissentient Protestant, Greater Seven Islands, St. Maurice, Saguenay, and part of the Eastern Townships. While Gaspesia and the Islands students would have made up some 25 percent of the new configuration, almost immediately, an ad hoc committee of commissioners and board personnel was established to review the proposed changes, and make recommendations to the board as a whole. As the educational psychologist for Gaspesia and the Islands School Board expressed it: "the move to linguistic boards was a good idea, since linguistic was more attuned to modern times than religion". One respondent felt that bringing all the anglophones together under one roof had to be a positive, given their declining numbers. Therefore, the change was regarded as advantageous, as English-speaking Catholics not served by Gaspesia and the Islands would come under their jurisdiction, resulting in higher enrolment figures, and therefore increased funding. There was a general consensus that the religious cleavage was no longer a dominant feature of Quebec society, and, as a result, the transition to linguistic boards was justifiable. As such, the board itself did not object to the elimination of the denominational system, but, rather, supported the creation of linguistic boards throughout the province.

However, this is not to imply that there were not serious reservations to the Marois proposals. Among the major concerns voiced from the board was the sheer geographic size of the proposed board, which would have made the administration most difficult. This could have lead to commissioners having to travel great distances to attend meetings, and could possibly have lead to a reduction in the quality of service offered at the local level, especially to those students classified as special needs, since services of this nature would undoubtedly be offered only in the larger centers, in this case, Quebec City. Another contentious issue was what type of voice would the peninsula have within this new board. There could possibly have been five or six commissioners from the Gaspe and this would have certainly resulted in a diminished voice. Furthermore, local control would have been lost, with the board office in New Carlisle being closed or down-sized, and, power vested in a central office most likely situated in Quebec City.

Also, with the government continually stressing the economic advantages of having linguistic boards in Quebec, there was a fear that this would result in further reductions of operating budgets for school boards, which would have detrimentally affected the already cash-strapped Gaspesia and the Islands School Board. While there could have been savings from having a linguistic system, in linking the quest for budgetary constraint with the elimination of denominational rights, it became easy for the government to pursue budget reduction.

A final area where the board expressed concern was in regards to the manner in which English rights would be protected under the new linguistic boards. Would protection of the English language be safeguarded under the new boards as adequately as it had been under the confessional system? However the government made assurances that the minority language would be protected under the new arrangement. Accordingly, Chapter VIII, section 72 of the Charter of the French Language was cited as a provision that would guarantee English instruction.

Like Gaspesia and the Islands School Board, most of the other school boards that would have merged to create this new "mega-board" had serious reservations about the changes. The Eastern Townships School Board, whose territory would have been substantially reduced, stood to lose hundreds of students from Drummondville, Victoriaville, Kingsey, Ulverton, and South Durham, and, as a result, were adamantly opposed to the proposal. The director-general of the Eastern Quebec School Board stated unequivocally that with some 3500 students, 32 schools in 18 buildings, and a vast territory already, the proposed changes were simply unacceptable. According to him: "...what happened here was the government just took the norms laid out for the francophone boards and applied it to the anglophones, knowing it wouldn't necessarily make sense" (in Dow, April 20, 1997: 7).

With the unveiling of her plans on March 24, 1997, Education Minister Pauline Marois did stipulate that there would be a process of consultation with all the denominational boards, but all recommendations from the boards would have to be received by the ministry in Quebec City by June 4th, leaving just two months for discussions. Many suggested, at least implicitly, that the guidelines were so stringent as to quell any potential public backlash to the elimination of denominational boards.

Thus, working against severe time constraints, emergency negotiations commenced between Gaspesia and the Islands School Board, and officials from both the Greater Seven Islands School Board and Greater Quebec school boards. It was perfectly clear from the outset that the school boards in Quebec City were not interested in entertaining any proposals dealing with amalgamation. However, Gaspesia and the Islands, as well as Greater Seven Islands, were both in agreement that a merger between these two boards was possible. It was generally agreed that this geographical unit with 1600 to 1700 students would be feasible if the money was there to run it properly (in Dow, April 20, 1997: 7).

Gaspesia and the Islands maintained throughout the negotiations that they would rather keep their current territory, which they considered to be enough of a challenge in terms of distances and meeting the special needs of small schools. However, if a merger was inevitable, Gaspesia and the Islands were prepared to amalgamate with Greater Seven Islands, and, by mid-May, after numerous meetings, and unending conference calls, an agreement to this effect had been reached, although the status of the Baie Comeau Protestant Dissentient Board remained in question.

On May 23rd, a brief was presented in Quebec City to the assistant deputy minister of education, who would present his own recommendations to the minister by June 3rd. Thus, the fate of Gaspesia and the Islands School Board was completely beyond its control, for, as was pointed out by all those interviewed, while there was room for minimal input, the final decision rested with the ministry in Quebec City, and, without question, the board would have to accept any decision arrived at by Marois and her department.

Finally, on June 27th, after nearly one month of nervous nail-biting, the education minster unveiled her plans for linguistic boards and, as expected, Gaspesia and the Islands would be merged with Seven Islands, Baie Comeau, Métis Beach, and possibly Schefferville, a territory which would cover a vast portion of the entire province. With the bulk of students located within the Gaspe, the director-general was confident that the board office would most likely remain on the peninsula and that most jobs would be maintained. The new board, which would cover a huge territory, would conceivably cost less to operate than the previous structure. Only one director-general would be required and administrative activities could be centralized to cut some costs (Dow, July 6, 1997: 1).

The analysis of this transition to a linguistic board would be incomplete without taking into account the reaction of Gaspesians to the proposals. According to all those who were interviewed, the general public was not particularly concerned with the changes afoot in the educational realm. Most individuals do not take a particular interest in these issues, since they seldom impact upon their daily lives in any meaningful manner. Most peoples' reaction was simply "what change", in referring to the elimination of all denominational rights and privileges.

This is not to suggest that the issue was devoid of any interest on the peninsula. Certainly, the local community newspapers such as Spec, and its French-language counterparts, devoted particular attention to chronicling the demise of denominational boards, and their replacement by linguistic ones. As well, local television stations reported on the issue in their daily newscasts. Thus, despite the fact that the matter failed to capture the attention of the local citizenry, it was considered to be newsworthy.

In its efforts to inform parents with children enrolled in schools administered by Gaspesia and the Islands, the school board sent correspondence to these parents regarding the proposed move towards linguistic boards. Therefore, families were quite well advised regarding the future educational arrangements that were to be implemented. Of those parents who were involved and actively voiced opinions, the creation of linguistic boards was generally regarded positively. Yet, despite the efforts by the board, most parents remained rather passive actors in the preliminary stages of the transition, either because of apathy, or uncertainty over what the plan actually entailed.

However, the docility so prevalent in the Protestant community at large was not evident within the Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA). This advocacy group, established in 1975 in response to the intensification of nationalist sentiment throughout the province, had, as its primary interest, the furtherance of English rights on the Gaspe Peninsula. For CASA, which largely equated profession of the Protestant faith with being a member of the anglophone community, the denominational rights guaranteed according to section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867, could not simply be eliminated without assurances for the new English-language boards. As such, CASA, which did not object to the creation of linguistic boards, sought to ensure the continued existence of English control over English educational institutions.

**Linguistic School Boards and the Aftermath**

With the announcement by Education Minister Pauline Marois on June 27, 1997, it was clear that the denominational Gaspesia and the Islands School Board would disappear, to be replaced by a linguistic board by June of 1998. The new board was to consist of the South shore of the Gaspe peninsula, Seven Islands, Baie Comeau, and Métis Beach.

To add to the complexity of the situation, the movement to a linguistic board would have to be made in the face of deep budget cuts imposed by the provincial government. From the outset of the proposal to establish linguistic school boards throughout the province, the government was adamant that the restrictive guidelines that they had established were to be met by all boards, regardless of their circumstances. Thus, it was imperative that the new administrative structure strive to meet the September 1997 deadline for creating a provisional council. While the Linguistic School Boards Act of 1997 explicitly stated that the implementation of the new system was to be achieved by July 1, 1998, in the interim period, provisional councils were to be established to facilitate this transition from denominational to linguistic.

Thus, by late September, a provisional council was established for the new school board. At the council's first meeting in October, a director-general was named for the new board and it was decided that Gaspesia and the Islands School Board would handle all budgetary matters, and provide a temporary address for the new school board. As well, the provisional council elected their executive council, and adopted their budget. At the same time, it was agreed that all subsequent meetings of the provisional council would have to be held at locations throughout the territory served by the new board, thus sending a clear message that this would not be an administrative structure dominated by the Gaspe.

Until February of 1998, the new English-language school board covering the eastern part of the province, including the Gaspe coast, had no official name, and, for the ministry of education, which demanded that an official name be chosen by April, the board was simply referred to as number 50-02, the official designation imposed by Quebec City. As such, a contest was launched by the provisional council amongst all schools in an effort to arrive at a name representative of the new board. As a result of this competition, the name chosen was Gaspesia-North Shore-the Islands, but the name was immediately rejected by the province's toponymy commission because it was translatable. A name which was entirely English could have been chosen, but a translatable name corresponding to a specific region was considered unacceptable. The school board had received few submissions that would have met the toponymy commission's guidelines and there was not adequate time to ask for re-submissions from the schools, so the final decision was made by the provisional council (Dow, March 1, 1998: 1). On February 28th, approximately one month after the proposed name of Gaspesia-North Shore-The Islands had been rejected, a special meeting of the provisional council was convened to select a new name for the school board. After much discussion and some lobbying, it was decided to propose the name "Eastern Shores". By June, the name had been approved by Quebec City. School board number 50-02 would now be referred to officially as the Eastern Shores School Board (Dow, March 8, 1998: 1).

Having arrived at a name that was satisfactory to both the provisional council, as well as the Quebec government, there still remained the major task of finalizing the structure the new board would assume. Since the new linguistic board was a result of a merger of the former Gaspesia and the Islands School Board, the School Board of Greater Seven Islands, the Baie Comeau Dissentient Board, and Métis Beach, among the most pressing of all the issues was the location of the central office. After much debate and speculation, it was announced in late February that New Carlisle, in the south of the Gaspe, would be retained as the administrative center for Eastern Shores. Since the former Gaspesia and the Islands School Board had the largest number of schools, as well as the most students within the new arrangement, it was agreed that the central office would be maintained on the Gaspe. This decision resulted in the transfer of employees from the former denominational boards to New Carlisle. However, it was also decided that a North Shore office, with a reduced staff, would be maintained in Seven Islands, to coordinate activities that were essentially local in nature.

Another major issue that had to be addressed was in regards to school buildings and students. Gaspesia and the Islands School Board operated ten schools with some 1100 students. However, with the creation of a linguistic board, the number of schools rose to 18, with a total student body of approximately 1600 pupils because of the expanded boundaries and the transfer in of anglophone Catholics. In regards to the former, while the board gained but one school from the Baie Comeau Dissentient Board, as well as one school from Métis Beach, four schools were absorbed into Eastern Shores from the School Board of Greater Seven Islands. In regards to the latter, the new board also received, from the French language board, Commission Scolaire Renée Lévesque, formerly the denominational Roman Catholic Commission Scolaire Rocher Perce, 49 anglophone Roman Catholic students. Since Eastern Shores had no buildings in their area to accommodate them, an agreement was negotiated with the Commission Scolaire Renée Lévesque to rent space in two schools in which to educate these students. This sharing of facilities between an English and French language board reflected the well established practice of sharing between the previous Protestant and Roman Catholic boards. At the same time, all seven teachers and 40 students from the English Catholic Sacred Heart School in Gaspe were integrated into the Eastern Shores School Board from the French-language Commission Scolaire Chic Chocs, formerly the denominational Roman Catholic Commission Scolaire Falaise.

Although Eastern Shores gained anglophone Roman Catholics, in theory this should have been offset by the loss of francophone Protestants. In reality, the previous Protestant boards had not instructed in French, leaving the francophone Protestant group apparently empty. The introduction of linguistic boards increased pupil population densities in the English language system. In terms of integrating the Roman Catholic students into the Eastern Shores School Board, the decision was quite logical, since having these small schools, which operated in English, within Roman Catholic boards, which operated in French, was not practical. Certainly, these boards had difficulty in attempting to offer services to such a limited number of students. In most instances, the former Catholic boards were quite willing to allow the Eastern Shores School Board to assume educational responsibility for these students. The parents were also willing, if not eager. While their professed religion was Roman Catholicism, they were part of the English community, and, as a result, believed that their children would be better served under this new arrangement.

An additional area of concern as a result of the newly created linguistic boards centered around the response of the Gaspesia Teachers' Association. While the union did not object to the creation of a linguistic board per se, the integration of seven English Catholic teachers from the Sacred Heart School in Gaspe was initially regarded with concern, since it meant that the teacher surplus situation in the greater Gaspe area would become critical. Because these teachers would maintain their seniority, members of the Gaspesia Teachers' Association were justifiably concerned about job security. With one person on surplus, and, with the additions from Sacred Heart, the additional forty students would not justify the increased number of teachers. But the surplus staff was put to good use, by separating some split classes, offering a French immersion program, and moving teachers to other schools (Dow, March 22, 1998: 1, 6). And, because of attrition, the issue of these Catholic teachers bumping Protestant teachers from Gaspesia and the Islands never became a reality.

At the same time, the union had to struggle with other changes brought about by the establishment of linguistic boards. The Centrale de l'Enseignement du Québec (CEQ), which had been renamed La Centrale des Syndicats du Québec (CSQ), would now represent all local unions within the francophone school boards; the Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers (PAPT), which had represented all teachers in Protestant school boards, had changed its name to the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT), and, would now be responsible for representing local unions in the anglophone school boards. At the local level, the new union, which grew from 100 to 150 members, would cover Gaspe and the Magdalen Islands teachers, as well as those educators in Baie Comeau, Seven Islands, and Métis Beach. Since the Gaspesia Teachers' Association was the largest union involved in the merger, it was decided that the draft constitution would be based on the Gaspe model. While there were initial rumors that the new union would be called the Gulf of St. Lawrence Teacher's Association, after some debate, the name Eastern Shores Teachers' Association was adopted (Dow, March 22, 1998: 6).

The sheer growth in geographic size created tremendous difficulty for all those involved with the board. Elected commissioners would now have to travel great distances to attend board meetings, and, the amount of commuting required by individuals such as the director-general was greatly increased. However, the merger of the former denominational boards into one structure has served to unite English students from different regions of the province. Through such events as public speaking contests, and sports competitions, all pupils are enriched by the experience through having the opportunity to interact with individuals from different regions of the province, with different backgrounds. Thus, the larger board afforded opportunities for student exchange not possible under the former denominational system.

The issue of school board elections and the creation of a new electoral list also proved problematic. With Sunday, June 14, 1998 chosen as the date for the elections, officials had to scramble to meet the deadlines imposed by Quebec City. Anglophone officials were extremely concerned about the electoral list, since there were a number of names of eligible voters that were not included. As a newspaper reported, the number of electors on the list was less than the student enrolment and it wasn't clear where all the parents' names went (in Dow, May 3, 1998: 2). As such, a massive publicity campaign was launched to ensure that all persons were aware of how to register to vote, with the Committee for Anglophone Social Action undertaking a telephone campaign to inform voters of the impending elections. Of course, the right to vote for a particular linguistic school board was extremely important, given the fact that voting for either an English or French language board would determine where a person's property taxes would be directed. While individual property owners with children in school paid their taxes to the school board or boards in which their children were enrolled, other individuals could choose the board to which they paid their taxes.

However, at the May 9th meeting of the provisional council, there were still only 987 names on the electoral list for the Eastern Shores School Board. Since the last electoral list for Gaspesia and the Islands School Board contained 4200 names, and, given the fact that the new board covered a larger territory with more families, it was assumed that the list would contain between 6000 and 7000 names. The tremendous discrepancy in the number of names was very troublesome, and, as such, all commissioners considering running for seats on the new board were asked to meet with voters in their area to ensure that all those eligible were registered. Adding to these woes was the fact that approximately 300 names were rejected for inclusion on the electoral list, because the civic addresses of the parents were not complete. For example, almost all the residents of Entry Island were excluded because there are no proper civic addresses used in the area. However, this technical problem was eventually dealt with, and all names were subsequently accepted by the government (Dow, May 17, 1998: 3).

By May 31st, officials were scrambling to meet the flood of people registering to vote, as constant and continuous revision was made to the electoral list. According to the President of Elections for Eastern Shores, by June, 3000 names were on the list, but, the number changed by the hour as new names were added; in fact, some 968 names were added in just one day (Dow, May 31, 1998: 3).

Despite the increase in the electoral list, mistakes continued to plague the election process, as numerous francophones had mistakenly registered to vote for the English board. Adding to the confusion was the inability of Canada Post to deliver election notices to potential voters because these information packages were sent to civic rather than postal addresses, and addressed to "occupant" rather than to specific individuals, resulting in postal employees not being able to ascertain who should receive the notices (Dow, May 31, 1998: 3). In response to this complication, CASA demanded that the provincial government postpone the school board elections, citing the fact that many voters had simply discarded their information packages since they resembled junk mail. The English rights organization was also concerned that absentee landlords, who could not vote in the elections, but, could pay their taxes to the English school board, had not been informed by the provincial government (Dow, May 24, 1998: 1, 5). Since a failure on the part of eligible voters to cast a ballot would result in the property taxes of that person not being directed towards the Eastern Shores School Board, the resource base would thus be diminished.

As a result of the numerous problems in ensuring that all anglophones were on the electoral list, the Quebec government decided that instead of postponing the elections, they would amend the election law so as to permit voters to choose the school board they wished to be affiliated with on the day of the election. Thus, by June 14th, elections were held throughout the province for all of the new English-language and French-language school boards. A larger number of voters turned out to vote in the election for the Eastern Shores School Board than for any other board in the province. Of the five wards in which ballots were cast (six candidates were unopposed), 1736 people voted, with over 50 percent of eligible voters turning out in every ward, and, with the average for the five wards being 64.53 percent. However, there were problems with polling, as heavy turnouts resulted in considerable delays, especially for those not on the electoral list for Eastern Shores. As well, at the advance poll in Matapedia, the wrong ballots had been supplied, resulting in ballots having to be brought from Escuminac, and, delaying the start of voting (Dow, June 21, 1998: 1, 6).

In spite of these obstacles, the Eastern Shores School Board had elected its first council of commissioners. Thus, as July 1st approached, the structure of the new linguistic board was officially in place, and, by mid-July 1998, Eastern Shores was putting the final touches on its administrative plan for the 1998-1999 academic year. With both principals and teachers being named, and, with formal registration for all students commencing at various locations, the board was in the concluding stages of the massive reform that eliminated all denominational rights and privileges throughout the province.

According to Bill 180, which was adopted in 1997, the role of schools within the new linguistic boards was to change radically, largely through the creation of a new school governing board, which replaced the former orientation committees, and, would be composed of parents, staff, students, and community members which, in a largely advisory capacity, would make recommendations to the school board. However, unlike the orientation committees, all of the above groups would be given the same number of seats on the board, thus promoting the creation of an educational community where decisions would be made in a collegial manner, drawing upon the ideas, skills, and experiences of all those involved.

In terms of the education provided to students within the schools administered by these new linguistic boards, the curriculum did not change from that offered by the former denominational boards. Accordingly, the transition to a language-based arrangement had virtually no impact on what was being taught within the schools of Quebec. As Smith, Foster and Donahue (1999: 190-191) point out, the school must ensure that all students master basic knowledge and skills within five fields of study: languages, technology, science and mathematics, social sciences, arts education, and personal development. Although Protestant and Roman Catholic instruction were to be available in the new system, the vast majority of Eastern Shores students chose to enrol in moral instruction, duplicating a trend prevalent throughout the province in both the French and English-language boards and indicating the decreasing importance of religion in Quebec society.

Perhaps the most difficult issue with which the Eastern Shores School Board had to deal with was a financial crisis, manufactured in Quebec City which arose as an ancillary result of the move to a linguistic system. The Ministry of Education, through neglecting to factor in the costs associated with travel, placed the Eastern Shores board in a most precarious financial position. Having received no commitments from the ministry in regards to increased funding, the board began to consider ways to reduce the costs associated with travel, including the use of teleconferencing, which would save a considerable amount of money in the long-term (Dow, December 13, 1998: 5). The viability of the Eastern Shores School Board in the long term will depend on the recognition in provincial funding formulas of its very low pupil population density.

**Conclusion**

Certain themes and patterns that help explain the denominational to linguistic tranformation appeared with regularity. While these themes may not have been explicitly pointed out, it is useful, at this juncture, to highlight these trends. These include the decline of the religious cleavage and the rise of a linguistic cleavage in Quebec society. Perhaps because the changes in the educational system simply mirrored changes that already had taken place in Quebec society, they were met with approval by the school board hierarchy and indifference by the public.

During the research for this paper, it became abundantly clear that the religious cleavage in Quebec, which up until the 1960s was perhaps the most dominant force, had declined in importance to the point where it was regarded as an anachronism. The disappearance of the religious cleavage is manifested by the limited role the Roman Catholic Church now plays, particularly in the realm of education. Since the creation of a provincial ministry of education during the Quiet Revolution, the Church's powers, according to the Roman Catholic hierarchy, have been usurped at an increasingly alarming rate, and, it seems evident to experts and observers alike, that the religious face of Quebec is but a relic of the past.

As the religious cleavage in Quebec crumbled, a new linguistic reality emerged. During the 1970s, and continuing to the present, language has become the dominant divisive factor in the province. Thus, it is clear that while the denominational school boards were a perfect complement for a society imbued with religion, they were an awkward fit for a province in which language was the main point of contention. There was unanimity among those interviewed that it was the decline in religion, coupled with the ascension of language to a position of importance, that prompted the government to vigorously pursue the creation of linguistic school boards. Of course, this is not to imply that economic factors, such as the need to battle the deficit, were not taken into consideration, but, such facts were used as a type of secondary justification to buttress the ministry of education's primary policy.

Without question, the elimination of all denominational rights and privileges in Quebec was generally regarded favorably. In the case of the hierarchy at the Eastern Shores School Board, it was logical to move towards a linguistic system, since it would serve to unite all English students under one board. In fact, there was agreement that the change should have occurred earlier but, because of a number of stumbling blocks, chief among them the denominational provisions contained in section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867, no provincial government was able to successfully implement linguistic boards. Thus, when the Parti Québéccois was able to secure a constitutional amendment in 1998, it was viewed as the means to achieving a necessary modification to the existing system. The increase in students resulting from the tranfer in of anglophone Roman Catholic students was viewed positively by the Eastern Shores board hierarchy, particularly in the light of general enrolment declines in that geographic area. With guarantees from the provincial government that the English language would be adequately safeguarded under the new system, and with these guarantees being enshrined in the Education Act, the Eastern Shores School Board was satisfied that the new linguistic arrangement would serve the needs of its clientele as well as the former denominational boards had.

When the initial proposals were advanced by the Quebec ministry of education, there were concerns that such a transition would not be easy to implement. Of course, with denominational rights being guaranteed in the Constitution Act, 1867, it was obvious that such a scheme would pose numerous obstacles and difficulties. Yet, with determination, the Minister of Education, Pauline Marois, embarked upon dismantling the province's denominational boards, and, replacing them with 69 language based boards. In the case of Gaspesia and the Islands School Board, despite having to merge with boards from Seven Islands, Baie Comeau, and Métis Beach, as well as the liturgy of tasks which accompanied this forced amalgamation, the transition to a linguistic structure was achieved by July 1, 1998. Of course, there were stumbling blocks and obstacles, but, overall, those interviewed indicated that the transition went remarkably smoothly, considering the magnitude of the reform and the government-imposed deadlines.

In examining the transition from denominational to linguistic school boards, it is particularly interesting to note that throughout this process, there was little, if any, public interest. While parents who had children enrolled within the schools administered by Gaspesia and the Islands were kept abreast of all developments through correspondence, it appears that this failed to raise the interest of most. Furthermore, despite both television and newspaper reports dealing with the issue, the general public remained unconcerned, and perhaps unaware, of what was taking place. While it must be noted that the Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA), an English rights advocacy group on the Gaspe, remained vociferous and vigilant in its role as guardian of the rights for those it represented, this was but one of the few instances of public involvement.

It is worth noting that in examining this transition, the most significant changes to the system were those that were ancillary to the elimination of all denominational rights and privileges. More specifically, the amalgamation of school boards, and the issue of budgetary constraints, were largely political decisions which accompanied the transition to a language based system, and, without question, each of these changes could have occurred at different times. Thus, it is clear that while the transition from denominational to linguistic school boards was relatively uncontroversial, the other related issues that accompanied this transition did cause problems.

On a larger scale, several issues remain to be dealt with by the provincial government, including the viability of the Superior Council of Education, whose Protestant and Roman Catholic committees have been replaced by English and French language advisory boards. It is argued that under this new arrangement, the position previously enjoyed by the denominational committees has been eroded so as to divest the Council of any substantive power. As a result, many observers believe that this body has become an anachronism and will eventually be eliminated. Another area of importance centers around the local property tax for education, which has been stripped of its denominational protection. With this tax only accounting for about 12 percent of the total revenue raised by school boards, it appears that Quebec may move towards full provincial assumption of the cost of education, as is the case in many other provinces.

Furthermore, the entire system continues to be plagued by protests from mainly French parents demanding access to English schools. In the most recent case, which began on June 15, 2000, a group of Montreal parents launched a challenge to the Charter of the French Language, arguing that they must be afforded the right to send their children to English schools in order that they may become fully bilingual. As such, the linguistic boards will be a center for conflict, as they are the primary source of educational services for citizens. Thus, the future may be marred by school boards having to reject students, simply because they do not meet specific language requirements as stipulated by the government. Despite the creation of linguistic boards, the tensions surrounding the issue of language will not disappear from the educational landscape of Quebec.

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