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Canadian Schools and Canadian Identity

Alf Chaiton and Neil McDonald (eds.). *Canadian Schools and Canadian Identity*. Toronto: Gage Educational, 1977. Pp. 189. $8.50 (Cloth). $4.65 (Paper).

With Rene Levesque's electoral victory in November, 1976, Canadians again are soul searching about Canadian identity and unity. It was therefore fortuitous that shortly afterwards, this book was published. And it is appropriate the book's "last word" belongs to Levesque. For presumably the book will help students to focus on how Canadians perceived the school and education in attaining a special identity.

The series of articles have been designed for pedagogic purposes essentially: "to encourage the active participation of the reader, and place the major responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the students, rather than the authors of the articles" (p. 3). The editors chose to introduce senior high or undergraduate students to a theme of Canada-wide importance by means of case studies. The expectation is that readers would then examine the issues raised in relation to developments elsewhere. Thus neither the articles nor book would claim to present a comprehensive picture of education's relationship to the goal of national identity.

Except for Levesque, the authors are all academics, and the scholarly approach of most articles will assist teachers of educational history in their courses. The first two articles indicate the long-term development of the concept of Canadian identity in the schools and some probable explanations of why Canadian schools have failed to produce people with a desired sense of Canadian identity. George Tompkins outlines past attempts to achieve this identity, ranging from the early attempts to ban American textbooks and teachers, to the introduction of Canadian adapted or developed curricular materials, including history textbooks stressing nation-building, acceptable to both language groups. Also he indicates the roles of agencies such as the National Film Board and the CBC. Furthermore, he describes the attempts of the Canadian Studies Foundation to develop appropriate curricular materials. Exceedingly important is his outlining various studies of political socialization of Canadian students, often demonstrated by regional loyalties. Proposing further avenues of research, perhaps Tompkins meant students to enquire why these regional loyalties should have developed: whether it was in fact the inadequate curricular material, the influence of the American mass media, or indeed contemporary political events. Can curricular factors alone explain why Quebec nationalism and pequiste support is strongest among the young and educated? Robert Stamp's article discussed some reasons why a Canada-wide consensus on educational goals has failed, including early perception of educational goals, provincial autonomy in education, Canada's delayed growth in achieving political autonomy, and American influence. Significantly he wonders, not only whether the schools *can* in fact fulfill the function Canadian nationalists want, but whether the schools, with so many other duties heaped upon them, *should*. By suggesting alternatives, Stamp helps to fulfill the book's pedagogic purposes.

Although the editors have included Genevieve Jain's article as part of the section defining the problem, in a sense the material described represents the attempt of educational and political decision-makers to develop (gradually) a particular view of Canada by means of history textbooks in Ontario and Quebec up to 1914. Jain suggests reasons for the different concepts of nationalism in the two provinces, including the extent to which people felt culturally threatened. In Quebec certain things still seem to remain such as the greater importance accorded teaching language rather than history in cultural preservation, or the relative neglect of the English-speaking Catholic minority.

Touching an oft-examined issue in education history courses, Neil McDonald discusses Canadian nationalism in education in the Northwest Territories until 1905. While concentrating on the roles of Haultain and Goggin in building the school system, McDonald shows that these men adequately reflected the dominant group in the West, indicated by the views of the Protestant churches, the press and other politicians in this period. The linguistic-religious struggles in the central provinces plus the impact of immigration indicate important factors explaining why Anglo-Canadians saw the school as the means for Canadianization. For some people in the West attitudes displayed prior to 1905 are still prevalent, thus helping to explain why Quebecois do not feel at home outside Quebec.

Trevor Wigney's article is a change of pace, though connected with McDonald's in that it deals with the Presbyterian concept of Canadian society. After outlining organizational problems Presbyterians had in adapting their Scottish organization to Canada, Wigney

discusses theological reaction to industrialization, including an idealist philosophy and an "applied Christianity" enabling Presbyterians, especially clergy, to take an active role in helping to frame Canadian society. However, though the title of the article speaks of nation-building, the discussion leans more to a moral sense, rather than action in what may be called the building of a unique Canadian identity. Investigation of the church's role regarding immigrants or contemporary educational controversies are left to students.

Robert Stamp's second article outlines the training of young imperialists in Ontario by means of Empire Day. Describing the movement's activities, Stamp goes a long way in expaining why Canadian identity was not fostered by schools, in the sense that there was a constant tug between Canadian and Imperial sentiments. Certainly many of the same manifestations of Imperial sentiment were present elsewhere in Canada, as the reviewer's research in Alberta indicates. As with other articles, the political goal of schooling in terms of citizenship and loyalty is shown. Significant are reasons for the decline of the movement, including national maturity resulting from the War and greater impact of American culture. Perhaps the article also illustrates problems of setting goals for schools in a changing society.

Although Canada has not had a central bureau of education, Alf Chaiton examines the unsuccessful attempts to secure one. Groups tried initially to get a federal bureau as a collecting agency for information and ideas (along the American example) and later to have an independent council established in conjunction with Provincial Education departments. Issues of provincial autonomy, not just by Quebec, and apathy by provincial and federal politicians spelled doom to the efforts. One wonders about the make-up of the associations proposing the bureau, including the relationships with other groups promoting national values.

Roy Wilson concentrates on educational efforts of the United Farmers of Alberta. He notes their dual even contradictory purpose, desiring to keep the youth on the farm and yet to allow rural youth to compete successfully to achieve social mobility. He outlines the mechanisms by which the Junior UFA sought to indoctrinate the youth in a philosophy of cooperation and social renewal, including citizenship and leadership training, public-speaking and field-crop competitions, University Week, and publications. However, though the concept of a society based on cooperation, equity and justice is present, one assumes this was the sort of society which would make up the unique Canadian identity.

The final three articles can be described as contemporary responses. Bruce Sealey outlines an incident in 1973 during which Manitoba Metis occupied a school and set up their own school to protest unequal treatment in education in a white-dominated society. Although the paper sketches the history of Metis education and treatment to explain Metis resentment, questions arise such as the role of Black or Red Power ideology or whether demonstration leaders were inspired by other situations. An important concept indicated is the role of myth in the collective identity.

Manoly Lupul presents a position paper on the concept of multi-culturalism and ethnic identity as the basis for Canadian identity. Edmonton's "bilingual Ukrainian school programme" is the basis for his argument, though some description of the programme itself and the background of people involved might have been desirable. Inclusion of culture and ethnicity in the curriculum is part of Lupul's answer to the problem. The article raises questions concerning reactions of groups other than Ukrainians, or the exact nature of resistance to federal bilingualism.

Finally, Levesque's speech illustrates Quebec's opposition to multiculturalism (a "farce" and "mere folklore"), and indicates the belief in loyalty to one's cultural roots. He describes Quebec's ideology of sovereignty to protect her culture. But one wonders how to reconcile Levesque's view that the schools reflect rather than promote change with the desire of militant Quebec teachers to use the school for social reform. Nor is there comment on the view that outside Quebec francophones (such as Acadians) are immigrants, the implications for anglophones of the view that they must assimilate, or aspects of his historical survey. Nonetheless Levesque's speech illustrates the concept of myth in the collective identity.

Besides the book's overall theme, articles are related by special themes or the roles of specific individuals.

Nonetheless one has some sense of dissatisfaction after reading the book. In addition to the above comments (pedagogic in aim), the device of dividing the book into *Defining the Problem* and *Response* weakens the organization in the sense that part of Tompkin's article as well as Jain's article illustrate responses. More significant is the nature of the

articles themselves. Ostensibly about schools and Canadian identity, most articles concern the Prairies and Ontario. Except for part of Jain's article and Levesque's political approach, Quebec attitudes are virtually absent. British Columbia and the Atlantic region are conspicuous by their absence. If the book was designed to get students to consider how Canadians have treated the issue and to examine whether or not the attitudes indicated in the case studies prevailed elsewhere, then some indication of attitudes outside Ontario and the Prairies would have been desirable, especially if students have not access to resource material to investigate other regions.

Admittedly the editors realized the difficulties of providing a unified account for Canada as a whole. The fact they have made a beginning will presumably foster further studies on the issue.

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