

Value Changes in Ontario Education Act: A Narrative and Discussion

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine value changes in the Education Act (1990) of Ontario, Canada, since 1807 when the Public Schools Act (1807) became the first education legislation in the province. With three main sections in the article, the first section offers a brief historical background of the Education Act (1990) from its beginning in 1807 to 1995, when the Conservatives reformed the governance of education in Ontario following their political values. The second section describes the value changes in the Education Act (1990) and related legislation that the Conservatives, the Liberals, and the Conservatives again have made since 1995. The third section discusses and reflects on the value changes described. The methodology of the study was document analysis, focusing on values reflected in legal documents and the relevant literature. The paper attempts to provide an interpretation of the value changes reflected in the Education Act (1990), its predecessors, and related legislation, as well as their implications for educational administration.

Keywords: values, education act, administration, Ontario

Value Changes in Ontario Education Act: A Narrative and Discussion

The purpose of this article is to describe, discuss, and reflect on the changes of values in the Ontario Education Act (1990), its predecessors, and related pieces of legislation. The framework utilized is based on the concept of value. Values could be thought of as conscious or unconscious influences on attitudes and actions (Begley, 2008). Values were established and maintained through normative communities (Strike, 2007). “By subscribing to certain basic values and aspiring to realize them at the individual as well as collective level, we not only strengthen our cohesiveness but also give a new meaning to our social world” (Thakur, 2019, p. vii). With different values, political parties could be expected to favour different education systems (Jungblut, 2015). Values can be examined with different terms.

“Value ranks among the most widely used analytic units in the social sciences and the humanities” (Horley, 2012, p. 161). Social values change, and these changes are often reflected in legislation. When we attempt to understand educational policies, we must always ask this question: “What values shape education policy?” (Fowler, 2013, p. 91). As Fowler argued, no policy can be fully understood without considering the values that undergird it. Understanding the values reflected in the law that governs education is essential to understanding schools themselves. Education has always been a part of society. At the same time, the values schools espouse can help to shape the moral contours of society. In addition, understanding these values may contribute to the effectiveness of schools. While there have been studies that have examined the policy shifts in Ontario education (Ben Jaafar & Anderson, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2003; Sattler, 2012), no study has been conducted to investigate the value changes behind these policy shifts through the analysis of education legislation.

Value in this article is defined as conscious or unconscious influence on attitudes and actions (Begley, 2008). The article investigates values reflected in education legislation in terms of belief. Here, belief refers to something widely held as true by the majority of people at a certain time.

This article has three main sections. The first section offers a brief historical background of the Ontario education statute from its beginning in 1807 to 1995, when the Conservatives started significantly reforming the governance of education in Ontario to reflect their political values. The second section describes the value changes in the Education Act (1990) and related legislation enacted by the Conservative government, the following Liberal government, and then a Conservative government again between 1995 and the present. The third section discusses and reflects on these changes in values, reaches a conclusion, and attempts to understand what they mean for educational administration.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is document analysis, which focuses on values reflected in legal documents and relevant literature. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing documents, and organizational and institutional documents are a staple in qualitative research (Bowen, 2009). The data sources of this study were the Public Schools Act (1807) and its subsequent versions, available at the Archives of Ontario. The data also included the current Education Act (1990), related legislation and regulations, available at the website of the Ontario legislature, and the relevant literature. I carefully examined the values reflected in these materials, briefly described how these values changed over the years, and reflected on why they had changed and what impact these value changes had on educational administration.

Value Changes from 1807 to 1995

In 1807, the first public school was opened in York—what is now Toronto—and the Public Schools Act established eight public schools in Upper Canada, now Ontario (Ross, 1896). The Act stated that for each school, the Lieutenant Governor should appoint not less than five fit and discreet persons to be trustees, who should have full power to nominate a fit and discreet person as teacher and to examine into the moral character of the person. Trustees had full power to remove the teacher for any misdemeanor. In this Act, elements related to values included the requirement that trustees and teachers should be fit and discreet, and trustees should examine the moral character of the person to be a teacher. While these ideas were not values per se, they were strongly value-laden, as values may be viewed as conscious influences on attitudes and actions (Begley, 2008). Although value systems were located in human minds (Fowler, 2013), values were explicitly recommended here. The requirement in the Act reflected the social attitudes at the time that trustees and teachers should have good moral characters, and teachers' moral characters should be examined by trustees, and probably by the general public.

Later, the Common Schools Act (1816) divided Upper Canada into eight districts, each with a board of education administered by locally elected trustees. The Act stated that it would be conducive for the happiness of the inhabitants and their general prosperity to encourage the education of youth in common schools. This statement reflected the increasing social value that education was a benefit for the well-being of individuals and society. More Ontarians realized that education played a role in improving conditions for individuals and society in general. One provision in the Act was that the inhabitants of a place were to elect three persons to act as trustees who would have the authority to appoint a teacher. The Act also stated that no person should be appointed a teacher unless the person was a subject of the British monarch. The Common Schools Act (1816) was the beginning of local school autonomy, as trustees were locally elected to govern schools in their districts.

Upper Canada was renamed Canada West in 1841. The Common Schools Act (1841) provided municipalities with the authority to collect taxes to operate schools. The Act stipulated that every pupil would pay a monthly fee; however, a notable advancement was made toward free education as 10 or fewer pupils from poor families in each district were provided free education (Ross, 1896). The religious Catholic and Protestant minority had the right to receive the due appropriation from the municipal treasurer based on the number of pupils to establish their own school (Ross, 1896). The Common Schools Act (1841) authorized trustees to collect rates for the support of schools. The value of free education was introduced for the first time in the form of legislation. Another value reflected in the legislation was

that different religious denominations, specifically Catholics and Protestants, should be treated equally, which led to the section in the Act guaranteeing that religious minorities had the right to have their schools funded publicly. These were values in terms of beliefs. Since municipalities collected taxes for education, and a school fee was charged, the Common Schools Act (1841) was the beginning of local financial responsibility.

In 1844, Egerton Ryerson was appointed the superintendent of education for Canada West, who promoted compulsory education for all, believing that government aid should be given only when necessary and where it would benefit most (Walker, 1971). Compulsory education was not a value in itself, but it was developed and promoted closely related to the belief that education was beneficial for individuals as well as society at large. Amended in 1850, the Education Act gave permission to any school section to determine whether the school should be maintained by a fee or whether the school should be declared free (Ross, 1896). In 1871, the School Act declared free schools, benefiting all children (Ross, 1896). These modifications to the education legislation happened as more people, including governments and businesses, realized the importance of education. This increasing awareness of education's importance in improving individuals and the general society was reflected in the declaration of free schooling for all children in the legislation.

Amended in 1876, the School Act established an Education Department in Ontario (Ross, 1896). Most funding for education was from local taxpayers (Li, 2015), and school boards were autonomous. Notably, in 1940, the Minister of Education objected to the suggestion by the Ontario Education Association to increase the Ministry's payment to school boards to 50% of educational costs (Guillet, 1960).

School boards used to have exclusive authority for levying education property taxes (Garcea & Munroe, 2014). When there was inadequate funding for education, school boards would approach municipal councils to increase the education tax. In 1997, local support for education was greater than that from the province (Gidney, 1999). From 1807 to 1995, the most important values that could be summarized from the changes in the education legislation were these three: the importance of education, treating denominational minorities equally, and local autonomy.

Value Changes in Education Legislation From 1995 to the Present

In 1993, the Ontario government, led by the New Democratic Party, established the Royal Commission on Learning to ensure that Ontario's youth were well-prepared for the challenges of the 21st century. In January 1995, the Commission released its report entitled *For the Love of Learning*, which suggested a vision and action plan to guide the reform of elementary and secondary education (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a). The plan included values, goals, and programs of schools, as well as systems of governance. Two of the most noteworthy values reflected in the plan were accountability and equity (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995b).

In 1995, the Progressive Conservative Party campaigned with a document titled "Common Sense Revolution," which stated their political agenda. Their message was: Reduce government spending, cut taxes, eliminate the deficit, and rationalize government services (Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2003), which seemed to indicate the conservative value of having a small government.

Once they formed a majority government, the Conservatives cut \$400 million from the total education funding for the 1996-97 school year and launched a comprehensive education reform. The government took on an ambitious legislative agenda, passing several pieces of legislation related to the education system. The legislature passed Bill 30, the Education Quality and Accountability Office Act (1996), establishing the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). The objects of the EQAO were set out in section 3 of the legislation, notably evaluating the effectiveness of elementary and secondary education and assessing the academic achievement of pupils. Section 4 stated that the EQAO might require the co-operation of school boards. Section 6 permitted the Minister of Education and Training to issue directives and establish policies on matters relating to the objects of the EQAO. Table 1 illustrates the pieces of legislation and policies related to the values of accountability, quality, and equity, particularly accountability, in Ontario since 1996. These values were identified through the examination of the relevant pieces of legislation and policies. The values were explicitly stated or strongly suggested in these documents. These values seemed to be universal across party lines, although different parties approached them in different ways. The difference was demonstrated by the Conservatives and the Liberals when

both of them had to deal with district school boards that submitted deficit budgets.

Table 1

Legislation and Policies Intended to Increase Accountability, Quality, and Equity

Bill	Title	Year	
Bill 30	Education Quality and Accountability Office Act	1996	Established the EQAO to evaluate the effectiveness of education, required the co-operation of school boards, and permitted the Minister of Education and Training to issue directives
Bill 31	Ontario College of Teachers Act	1996	Established the College of Teachers to regulate and govern the profession of teaching
Bill 104	Fewer School Boards Act	1997	Amalgamated 129 school boards into 72 district school boards, cut the number of trustees and capped their honoraria at \$5,000/year, and established the Education Improvement Commission
Bill 160	Education Quality Improvement Act	1997	Took away school boards' power of deciding education tax, made it illegal for boards to operate with a deficit, and centralized funding at the provincial level
Bill 74	Education Accountability Act	2000	Extended the government's powers to improve the accountability of school boards
Bill 177	Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act	2009	Increased the government's powers by stipulating that the government might make regulations governing the roles, responsibilities, and powers of school boards
	Guideline for Fees for Learning Materials and Activities	2011	Made fees schools collected more consistent across Ontario
	Fundraising Guideline	2014	Made fundraising activities more consistent across Ontario
Bill 122	School Boards Collective Bargaining Act	2014	Changed legislation concerning collective bargaining between teacher associations and school boards, giving the government a greater role to play
Bill 124	Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act	2019	Capped public sector salary increase at 1%

The following paragraphs focus on explaining the values of accountability, quality, and equity that were reflected in the most important pieces of legislation listed in the table. Bill 30, Education Quality and Accountability Office Act (1996), established the EQAO to evaluate the effectiveness of the education system, required the co-operation of school boards, and permitted the Minister of Education and Training to issue directives to school boards. Bill 31, College of Teachers Act (1996), established the College of Teachers with the objective of regulating the profession of teaching, governing its members, and establishing and enforcing professional standards and ethical standards applicable to members. In carrying out its objects, the College had a duty to serve and protect the public interest. Bill 104, the Few-

er School Boards Act (1997), amalgamated 129 school boards into 72 district school boards in 1998, cut the number of trustees, and capped their honoraria at \$5,000 per year, drastically lower than the actual honoraria paid at the time by most school boards. To oversee the transition to the new district school boards, Bill 104 established the Education Improvement Commission (EIC; Li, 2015).

The government's initiatives reflected the conservative value of having a small government to reduce taxes. Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act (1997), took away school boards' power to levy education tax and made it illegal for boards to operate with a deficit. Education funding was centralized at the provincial level and was determined by a formula that considered the number of students, the needs of students, and the needs of district school boards. Bill 160 also made funding more equal across the province, reflecting the increasing awareness of the equity value, supported by all provincial parties, at least theoretically.

In 1999, the Conservative government asked the EIC to review the major activities the district school boards undertook to reduce administrative structures. In its report, the EIC (2000) outlined an accountability framework that defined who did what and provided recommendations for its implementation, believing that the implementation of a comprehensive accountability framework was the single factor that would have the greatest impact in improving the education system (Li, 2015). Bill 74, the Education Accountability Act (2000), extended the government's powers over school boards to improve the accountability of district school boards to students, parents, and taxpayers. The legislation stipulated that the Minister may require boards to submit plans and report on any matter related to compliance.

In 2002, in response to the continued refusal of trustees in the three largest district school boards (Toronto, Ottawa, and Hamilton Public) to revise their budgets to eliminate deficits, the Conservative government appointed supervisors to the three boards. The supervisors in Ottawa and Hamilton made cuts and balanced the budgets. The supervisor for Toronto significantly reduced the deficit and composed a plan to further reduce the deficit in the following years with the aim of eventually balancing the budget (Kalinowski, 2002).

In 2003, the Liberals formed a new government. The Liberals increased education funding, but in 2006, three large district school boards (Toronto Public, Toronto Catholic, and Dufferin-Peel Catholic) submitted budgets with a deficit for 2006-07. The government appointed auditors to review the budgets of the three boards. Working with auditors, the Toronto Public and Toronto Catholic Boards balanced their budgets. Dufferin-Peel Catholic Board continued to resist recommendations from its auditor, which led the government to appoint a financial expert to work with the board to eliminate their deficit. Both the Conservatives and the Liberals promoted the value of accountability, although their approaches were different. The Conservatives sent in supervisors, but the Liberals sent in auditors. Supervisors acted more as managers than auditors.

What happened in Ontario was part of the trend across Canada, where there was an emphasis on values, ethics, and accountability (Pal, 2014). While there was more money per student in Ontario, there were more restrictions on where school boards could spend the money, and more requirements on the boards to report how they used the money (Li, 2015).

After the Conservatives' reform in 1997 through Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act, education was funded entirely according to a provincial formula. With the formula, there was less flexibility for district school boards to decide how to use their funding (Governance Review Committee, 2009). In addition, school boards had to make their annual financial statements public. Among the changes in the late 1990s, the implementation of the provincial funding formula had the greatest effect on the education system (EIC, 2000). Behind this significant reform were the values of accountability and quality.

Even with the increased funding, there was criticism that funding was inadequate (Mackenzie, 2007). One advocacy organization, People for Education (2012), stated that its survey results often contradicted what the Liberal government claimed with respect to funding adequacy. It seemed that Mackenzie (2007) and People for Education (2012) had different values from those of the Liberal government. Mackenzie (2007) and People for Education (2012) stressed adequacy, but the government, both Conservative and Liberal, stressed accountability.

Brimley et al. (2016), who were education finance experts, suggested that a per-pupil funding amount that varied by 5 percent or less could be considered as within acceptable limits. By this metric, Ontario

education funding could be considered equitable, since it is determined provincially regardless of local wealth. In 2020-2021, the provincial government provided approximately 70% of the education funding, and 30% was from local property tax (author's calculation based on information from T. Dias, Team Lead, Funding, Special Education / Success for All Branch, Ontario Ministry of Education, personal communication, March 16, 2021).

In 2009, under the Liberal government, the Minister of Education introduced Bill 177, the Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act, which stipulated that the government might make regulations governing the roles, responsibilities, and powers of school boards. The increasing centralization of education governance put the Ministry in the position of setting performance standards and monitoring local compliance. The Ministry issued the Guideline for Fees for Learning Materials and Activities (Ministry of Education, 2011) and a Fundraising Guideline to regulate school fundraising activities (Ministry of Education, 2014) to make policies more equitable across the province. To reach equitable learning outcomes, equitable financial input must be achieved first.

Teachers' collective agreements were originally negotiated almost exclusively by school boards and teacher association locals. In the 1990s, there was a concern that trustees seemed unwilling to restrain ever-rising education spending and taxation (Bedard & Lawton, 1998). As a result of Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act (1997), the Conservative government determined the foundation on which the negotiations between school boards and teacher associations were conducted (EIC, 2000). As accountability was a social value supported by more people (Sattler, 2012), the Liberal government, which replaced the Conservatives in 2003, increased its role in collective bargaining in 2005 as part of the centralizing process, negotiating directly with provincial teacher associations in renewing contracts, going around school board associations and district school boards. In 2008, the Liberal government discussed a funding framework for renewing teacher contracts, again, directly with provincial teacher associations to reach agreements (Rushowy & Ferguson, 2009).

Talks between the Liberal government and provincial teacher associations began in February 2012, before collective agreements expiring at the end of August. This time, the government wanted a freeze on public sector salaries for two years to deal with a \$14 billion provincial deficit. Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA) and Association des Enseignantes et des Enseignants Franco-Ontariens (AEFO) signed a memorandum of understanding with the government in July (Rushowy & Benzie, 2012) and August (Talaga & Rushowy, 2012), respectively. The other two associations, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), refused to accept the government's proposal (Ferguson, 2012).

The legislature passed Bill 115, the Putting Students First Act, in September. It imposed on ETFO and OSSTF contracts similar to those for OECTA and AEFO, freezing salaries for two years and pre-emptively removing teachers' rights to strike if ETFO and OSSTF did not reach agreements with boards by the end of December. Bill 115 reflected the trend of centralization in the province and the country. Contracts were imposed in January 2013 when agreements were not reached. Launching a legal challenge against Bill 115, ETFO and OSSTF were also engaged in protest activities, which only stopped after a new premier assumed office in February and made amendments to the contracts (Ferguson, 2014). Teachers' agreements expired on August 31, 2014, when collective bargaining was conducted under a more formal provincial system passed into law through Bill 122 under the Liberal government, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, which established a framework of two-level bargaining: central bargaining and local bargaining. By November 2015, eight of nine central deals—which covered costly items such as salary and benefits—were reached, and most were ratified.

In 2017, collective bargaining between the Liberal government and provincial teachers' associations was conducted quietly with minimal media coverage. Both the government and teacher associations remained relatively silent, and they reached an agreement, extending the previous agreements for two more years.

During his provincial campaign in 2018, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, Doug Ford, promised that if elected, he would cut \$6 billion in existing government spending. Ford also promised to change the math curriculum so that students would focus on basic arithmetic rather than discovery strategies, as Ontario students' test scores in math had fallen in recent years (Alphonso, 2018). On June 7, 2018, voters elected a Conservative majority government. The Conservatives announced increased class sizes for Grades 9-12 from 22 to 28, which would be gradually phased in. The legislature

passed Bill 124, the Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act (2019), to cap public sector salary increases at 1%. One thing was clear: The Conservatives wanted to reduce public spending so that Ontario could balance its budget, as they had explicitly stated in their election campaign. It seemed apparent that the Conservative value of having a small government came back.

From 1995 to the present, the most important values that can be summarized from the changes in the education legislation are quality, equity, and accountability, particularly accountability. The word “quality” appeared in the titles of two pieces of legislation, and the purpose of two guidelines was claimed to increase equity. The word “accountability” appeared in the titles of two pieces of legislation. Provincial, national, and international social and political factors have intertwined to shape the increasing emphasis on these values. These factors will be discussed in the last section of this article: discussion and conclusion.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper presents a brief history of value changes reflected in the successive iterations of Ontario education legislation, divided into two eras: pre-1995 and post-1995. The first Public Schools Act (1807) was only three pages long. Elements that could be considered as reflecting social values were that trustees and teachers must be fit and discreet, and that a teacher must have a good moral character. For over one and a half centuries, most funding for public schools came from local communities. A sense of “our school” developed in communities, and school boards were autonomous. As social and economic changes occurred, more children enrolled in school, and remained in school for extended durations. Pieces of legislation on administering schools became more complex, and more social values were written into education statutes. In addition to quality, equity, and accountability, the current Education Act (1990) mentions care, student achievement, and well-being. The Education Act (1990) is over 300 pages long, under which 254 regulations have been made. Education legislation covers almost everything concerning schooling, from how schools are funded to what programs should be provided and how they should be provided, to how teachers and students should behave in schools. Youth must go to school until they are 18 years old or until they receive the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Teachers are still required to have a good moral character, but other things have changed significantly. The most important values that could be summarized from the developments in the education legislation from 1807 to 1995 were the importance of education, treating the religious minority equally so that they could have their schools, and local autonomy.

This article also describes and reflects on the changes the Conservatives, the Liberals, and then the Conservatives again have made in education legislation since 1995. One value stands out from most of the changes: accountability. With limited resources, policy advocates must emphasize a few central values (Fowler, 2013). Accountability is a central value that the government has been advocating, regardless of being Conservative or Liberal. District school boards have become more accountable to the government. The increasing accountability for school boards has happened in the North American social-political context. In the United States, a regime of neo-liberal corporate accountability dominated the governance of education (Ranson, 2003). This was, to a certain extent, a reflection of value changes in society. In Canada, at the federal level, the modern focus on accountability, ethics, and good governance began in 1995 (Pal, 2014). In the 1990s, all provinces except Prince Edward Island reduced the number of school districts, centralizing the governance of schools (Ben Jaafar & Anderson, 2007). Centralization was a means towards greater accountability. Over the past 20 years, provincial governments introduced a broad array of educational reforms and accountability initiatives to address higher public expectations for schools (Galway et al., 2013).

The trend of centralization at the provincial level happened in the name of efficiency and equity. The concept of efficiency in government discourse was closely related to the values of quality and accountability, and the concept of equity was closely related to the value of fairness. The Conservative government in Ontario believed that fewer school boards would lead to less money spent on administration and that more provincial government funding power would lead to more equalized funding across the province. Across Canada, provincial governments became more powerful, and school boards less so (Galway et al., 2013). In addition, there emerged a growing Canadian constituency believing that school boards had become wasteful hierarchies whose role in promoting student learning was negligible, and a

common trend in governance was the centralization of power at the provincial level (Galway et al., 2013). One main theme of the reforms since 1995 in Ontario has been the increasing expectation of accountability for district school boards, school administrators, and teachers.

The government, Conservative, Liberal, and Conservative again, has demanded more accountability from school boards and made more regulations. Bill 30, the Education Quality and Accountability Office Act (1996), had the word accountability in its title. One important purpose of Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act (1997), was to enhance the accountability of school boards. The EIC (2000) claimed that reforms at the time included a focus on developing greater accountability. In its title, Bill 74, the Education Accountability Act (2000), also included the word accountability. Ranson (2003) argued that the purpose of accountability legitimized the creation of detailed regulations to ensure the compliance of practitioners. Through legislation, it was the provincial government, whether the Conservative, the Liberal, or the Conservative again, that acted as an enforcer to compel district school boards to follow provincial policies. According to Brill et al. (2018), the purpose of accountability is widely accepted as one of strengthening the education system. As countries and jurisdictions strive to draw the most value from their education systems, it is common for governments to implement modest or extensive reforms to their accountability regimes (Brill et al., 2018).

The Ontario government plays a more directive role regarding education funding and delivery, in the name of consistency, effectiveness, and efficiency (Li, 2015). Consistency in an education system is often described as achieved through centralized control (Ranson, 2003). What has happened in Ontario education in almost three decades is consistency achieved through centralized control, from taking away school boards' taxing power and replacing it with a provincial funding formula under Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act (1997), to Bill 115, the Putting Students First Act (2012), which imposed a contract on teacher associations, to the government negotiating teacher contracts directly with provincial teacher associations without real participation from district school boards under the 2014 Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act (Li, 2015). Consistency was also achieved in the name of equity. Ontario was part of the Canadian trend in education governance centralization at the provincial level (Galway et al., 2013) and part of the international trend of educational reforms through accountability measures (Ben Jaafar & Anderson, 2007). Accountability was a government's mechanism for holding education institutions to account for the delivery of high-quality education (Brill et al., 2018).

Although some reform initiatives were started by the New Democratic Party government before 1995 (Manzer, 1994), with their political values, the Conservatives made the most significant changes, and the Liberals continued in a similar direction, albeit generally with a less confrontational approach (Li, 2015). The Liberal Premier of Ontario from 2003 to 2013, Dalton McGuinty, claimed to be an education premier. In comparison with the Conservatives, the Liberals invested more money in education. According to this author's calculation, the funding for elementary and secondary education in 2017-2018 was \$8.6 billion more than that in 2003-2004—an increase of about 57%—even though enrolment remained almost the same during this period (Ministry of Education, 2017). The consumer price index for Ontario indicated an increase of about 32% from 2003 to 2018 (Statistics Canada, 2021), which was the closest matching period the author could find. Notably, there was an increase in expenditures on education for each student in 2017-2018 than in 2003-2004, even with inflation considered. Although the Liberals invested more in education, reforms from the Conservatives, the Liberals, and again the Conservatives increased accountability for school boards, school administrators, and teachers.

Increasing accountability in Ontario, coupled with greater funding from the provincial government, has made education more centralized and created a regime of regulation. Based on the analysis of value changes that have transpired in almost three decades, the current education revenue sources, and the national and international trends of increasing accountability (Brill et al., 2018; Bush, 2018; Copp, 2019; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017; Wang, 2019), it appears that the government will keep its increased powers. While the New Democrats, the Conservatives, and the Liberals have different political values, they all have worked to increase accountability in Ontario education. There is more consistency across the province, and the government has increased its powers, regardless of political affiliation.

Bill 30, Education Quality and Accountability Office Act (1996), had the word accountability in its title, but Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act (1997), made the most significant changes, which reflected conservative values of having a small government with a low tax system. Another

noteworthy change was Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act (2014), which changed legislation concerning collective bargaining between teacher associations and school boards, giving the Liberal government a greater role to play. Bill 122 reflected the neoliberal paradigm values of financial stewardship, stakeholder partnerships, and accountability for student success, as suggested by Sattler (2012).

One impact of the increasing influence of accountability is the decreased discretion of trustees and school administrators in operating schools. District school boards and schools are less autonomous. Provincial policies are more directive than in the past. School boards must adhere more closely to provincial policies or face the consequences. With increasing provincial direction and less local autonomy, there is an intensification of school administrators' workload. For example, the provincial equity and inclusive policy and the safe and accepting schools policy that school boards must comply with add to the work intensification of board and school administrators. Additional documents are to be filed (Faubert et al., 2019; Higginbottom, 2019). Accountability also puts pressure on teachers, who must adhere more closely to provincial policies in their work and demonstrate students' success, often defined in terms of student achievement on standardized tests (Duncan, 2011; Lim, 2019).

Individuals and groups often act to increase their power, and power plays are frequently well hidden beneath seemingly neutral policies (Fowler, 2013). Questions that should be asked in the analysis of education policies are: Who gains power, and who loses power? (Fowler, 2013). With the descriptions and reflections in this article, it can be concluded that the most noticeable result of the reforms in almost three decades in Ontario is that increasing accountability has been written into a series of education legislation since 1995. Through this series of legislation, the provincial government has gained power, regardless of whether it is Conservative or Liberal, and school boards, school administrators, and teachers have lost much of their autonomy.

Learning where we are from may help us understand the current situation, and it may also help us foresee where we are likely to go, particularly in uncertain times. This study enables us to gain a better understanding of the changes in values in education legislation over the years, and probably why these values changed. With the current structure of funding, the political landscape, the national and international trends, and the economic situation, this increased accountability is likely to stay, although there are varied opinions about whether more accountability is beneficial for public education (Parker, 2017). While previous studies have highlighted the increasing accountability in public education in Ontario, Canada, and internationally, this study has systematically described and analyzed the value changes in Ontario education legislation, demonstrating with concrete examples how accountability has been written into legislation and has become more important in Ontario education since 1995. This study advances historical, practical, and theoretical knowledge in the field of educational administration.

Social values change, and the values reflected in education legislation change accordingly. "The most important overarching value in public policy is the public interest" (Pal, 2014, p. 3). By extension, it can be argued that in public education, the most important value is the interest of students. A recent UNESCO (2017) report indicated that socio-political trends have shifted education policy towards greater emphasis on accountability. The increasing accountability in Ontario education has been promoted in the name of students' interests. Future studies can examine whether there is a relationship between accountability and students' interest. As UNESCO (2017) pointed out, "On legal, political, social or moral grounds, governments and other education actors are obliged to report on the fulfilment of their responsibilities" (p. 8). A succession of Ontario governments has increased accountability for school boards, school administrators, and teachers. Is it possible for citizens and educators to increase accountability for their governments when it comes to public education?

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