It is a principle that shines impartially on the just and unjust that once you have a point of view all history will back you up.

Van Wyck Brooks

R. L. Schnell*

Writing and Re-writing the Canadian Educational Experience

On February 14, 1980, thirty-four Canadian academics gathered at The University of Calgary in response to a call from the Committee for the Study of Educational History. In the middle of a busy day, participants agreed to the establishment of a national history of education society, with the final details to be worked out at the June meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education. The Founding Conference and the plans for a national organization represented a significant stage in the development of educational history in Canada.[1]

Although much less developed than its British and American counterparts, recent Canadian history of education has had several landmarks, e.g., the publication of the cooperative *Canadian Education: A History* (1970)[2], the special issue of the *History of Education Quarterly* (1972)[3], and the Ryerson Conference (1976)[4]. These three events reflect the intellectual, institutional, and geographic realities of English-Canadian academic life. The authors of *Canadian Education: A History,* taking to heart the strictures of Bernard Bailyn, attempted to move Canadian educational history out of the Whig tradition of C. D. Phillips' *The Development of Education in Canada* (1957)[5], and moreover, devoted specific chapters to regional aspects of Canadian educational experience. This study, now out of print, represented the only effort to provide a modern scholarly account of Canadian educational experience. In this sense, it was a hopeful sign of the rapid development of education as an academic field in Canadian universities.

The special issue of the *History of Education Quarterly* and the Ryerson Conference signified the shaping of that academic field under institutional and geographic pressure. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) had become the dominant institution in graduate studies and research in education in Canada. A few educational historians, notably Michael B. Katz, and a relatively small number of graduate students at OISE featured prominently in research and writing about Canada's educational past and present.

That the largest "faculty of education" should dominate history of education is not surprising but it has been unfortunate that the dominance has also redirected the initial promise of *Canadian Education: A History.* The last two events re-established (if it had ever been overturned) the hegemony of the Ontario experience and the central concern with the middle years of the nineteenth century and the politicians and reforms which helped transform the colony of Upper Canada into

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the Province of Ontario in the Dominion of Canada. The obsession with Egerton Ryerson and his contemporaries and the establishment of compulsory schooling in Upper Canada and Ontario is, of course, partially explained by the availability of documentary resources and by the lure of American historical models and metaphors. The planned conference for February 1982[6] at the University of Toronto signalled officially what had been known for some time, i.e., the impasse to which Ryerson Studies had finally come. The Toronto conference will stake out the next period, 1880s-1920s, and the next theme, the new education.

The colonial experience prior to 1837 remains largely ignored[7], the Imperial connection attenuated, the American influence denied while the theoretical developments of American scholarship are quickly assimilated, and regional experience celebrated either in the guise of a national meaning (Ontario) or as a conscious rejection of the significance of central Canada.

The Founding Conference brought renewed hope to many a heart on several grounds. First, the successful planning and conduct of the conference suggested a maturity and a national basis in Anglophone Canada of a relatively specialized field of study.[8] The vitality and generosity of Canadianists encouraged those historians who are primarily interested in the educational experiences of other societies to view the establishment of a national history of education society as a means of advancing scholarship in *all areas of historical work in education.*

Secondly, the conference on the new education in Canada planned for February 1982 was a pledge to sustained and systematic meetings of educational historians outside of the annual umbrella of the Learned Societies. If other institutions and individuals build on the work of the Calgary and Toronto conferences, much of the isolation and uncertainty within historical studies in education will be alleviated.

Thirdly, the theme of the Founding Conference, "Relationships: History and Education," assembled a national group of scholars and papers. It re-established a national sense of scholarship in topics, interpretations, and personnel. Ontario was as usual well represented but the varying regional interests played a significant role in the program.

Finally, the Conference witnessed a major shift in interpretation and openness to new ways of viewing historical data. Susan Houston, "Schooling and Delinquency: A Review of a Victorian Obsession," in applying the concept of family strategies to Ontario industrial schools revised many of the older conclusions about those institutions and their relationships to the poor and working people in the province. Indeed, Professor Houston's explicit search for a new interpretation created a stir at the conference and suggested a renewed vigour in on-going studies across the country. It was fitting that the Conference and the resulting hopes occurred at The University of Calgary, whose *Journal of Educational Thought* published pioneering critiques of the dominant revisionist interpretations of American and Canadian educational history.[9]

In light of the above discussion, does not the present collection of articles on education in Western Canada contribute to the regionalism and isolation which are endemic in our scholarship? To such a question, the answer is a sound historical yes and no. Although regional or provincial in scope, the articles clearly suggest broader issues.

J. Stewart Hardy's energetic survey of recent studies of the history of education in Western Canada provides a well organized and useful bibliography, demonstrates the dominant Whig character of much of the writing, and identifies those

authors who are now re-interpreting the educational experience of Western Canada. As described by Hardy, the historical study of education appears to be ready for major work that will link significant aspects of experience in Western Canada. The articles in this special issue suggest some of the lines of investigation and conceptualization that will make such a breakthrough possible.

Neil Sutherland raises fundamental problems of focus, that is, moving away from an emphasis on the reformers or interventionists to a phenomenological consideration of "how families and children actually lived their lives under the new arrangements," i.e., new notions of child-rearing, new health practices, and new schooling. In a significant manner, the article beautifully complements Susan Houston's family strategies and Alison Prentice's women's domain.

Timothy Dunn's study of vocationalism in British Columbia points out the problems of establishing the function of educational innovations and their ultimate impact on the lives of children and youths. Moreover, it demonstrates the strange mixture of proponents and opponents and personal and social motives that accompany educational change. As Sutherland concluded, historians need to grapple with personal lives, with "lived expperience."

Nancy Sheehan's examination of the WCTU in the promotion of social and educational change in Alberta illustrates both the relevance of non-school organizations as a means of understanding the context within which local school boards and provincial departments of education operated and the national (if not trans-national) networks in personnel and societies that connected even the most local organization to a broader world of ideas and sentiment.

David Jones gives the Better Schools Day a broader setting than Saskatchewan. His explication of the insensitivity of educational and social reformers and the anxiety (usually inarticulate) of the objects of reform suggest a need to re-examine the Canadian rural life movement in ways that will dig out the "lived" experience of rural populations nationally.

Ormond McKague's challenging analysis and interpretation of the educational policy of the Saskatchewan CCF and Woodrow S. Lloyd demonstrates the need for similar rigorous examinations of ideological or issues-oriented provincial governments. Although the CCF was an outstanding example of political consciousness, other reformist governments and their educational success and failure await critical study.

These articles represent both the vitality of educational history in Western Canada and the national implications of themes and perspectives. To paraphrase a song of the 1970s, history of education is alive and well and living all across the country.

Notes

[1]The sessions with presenters and their papers and commentators included: (a) Childhood and Adolescence: R. L. Schnell and Patricia T. Rooke, "The Institutional Society: Childhood, Family and Schooling"; Susan Houston, "Schooling and Delinquency: A Review of a Victorian Obsession"; and Neil Sutherland; (b) Neglected Minorities: Alison Prentice, "Women's History and Educational History: New Approaches and Old Questions"; J. Donald Wilson, "The Picture of Social Randomness: Making Sense of Ethnic History and Educational History"; and Keith McLeod; (c) Local and National Perspectives: Chad Gaffield, "Demography, Social Structure and the History of Schooling in Canada"; Neil McDonald, "Political Socialization in Ontario Schools, 1867-1914"; and Robert Patterson; and (d) Banquet: John Calam, "Length of Five Long Winters - Revisiting Historical Relations."

[2]J. D. Wilson, R. M. Stamp, and L-P. Audet (eds.), *Canadian Education: A History* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1970).

[3]*History of Education Quarterly,* 12 (Fall 1972). An expanded version of the special issue appeared as Michael B. Katz and Paul H. Mattingly (eds.), *Education and Social Change; Themes from Ontario's Past* (New York: New York U. P., 1975).

[4]Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton (eds.), *Egerton Ryerson and His Times* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978).

[5]Toronto: Gage, 1957.

[6]Information about the conference is available from Dr. Keith McLeod, Faculty of Education, University of Toronto.

[7]John Calam, "Length of Five Long Winters."

[8]To note that the much smaller populations of Australia and New Zealand have supported *since 1972* the *ANZHES Journal,* which is the journal of the Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society, is to understand how slow that ripening has been.

[9]Patricia T. Rooke, "From Pollyanna to Jeremiah -Recent Interpretations of American Educational History," 9(April 1975): 15-28; J. Donald Wilson, "Historiographical Perspectives on Canadian Educational History: A Review Essay," 11(April 1977): 49-63; and David C. Jones "The Maleficient Obsession: Social Control and the Schools," 12 (April 1978): 47-55.