

*Recent discussions of nationalism and education in Canada have over-looked the fact that Canadian schools have never addressed themselves to the task of bolstering Canadian nationalism. The following factors have contributed to this situation: political aims of nineteenth century public school advocates; the British North America Act; continued dependence on British ideals; presence of the United States; and the French-English division within the country. The future role of Canadian schools in the development of a national identity raises both practical and moral problems.*

ROBERT M. STAMP\*

## Canadian Education and the National Identity

After years of languishing on the periphery of public concern, the question of nationalism in Canadian education has become a central concern of the 1970's. Three developments seem to account for this increased interest. In 1968 A. B. Hodgetts published the results of his two-year investigation of history and social studies teaching in Canadian schools under the title, *What Culture? What Heritage? A Study of Civic Education in Canada*.<sup>1</sup> The report came as a shock to those who assumed that civic education in the schools contributed to feelings of national pride and national understanding among Canadian youth. Then one year later Professors Robin Mathews and James Steele of Carleton University published *The Struggle for Canadian Universities*<sup>2</sup> which dramatized the shortage of Canadian appointments and Canadian courses in many universities. Finally, in late 1970 the sale of Ryerson Press to an American publishing firm seemed to point to the potential decline of Canadian materials for elementary and secondary school classrooms.

One important factor has been missing from the somewhat emotional and impassioned rhetoric that has followed these developments. And that is an examination of why Canadian educational institutions have *never* served the interests of Canadian nationalism. If we believe that schools and universities do have a role to play in the development of a national identity, then we should be as concerned with past developments in Canadian education as with contemporary developments. It is

\*Associate Professor of Educational Foundations, The University of Calgary.

<sup>1</sup>A. B. Hodgetts, *What Culture? What Heritage? A Report on Civic Education in Canada* (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>Robin Mathews and James Steele, *The Struggle for Canadian Universities* (Toronto: New Press, 1969).

necessary to examine several factors in the history of Canadian education to explain why Canadian schools have never been able to play as great a role as American schools in the cultivation and development of a national identity. These factors include: the political aims of the nineteenth century advocates of public schooling; the delegation of education under the British North America Act to the provinces rather than to the federal government; the delayed growth of political autonomy through Canada's continued membership in the British Empire; the presence of a powerful neighbour to the south; and the growing realization and acceptance of the presence of two "nations" within the Canadian political state.

The political aims of nineteenth century public school reformers were most influential in the future relationship of schooling to patriotism. Despite the many similar arguments advanced on behalf of publicly-supported education in both Canada and the United States, there was an important difference in the political aims. Whereas much of the guiding emphasis of colonial American education had been preparation for religious orthodoxy, increasing emphasis in early nineteenth century United States was placed on citizenship in and loyalty to a national state. The writings of every one of the early presidents, for example, reveal a deep interest in universal education as a bulwark of republican institutions. From the educational theories of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster emerged definitions of the republican American. As David Tyack has written:

Not content with unconscious and haphazard socialization provided by family, political meeting, press, and informal associations, not trusting in the 'givenness' of political beliefs and institutions, these men sought to instruct Americans deliberately in schools.<sup>3</sup>

As the forces of American nationalism grew stronger in the early decades of the nineteenth century, so did the demands that the school exercise this patriotic function. When the great immigrations of the 1840s and 1850s came, the argument was substantially reinforced. When the teachers of Cincinnati discussed the immigrant problem, Calvin Stowe and William McGuffey argued that the public schools held out the best hope of turning foreign children into Americans. No random education would do; it must be uniform and systematic. "Americans must define what it meant to be American and must find ways of inculcating patriotism in the young."<sup>4</sup>

During this same period the campaign for public support of elementary education reached its peak in the northern and eastern states. The outstanding figure in this crusade, Horace Mann of Massachusetts, clearly saw the relationship between public schooling and national patriotism. "It may be an easy thing to make a Republic," wrote Mann,

<sup>3</sup>David B. Tyack, *Turning Points in American Educational History* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1967), p. 84.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 123.

"But it is a very laborious thing to make Republicans."<sup>5</sup> But how could the school teach patriotism without teaching this or that political creed? The solution centred in the attempt to teach those aspects of patriotism common to all political parties. As Mann put it, the sensible course which "all sensible and judicious men, all patriots, and all genuine republicans must approve," was "that those articles in the creed of republicanism, which are accepted by all, believed in by all, and which form the common basis of our political faith, shall be taught to all."<sup>6</sup>

There was no similar feeling of national patriotism among educators in British North America during the crucial decades of the 1840s and 1850s when public control of education was advocated and achieved. This is clearly seen in the writings and the policies of Egerton Ryerson, superintendent of education for Upper Canada from 1844 to 1876. While his American counterpart, Horace Mann, saw public schools as producing "good little Americans," Ryerson never saw the production of "good little Canadians" as a central reason for advocating publicly supported schools. Ryerson did see political value in free schooling; but it lay in inculcating loyalty to Britain and to British institutions in the face of persistent republican threats from the south. This meant the adoption of the Irish National textbooks, with their emphasis on selections from British literature, and where the interpretation in history and civics was oriented towards a reverence for the achievements of the mother country and her national heroes.

George Brown, editor of the influential Toronto *Globe*, took strong exception to the Irish National textbooks and waged war against them, asserting that "these Canadian provinces are not to be ruled according to the colonial ideas of the Superintendent . . . but on enlightened national principles."<sup>7</sup> Through the columns of the *Globe*, Brown called upon the citizens of the province to unite for the development and defence of Canadian textbooks. But it was in vain. Upper Canada and the other English-speaking provinces regarded themselves as provinces of the British Empire, not as provinces of a united Canadian nation. While loyalty must be stressed in the schools, the average citizen interpreted this as loyalty to the British throne and British institutions, not loyalty to anything distinctly Canadian.

With the Confederation of the British North American provinces in 1867, an opportunity might have presented itself to change the orientation of political education in Canadian schools. The Fathers of Confederation might have assigned control of education to the new federal government, rather than leaving it under provincial jurisdiction. Perhaps, then, Canadian schools could have bolstered national unity and national

<sup>5</sup>Horace Mann, *Twelfth Annual Report to the Massachusetts Board of Education (1848)*, as cited in Lawrence A. Cremin, ed., *The Republic and the School: Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1957), p. 92.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>7</sup>Toronto *Globe*, February 5, 1856.

loyalty, rather than supporting imperial loyalty in English-speaking Canada and provincial loyalty in French-speaking Canada. But the Fathers of Confederation quickly decided that education remain a provincial concern, with the one exception that the federal government would protect the school rights of denominational minorities that existed by law at the time of union.

Why was education left under provincial jurisdiction in 1867? It must be remembered that at that time schooling was very much a local concern. Each of the colonies that later became a part of Canada had developed its own unique school system. Education was not then viewed as a factor contributing to national economic growth. Therefore in the conferences and debates of the 1860s, most politicians took it for granted that education should be a provincial concern. Cultural reasons also dictated that education remain a provincial responsibility under Confederation. The 1841-1867 period of legislative union between Upper and Lower Canada had proven how difficult it was to secure harmony between English- and French-speaking Canadians over matters of education and religion. One essential element of the federal bargain of 1867 was that matters of cultural contention between English and French should be removed from the jurisdiction of their common authorities. Hence, with virtually no debate, education was assigned to the provinces.

In the years following 1867, therefore, each of the provinces continued to develop its own school system or systems. Protestant-Catholic divisions meant that some provinces, Quebec in particular, developed dual school systems with little coordination between the two. Similar "provincialism" might also have developed in United States education, where education was a state rather than a federal responsibility. But American politicians and educators could at least agree on certain national political goals of schooling, consistent with the earlier views of Jefferson, Mann and others. But no such agreement was possible in Canada, where provincial loyalties remained strong and where French- and English-speaking leaders emphasized different concepts on the relationship between schooling and patriotism. A federal office of education in the United States, created in 1867, was also able to encourage American schools towards national political goals.

But Canada is lacking a similar federal office or national ministry of education; she is one of the few countries in the world without such an office. It is not for lack of effort on the part of Canadian educators, particularly educators in English-speaking Canada. At the first meeting of the Dominion Educational Association in 1892, the demand was heard for a federal bureau; the D.E.A.'s successor, the Canadian Education Association, has continued to strive for such an office. During the 1960s the educators were joined by powerful segments of the Canadian business community; industrialists argued the need to coordinate national economic and educational planning and the resulting necessity of a strong federal role in Canadian education. But the province of Quebec

has been even more opposed to the idea of a federal office in recent years than it was 100 years ago. It may very well be that education has to remain a provincial responsibility if Quebec is to stay in Confederation. Canada, therefore, has lacked the federal presence that might have given Canadians national goals and aspirations in education and that might have made it possible for Canadian schools to do more to develop a national identity.

The delayed growth of political autonomy through Canada's continuing membership in the British Empire following Confederation is another factor that helps explain the absence of Canadian nationalism in Canadian schooling. The pre-1914 years throughout English-speaking Canada saw the climax of the movement to use the schools for patriotic purposes. Children from coast to coast received a daily dose of flag-saluting, allegiance-pledging, and patriotic song-singing and poetry-reading. But it was imperial loyalty that was stressed, not Canadian nationalism. Politicians and educators who seemed to want to promote Canadian nationalism in the schools actually spent more time promoting the imperial sentiment. In truth, perhaps, they saw no real difference between the two, and the so-called "double loyalty" rested easily with them.

Nowhere is British imperialism and Canadian education more thoroughly blended than in the promotion of "Empire Day" — that annual patriotic rite that engulfed youngsters in English-speaking Canada throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The idea originated with a private citizen, Mrs. Clementine Fessenden of Hamilton, but was quickly seized upon and exploited for political reasons by Ontario Education Minister George Ross. Mrs. Fessenden wrote to various Canadian newspapers in 1897, suggesting "the endorsement of a movement looking toward the formation of a national patriotic scheme of education."<sup>8</sup> Ross promised support for "any effort made to foster in our school-children a love for our own country."<sup>9</sup> But as the movement gathered support, and as individual school boards began designating one afternoon a year "for the purpose of inculcating patriotic sentiment," Ross the imperialist replaced Ross the Canadian nationalist. The idea of "love of our own country" was broadened to veneration of Empire. Ross persuaded the 1898 meeting of the Dominion Educational Association to endorse "Empire Day" as an appropriate name for the celebration, and the school day immediately preceding Queen Victoria's May 24 birthday as an appropriate date. From that point on the movement spread rapidly as education authorities throughout English-speaking Canada endorsed Empire Day.

But this "bathing in the imperial sea" was not confined to one day of the school year. Elementary school readers in the 1890s and early 1900s were full of prose and poetry selections designed to produce loyal

<sup>8</sup>Montreal *Star*, August 24, 1897.

<sup>9</sup>W. Sandford Evans, "Empire Day: A Detailed History of Its Origin and Inception," *Canadian Magazine*, XIII (July 1899), p. 275.

subjects of the Empire. Readers for the senior grades in most provinces included such selections as Kipling's "Oh Motherland, we pledge to thee, / Head, heart and hand through years to be;" F. G. Scott's "Strong are we? Make us stronger yet; / Great? Make us greater far;" as well as Thompson's *Rule Britannia*, Campbell's *Ye Mariners of England* and many others. After reminiscing about his own school days in Barrie, Ontario, in the 1890s historian Arthur Lower concluded: "The wonder is that the tender plant of Canadian nationalism survived at all, for all little Canadian boys and girls have been subjected from the day on which they start school to an unending steeping in the liquid of imperialism."<sup>10</sup>

Canadian achievements during World War I seemed to promise some hope for those interested in promoting a stronger national identity. Could not the military achievements won on the battlefield and political achievements won at the peace conferences lead to a new pride in Canada that could be passed on to Canadian children through the schools? Canada gained political autonomy during these crucial inter-war years through the Balfour Declaration (1926) and the Statute of Westminster (1931), but was not able to achieve cultural and spiritual autonomy. This may have been largely due to the struggle between British and American ideals to capture the emotions and loyalties of Canadian schoolchildren — a struggle in which Canadian ideals fared a poor third.

British ideals were urged on Canadian youngsters by provincial departments of education — particularly Ontario. The *frontispiece* of the *Ontario Third Reader* for 1922 carried a full color illustration of the Union Jack with the caption "One Flag/One Fleet/One Throne." The Ontario government was apparently oblivious to such trends as the replacing of the Union Jack with the Red Ensign, the rejection of the Imperial navy concept, and the increased questioning of the value of the monarchy. But Empire Day itself reached its zenith during the 1920s; each year the Ontario department of education published a pamphlet entitled *Empire Day in the Schools of Ontario*, which contained an essay on British ideals by Premier G. Howard Ferguson, patriotic poems and songs, and suggestions for studying "The greatness of the British Empire" in the schools. To one Toronto teacher the march past of the Toronto high school cadet battalions on Empire Day was "one of the important events of the life of this city. As these lads — 7,000 of them — swing past his Excellency the Governor-General, no heart could remain unmoved."<sup>11</sup>

But the hearts of many Canadian school children did remain unmoved — both to the powerful lure of British ideals and the potential lure of Canadian ideals. It was American popular culture that appealed to them

---

<sup>10</sup>Arthur Lower, *Canadians in the Making* (Toronto: Longmans Canada Limited, 1958), p. 350.

<sup>11</sup>E. A. Hardy, *Talks on Education* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1923), p. 24.

in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s. During these years American magazines, American radio and American movies inundated Canada and captured the imagination of Canadian youngsters. By 1927 eight times as many copies of American magazines and periodicals were circulating in Canada than domestic publications; in addition some 20,000,000 copies of daily and weekend newspapers poured across the border. A 1930 survey of some 1300 senior high school students from Charlottetown to Victoria showed that, apart from *Maclean's Magazine*, American periodicals had captured the readership of Canada's youth.<sup>12</sup> By that time the entire settled area of Canada was within regular range of American radio stations, while only 60 percent of the Canadian population was able to hear Canadian programs on a regular basis. Even when they could get domestic programs most Canadians preferred American broadcasts. The seven most popular programs among Canadian high school students in 1930 were all of American origin.<sup>13</sup> As far as motion pictures were concerned, Canadian students preferred American over British by a margin of more than two to one.<sup>14</sup> During these years Canadian young people substituted American heroes for British heroes, with scarcely a passing thought being given to Canadian heroes. Canadian schools were powerless to halt the trend.

These external pulls on the loyalty of Canadian youth have always been accompanied by internal strains. History, civics and social studies have had different emphases and different purposes in the schools of English- and French-speaking Canada. The result has been an inability on the part of Canadian schools to help develop in students a Canadian identity. As A. B. Hodgetts wrote in 1968:

Young English- and French-speaking Canadians are being raised on sharply opposed views of our history. Thus, the lack of understanding between our two linguistic communities is in part the direct result of what these young people have been taught in school . . . Our educational systems have failed in their responsibilities to the nation . . . We have not given our students a meaningful sense of the Canadian identity.<sup>15</sup>

Differences in history text books within Canada's two cultural communities are not a new phenomena. In the 1940s Charles Bilodeau concluded a study with the observation that "textbooks in the French language failed to do justice to the contributions of English-speaking Canadians and that textbooks in the English language were similarly deficient in presenting the contributions of French-speaking Canadians."<sup>16</sup> Similar conclusions were reached by the Parent Commission in Quebec in 1965<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>Henry F. Angus, *Canada and Her Great Neighbour* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1938), pp. 366-367.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 369.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>15</sup>Hodgetts, *What Culture? What Heritage?* p. 13

<sup>16</sup>"Report of the Committee for the Study of Canadian History Textbooks," *Canadian Education*, October 1945, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup>Quebec, *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Quebec* (Quebec City: Government Printer, 1965), III, 140-141.

and the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1968.<sup>18</sup> As the latter commission reported:

There are two versions of Canadian history — an English version and a French version . . . In the French-language textbooks the dominant theme is the development and survival of French Canadian society . . . In English-language textbooks the central theme is the establishment and survival of Canada as a political entity in North America . . . With two such different themes it is not surprising that we have two very different versions of Canadian history.<sup>19</sup>

While the Parent Commission recommended a common Canadian history syllabus for both French- and English-speaking schools,<sup>20</sup> the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism rejected “an authorized version of Canadian duality” and instead urged that textbooks authors possess the attributes of “scholarly competence and an ever-present awareness of the probability of a restricted point of view.”<sup>21</sup> By the end of the 1960s schools in English-speaking Canada at least were beginning to devote more attention to French Canada. But was it already too late for the schools to make up for decades of lost time in helping to develop a sense of Canadian identity?

The recent controversy surrounding American influence on Canadian education is but another manifestation of the failure and/or inability of Canadian schools and universities to play a major role in the development of a national identity. The crusade first launched by Professors Mathews and Steele quickly won considerable national attention as alarm was expressed at the shortage of Canadian content and Canadian textbooks at all levels of education and the particular shortage of Canadian instructors at the university level. It resulted in a group of university professors forming the Committee on the De-Canadianization of Canadian Universities, the Ontario government setting up a royal commission on the publishing industry, and the Alberta government establishing a commission to study non-Canadian influence in post-secondary education. The response from most universities was public condemnation of the parochialism of the Mathews-Steele approach combined with behind-the-scenes efforts to inject more Canadian material into individual courses. But again, many Canadians wondered if it was already too late to call on the schools to preserve Canadian nationalism and the Canadian identity.

It seems perfectly clear that in the past 150 years Canadian schools have not been able to foster a sense of national awareness and national identity. Such factors as the political beliefs of nineteenth century school reformers, the division of powers under the British North America Act, the presence of a powerful neighbor to the south, and the presence of

---

<sup>18</sup>Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1968), II, 271-285.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, II, 275.

<sup>20</sup>Quebec, *Report of the Royal Commission . . . on Education*, III, 145.

<sup>21</sup>Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, II, 284.

two major linguistic groups within the country have all contributed to this situation. But it would be unfair to lay total responsibility for this failure on the schools themselves. Political and cultural pressures at work in Canadian society at large have simply not allowed schools in Canada to play the same role they have in other countries.

But there is still a further question that must be asked: Should Canadian schools and universities even attempt to foster a sense of national identity? Is this a legitimate aim of education? Canadian schools have many functions to fulfil, and few responsible educators would urge that the promotion of a national identity should be their main function. In addition, many critics of nationalism would argue that using the schools to promote a sense of national identity is dangerous. They would cite examples from nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe and point to the catastrophe of World War I. Other critics would argue that it is futile because of the presence of the United States with its all-pervading influence on Canadian economic and cultural life. Still others would argue that such a concept as national identity is obsolete in a world that is becoming increasingly interdependent.

On the other hand, Canadians may have to become more conscious of their national identity if they are going to make a contribution to the global world of tomorrow. Only if Canadians are sure of themselves, confident of themselves as a nation, will they have the necessary maturity to play a vital role as a nation in the future. Former Prime Minister Lester Pearson summed up his concern for preserving the Canadian identity in a national television appearance some years ago. He emphasized that his concern for Canadianism was "not because we wish to live in isolation behind a Canadian curtain of snow," but "because we wish to live in this interdependent world preserving those national values which have a special meaning for us and which will permit us to serve not only ourselves, but the international community as well." Perhaps this is the approach to Canadian identity that would be a legitimate one for Canadian schools to encourage.