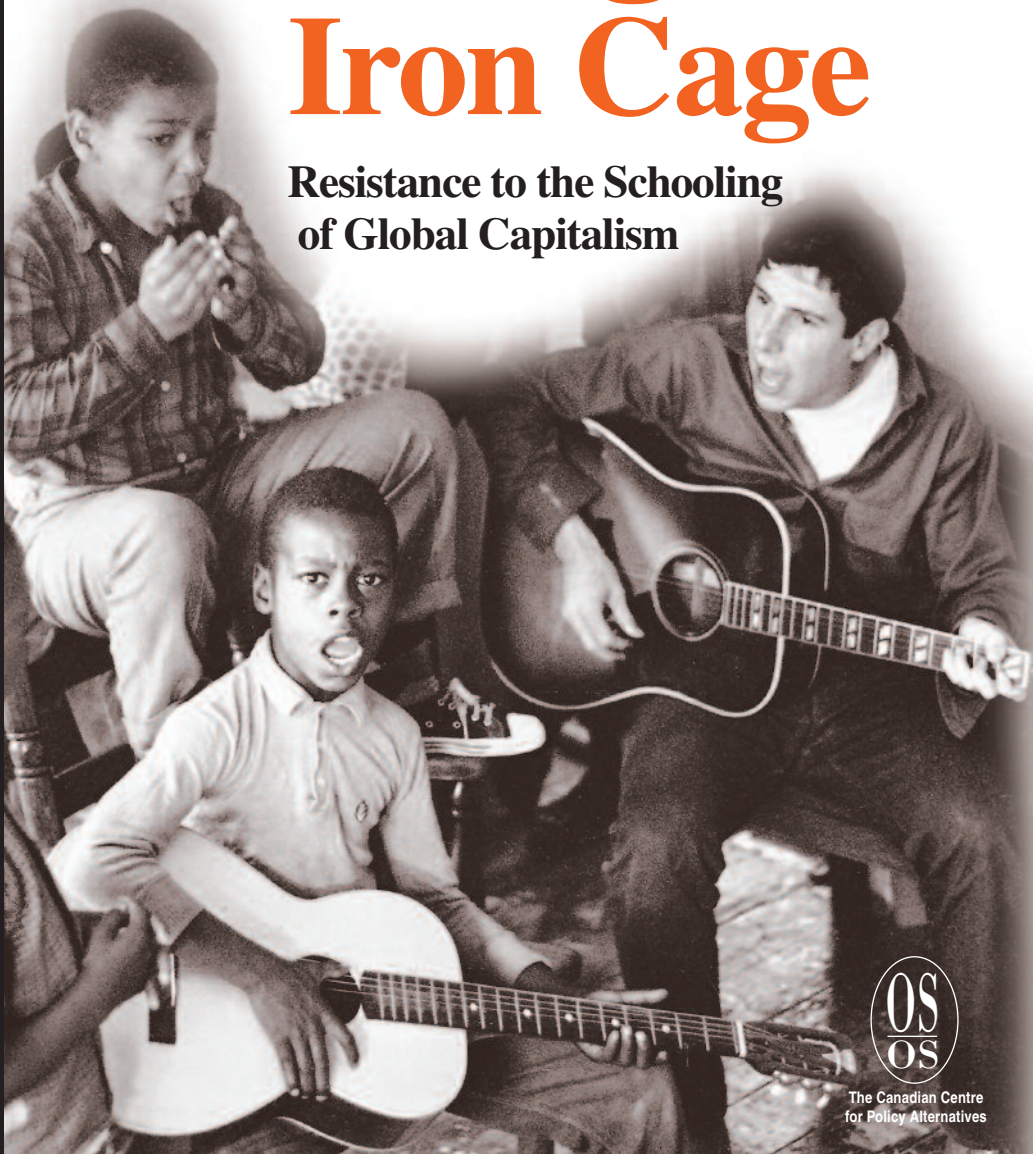


Breaking the Iron Cage

Resistance to the Schooling
of Global Capitalism



The Canadian Centre
for Policy Alternatives

Hugo Aboites • Alejandro Álvarez Béjar • Jocelyn Berthelot • Raewyn Connell
Richard Hatcher • Ken Jones • Stan Karp • Kit Krieger • Larry Kuehn
George Martell • Tim McCaskell • Enver Motala • Brian Ramadiro
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Education and The Common Good

JOCELYN BERTHELOT

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY DAVID CLANDFIELD

The following article is taken from Jocelyn Berthelot's Une école pour le monde, une école pour tout le monde (Montreal, VLB, 2006), soon to appear as A School for the World, a School for All (Ottawa, CCPA). This book gives an account of Quebec education in the context of globalization and against a backdrop of the neo-liberal assault on public education in Europe and North America. It consists of three sections. The first gives a general history of the current round of neo-liberal globalization. The second analyzes the impact that this has had on public education in the developed world and in Quebec particularly. The third part describes what needs to be done to fight these trends, not only describing the educational measures that must be taken in defence of the public good, but also backing these up with solid recent international research. This extract is the first half of the third part. In it Berthelot shows how public education for full citizenship is not only necessary for a society founded on principles of social justice but is also consistent with the effort to achieve the very best education for all.

D.C.

We are at a crossroads: either we keep working at defining and developing a universally accessible public domain; or we turn back. Either we continue on the road to a national education sys-

tem that puts more emphasis on nation and the people, or we opt for the “survival of the fittest” and “charity begins at home.”

— Claude Lelièvre

L'école obligatoire: pour quoi faire?

Quebec society benefited greatly from the rapid development of public education during the Quiet Revolution. In a few decades, the progress has been remarkable. School attendance and graduation rates in Quebec are now comparable to those of other western societies. Groups once excluded or discriminated against have now found their place within the educational community. Public education has played a major role in the construction of a Quebec identity and in the preservation and teaching of our national language and culture.

Unfortunately, as we have seen, recent years have seen an end to the linking of public education with the common good. Words like “common” and “public” have even become anathema now, associated in some minds with standardization and mediocrity.

The strongly held belief that we are living in unprecedented times, “the global epoch,” has meant that education is now being subordinated to narrow economic goals. Globalization has been used and is still being used as an argument in support of the neo-liberal educational agenda. It is true that the changes ushered in by globalization will define the context in which young people grow up, learn, love and work, but the solutions offered by this new educational order are the very opposite of democracy.

Individual educational choices dominate, to the detriment of the interests of society as a whole and of the poor in particular. Competitive learning is encouraged from earliest childhood. Private enterprise is forced on us as the model to imitate. The market is now interfering in some areas for the first time. The common good is being sacrificed.

At the same time, all political stakeholders are crying out for educational improvement. Everyone agrees that education is the key determinant of social and economic development. Massive changes have come with a demand for a high standard of cultural attainment and higher qualifications.

In the face of these changes, we must develop an alternative approach fuelled by a different kind of logic. This approach must combine a reac-

tion against the neo-liberal agenda with a response to the issues raised by globalization. It is based on a few important principles: an increase in equality, better social integration, and educational justice. We shall begin by defining these principles in more detail, and then move on to the things that have to be done to make them work.

We propose a new social covenant for education. It begins with a call for policies that will distribute students more fairly across schools and classrooms, notably by limiting school choice. It demands an array of measures designed to ensure success: quality early childhood education, support for the most vulnerable groups, an emphasis on school-community solidarity, and a respect for professional autonomy, which provides the only way to guarantee the much-needed diversity of teaching.

A high-quality basic education, with a strong sense of shared responsibility, will serve as the foundation for an extended education. The goal of providing our youth and all adults with a recognized professional qualification must be taken seriously. Higher education and professional development must be made more accessible and democratic. It is in a spirit of co-operation and solidarity that we must seek inspiration for the internationalization of education.

This approach will not achieve instant unanimity. But it is vital if we want to transform an education system entrenching inequalities of every kind and creating a veritable apartheid in our schools.

Our enterprise is not unrealistic. We shall draw on the experiences of countries that have managed to resist the current trend. We shall look at the results of numerous research studies in Quebec and elsewhere as well as reports about truly innovative and democratic policies and practices, in order to show that our program is not only desirable, but also achievable. The challenge is massive: the creation of a new “virtuous circle” dedicated to the common good (in place of the old vicious circle).

If we are to ground education once again in the common good, we shall need courage to go against the flow. But without such courage, many social changes in the past, now widely accepted, would never have seen the light of day. The public school would still be in limbo, women would still be made to stay at home, and human rights would still be a utopian dream.

EQUALITY, SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE

Public education has been the tool of choice in efforts to achieve the democratic principles of liberty, equality and solidarity. From its inception, we have expected much from it and we still do. It must give everyone an equal opportunity to succeed; it must achieve the lofty goal of emancipation, preparing free people capable of thinking for themselves – enlightened citizens; it must become the soul of an all-embracing nation.

Today, these persistent challenges are becoming more complicated. More than ever before, educational inequalities cast a shadow over the democratic ideal. The increase in social diversity puts heavier demands upon the integrative mission of education. Globalization is increasing the pressure for an enlightened and expanded notion of citizenship. These are the three challenges confronting education in Quebec.

Dramatic inequalities

Access to the different social levels that characterize democratic societies should not depend on wealth or social status. That principle was at the origin of the notion of equality of opportunity. Since education was universally accessible, merit should be the only criterion for distinguishing “winners” from “losers.” But the revelation of glaring inequality among different social groups in the education system has shaken the meritocratic principle to its roots.

In fact, in the 1960s, we began to discover that the dice were loaded. Sociologists spoke with one voice. School, they said, privileges students who are already privileged and contributes to the “construction” of inequalities. Children of poverty do not have access to the same educational resources as children of affluence. Inequalities become apparent right from the first day at school and the gaps widen as time passes. So we wondered whether society or the school system was to blame. We finally concluded that there was shared responsibility, but we were far from agreeing where to draw the dividing line.

The concept of equal opportunity was then expanded to include policies that aimed to give more to those who had less. We tried to compensate for what some called “handicaps” and others called “deficits.”

In the 1970s, Quebec joined the wave of interventions in poor and working-class neighbourhoods, convinced that greater equality of opportunity would come about through the selective redistribution of resources.

Today, the magnitude of inequalities remaining in Quebec's school system should embarrass even the mildest of democrats. In 2001-2002, the secondary school dropout rate in poor areas was twice as high as in affluent areas; the respective rates for boys and girls who had repeated a grade by the end of elementary school were 2.5 and three times higher. As for secondary school graduation rates, the gap between the poorest and the richest had reached 16 percentage points among boys and 13.4 among girls.

The failure rate gap between boys and girls "seems less important than the one between children from different socio-economic backgrounds. On the other hand, the gap between girls and boys tends to shorten when the students are from a privileged background, and to widen with disadvantage." (Pelletier and Rheault, 2005, p.23)

The situation is even more critical on the island of Montreal. The rate of those who are a grade or more behind among the most disadvantaged was almost four times higher than the rate among the most privileged (16.6% and 4.9%) while the percentage of students not graduating or graduating late was 2.6 times higher among the former than the latter (62.4% and 24.0%).

In higher education, participation rates also correlated noticeably with parental income. According to 2001 StatsCan data, 35% of 18-to-24-year-olds whose parents' annual income was under \$25,000 were enrolled in cegeps and 18% in universities, while these participation rates were 50% and 37% respectively for students with parental incomes over \$100,000 (MELS, 2005).

Educational inequalities have very serious lifelong consequences. Education is the major determinant of social class and income in later life. Although these inequalities are a universal phenomenon, their magnitude varies enormously from society to society and schools can do a lot to reduce them, both in their organization and in their practices.

Numerous research studies indicate the path to follow and confirm the urgency of making the struggle against educational inequalities a policy priority. We know, for example, that inequalities are made worse the earlier the process of selection begins. We know that a massive inter-

vention is needed as soon as school attendance begins. We know that the chances of the most disadvantaged are directly affected by streaming children into different schools and different classes.

Policies to combat educational inequality should not be limited to compensatory measures inspired by an “ideology of deficiency.” We need a holistic approach to the “war on poverty.” The countries that have made most progress towards school democracy are also those that have succeeded in reducing educational inequality and in improving the living conditions of poor families.

Since 1995, the proportion of families living in poverty in Quebec has declined somewhat; but the financial situation of the poorest families has become more precarious and lasts longer. Today, more than 15% of families live below the poverty line. The proportion is higher in the Montreal region and those most affected are children in the 0-5 year age group; almost 40% of them live in poverty. In some city neighbourhoods, this situation leads to a downward spiral accentuating social problems and effectively compromising children’s development.

Robert Cadotte¹ has published a description of the physical, social, economic and environmental health of a poor neighbourhood in Montreal (Saint-Henri) and compared it with Westmount, the wealthy neighbourhood next door. In Saint-Henri, life expectancy is ten years lower, diseases are far more frequent and living conditions are desperate. It is no wonder that the suicide rate is 3.5 times greater than in Westmount.

It’s worth repeating Gerald W. Bracey’s remark that poverty resembles gravity. Gravity affects everything you do on the planet. So does poverty. It gets in the way of the full exercise of your fundamental rights and is fully synonymous with exclusion and discrimination. But, unlike gravity, poverty is not inevitable.

According to the Collective for a Poverty-Free Quebec²: “From 1997 to 2002, if the population of Quebec had consciously chosen to exchange the so-called invisible hand of the market and its political glove for a visible, fraternal helping hand, it could have freed itself collectively from neediness and poverty” (Labrie, 2005, p.5). All that was needed was a temporary ceiling on the wealth of the richest fifth of the population, whose income continued to rise, while the income of the poor stagnated, when it did not actually fall.

For their part, Léo-Paul Lauzon and his team (2005) expose the other imbalance, that of the tax burden, brought about by lowering corporate taxes. In 1964 the share of Quebec's tax revenues borne by individuals stood at 62%. As of 2004 it stood at 88%. The lower corporate share is explained mainly by the fact that more than half of them pay no taxes at all. A modest tax on corporate revenues would allow for a more equitable distribution of wealth and adequate funding for public services.

Education is increasingly being affected by social problems, especially in poor areas. The demands being made of schools continue to grow. Children bring to school their own difficulties and misfortunes, whether exposure to violence, discrimination or poverty. These are societal problems that should be tackled by society as a whole. ...

Any policies intended to make education more democratic must be part of a total package of anti-poverty policies: policies on employment, income security, redistribution of wealth, public housing and urban planning.

GROWING DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM

One direct consequence of globalization has been to expose more people to very different cultural experiences. Even in Western societies, pluralism and ethno-cultural diversity have risen constantly, largely as a result of a greater diversity of immigration. People from a wide range of range of backgrounds are interacting more and more everywhere.

Societies and their educational systems have a double duty: (i) to encourage their citizens to be open to this pluralism, and (ii) to do more to integrate immigrants. There is no ideal integration model, no magic formula. Nations have taken different approaches to pluralism. The French republican model hasn't worked, judging by the suburban "uprisings" of Fall 2005. As for British multiculturalism, it had already hit the skids with the dramatic events of 9/11 and it was badly shaken by the London bombings of July 2005, essentially the work of British citizens.

As for Quebec, it has long seen itself as a society of "French Canadians." The world consisted of "us" and "them." Although we should acknowledge that there has been much progress, changes in cultural identity occur very slowly. It is not unusual to hear experts, politicians, journalists and many others limiting the term "Québécois" to peo-

ple of francophone stock. At the same time, the passionate reaction against the wearing of Islamic headdress in school, at a time when schools themselves were still denominational, did not show much logical coherence.

In both Quebec and the rest of Canada, demographic projections anticipate a big increase in immigration in the coming years. One Canadian study (Bélanger & Malenfant, 2005) estimates that, between 2001 and 2017, the growth of the immigrant population will be somewhere between 24% and 65% and that almost 85% of this growth will be accounted for by visible minorities. In comparison, the non-immigrant population is expected to rise between 4 and 12%.

It is estimated that by 2017 the proportion of immigrants in the total Canadian population will be comparable to what it was at the time of the great population movements of the early 20th century. Big cities will be affected most. In Montreal, the proportion of visible minorities is expected to reach 19%, compared to 13% in 2001, while in Toronto it is expected to exceed 50%.

Quebec has already announced that it intends to accept significantly more immigrants than the average levels of the 1990s. It is not hard to imagine the challenge for the Montreal region, which takes in three quarters of all Quebec immigrants and where immigrants already accounted for 28% of the population in 2001. It would be a challenge for all the other regions too, given the intent to spread immigrant settlement out more... Judging from how things are now and despite a largely positive record, Quebec society and its schools still have a long way to go in their acceptance of diversity, integration and equality.

Indeed a certain chill regarding immigration can now be observed in Quebec. A CROP poll for the magazine *L'actualité* (March, 2005) showed that 55% of the population were against the idea that "to counter the effects of the drop in the birth rate on the Quebec economy, the government should accept far more immigrants that it does at present." Only 38% approved of this proposal. Even in the very white, very francophone region of Quebec City, where immigrants account for only 3.3% of the population, one person in five, according to another poll, felt that this was already too much.

As for economic integration, Quebec was, according to the 2001 census, the province where the difference between the unemployment rates

for white and black people was highest (7.8% and 17.1% respectively), even though the average level of education among black people was higher. More than one immigrant in four was living below the poverty line (almost twice the average for the whole population), and for visible minorities, the rate reached 40%. Skin colour has a negative impact on how immigrants are viewed and the attitudes that they encounter.

Generally speaking, visible minorities are not well-represented. They are almost absent from the National Assembly; they are under-represented (or totally absent) in the media, and they are rarely seen in commercial advertising. The civil service, for its part, includes only 2.5% of its staff from “cultural communities.”

Being a young immigrant is often synonymous with being poor, bordering on destitute. The usual measures of success do virtually nothing to help these young people. Most of them fail and fewer of them graduate with diplomas either in secondary school or in the *cégeps*.

The situation is even worse for black youth. After seven years of secondary school, only 51.8% graduated with a diploma as compared to 69% of the total population (McAndrew, 2006). Only 14.7% of black youth entering the first year of secondary school in the mid-1990s went on to graduate with a college diploma, as compared with 29.7% of the total population and 26.2% of students of immigrant backgrounds generally³. On the island of Montreal, 55% of schoolchildren from black communities live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods as compared with 30% of the total population. This is a major issue. It calls for a genuine policy on racial equality.

One can imagine the challenges yet to come. Every year, over 30,000 immigrants will settle in Montreal, and one fifth of them will be under 14. Already more than half of the public school population of Montreal is made up of students from immigrant backgrounds.

Even so, we should recognize that important steps have already been taken. The French Language Charter has defined one of the determinants of a common civic framework. The secularization of schools and their governing structures in 1997 and the subsequent decision to end the historical privileges of Catholics and Protestants with respect to religious education are measures that will help to improve integration in school.

But more has to be done. Publicly subsidized private schools are left untouched by secularization. The concentration of immigrant school-

children in schools located in poor neighbourhoods does not help with an educational policy of inclusion. Finally, the integration of adult immigrants means more than improving their command of French.

Ethno-cultural diversity and pluralism in values and lifestyles can enrich the education of our schoolchildren by opening their minds to diverse cultural horizons. But they can also accentuate prejudice and social exclusion. That is why social and educational policies that support integration and interethnic harmony, two factors that contribute to educational success, are so important.

The democratic ideal is based on an equal respect for all citizens, openness to diversity, the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, and the effort to find effective solutions to the problems we encounter by means of debate and cooperation.

There are two pre-conditions for living harmoniously according to this ideal: a shared political culture and the peaceful co-existence of differing lifestyles. The first of these pre-supposes the acceptance of democratically defined norms and rules and the will to be integrated in society as a fully-fledged citizen. The Quebec philosopher Charles Taylor has put it strikingly: just as we shouldn't always be saying "that's just the way things are here," nor should we always avoid saying that sometimes things should be "like that". The second condition enjoins the host society to respect its own rules, to take into account its own diversity and to integrate this into the totality of its social institutions, while paying special attention to groups suffering from discrimination and exclusion.

These conditions should serve as a guide to educational policies. All education is the education of a given society and that society is the one in which everyone should be invited to integrate. In order to live together, it is all the more important that students learn together, in a setting most closely reflecting the image of the surrounding society.

Research leaves no doubt on this: an ethnic mosaic in the school encourages peaceful coexistence and dialogue while segregation or separation encourages withdrawal into distinct communities. The State should be doing everything possible to avoid such segregation. Secular schooling has a responsibility to show students the basic distinction between universal knowledge and personal belief.

[In addition], we cannot overlook the gap between the legally recognized status and the daily reality of native peoples. Aboriginal peoples

have special rights as the first occupants of the land. They embody the first historic instance of pluralism in Quebec society. Nevertheless, their living conditions are far too often deplorable. While the challenges they face may be first and foremost their own concern, they do also involve the entire population of Quebec.

Quebec is home to about 70,000 native people belonging to eleven different nations. Apart from the 10,000 Inuit who run their own school boards in line with municipal legislation and under the same tax laws as the rest of Quebec, native affairs come under the Federal government through the Indian Act. Even so, from the 1970s on, these communities have gradually been taking over the management of their schools.

Overall, research has shown that the native population is significantly behind in school, the secondary school graduation rate is often under 10%, and access to higher education is very low. According to the Federal government, improvement is needed in the quality, accessibility and relevance of school programs, in the effectiveness of school systems, and in collaborative efforts. Socio-economic factors, the after-effects of residential schools, the huge diversity of the communities, and their geographical remoteness are all elements that make this mission difficult. They confront the enormous challenge of trying to reconcile tradition and modernity and to ensure the survival of their heritage and culture, while still emphasizing the need to develop fluency in one of the two official languages of Canada and a broader perspective of the world.

But all the youth of Quebec should be made aware of the history, culture, reality and rights of native peoples. It is by no means obvious that the contents of the new Quebec Education Program will succeed in doing this.⁴

GREATER DEMANDS OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

The core function of public education is not to serve families or the business world. From its very beginning, it has been about citizenship, a collective effort in the service of the common good. This function means that all students, indeed all citizens, must be able to acquire the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary to be good citizens. Everyone agrees today that such needs are continually increasing and argue for both a broadening and an improvement of basic education.

In the course of the last few years, the balance between maintaining this citizenship function in the school and the function of selecting and sorting has been lost. Competition is imposed from the beginning of school and actually works against the chances of the majority. We must find a new balance between the objective of individual development and integration for all and the objective of getting students ready for entry into a hierarchical workplace.

More and more educators now think that competition and selection should be put off until the end of compulsory education. This is not to deny differences, but to put off their effect, so that all children learn first to be citizens.

As the US philosopher Michael Walzer has pointed out, there is no royal road to citizenship, no way to get more of it or to get it more quickly, by doing better than others at school. We must not be content with offering all students an equal opportunity to learn to read. They must all succeed. At the same time, you cannot expect everyone to become a literary critic or a doctor. For all to succeed, the principle of corrective justice applies; in the second case, the principle of meritocratic justice.

The determination to teach all students the essentials of democratic citizenship is rooted in the conviction that all students are capable of learning. This affirmation of educability must extend to the way in which schools are organized and resourced. Not that all students are identical, but we must guard against the tendency to attribute to nature differences that are attributable to social factors.

The establishment of this core belief is important both to ensure school justice and to encourage school integration. Rooted in a culture of curiosity and pleasure in learning, this belief could help reverse the tendency to consider education above all as an instrumental good rather than as a good in itself.

François Dubet and Marie Duru-Bellat believe that a common curriculum of at least nine years is needed to cover the requirements of the future life of our young people, to take on the evolving uncertainties of the world, to give a whole generation a set of common reference points, and to lay the foundation of social cohesion and a capacity for living together. In their view, this combines an economic necessity, a civic imperative, and an ethical commitment.

We could add that this will raise the academic level too. Studies based on international measures of student achievement support this: countries with undifferentiated school systems, aiming to provide all students with the tools needed to be a good citizen are those which obtain the best academic results and combine these with being the most egalitarian.

For comparative study, school systems were divided into three types. Integrated systems, mainly represented by the Scandinavian countries, have common schools and mixed-ability classrooms for the duration of compulsory education. At the other extreme are differentiated systems that stream students early (sometimes even ten-year-olds) and also segregate schools by ability; this is the case of Germany and Austria. Between these two extremes are systems that have a common structure but stream by program as in France and Quebec.

In a report for the French Ministry of Education, Marie Duru-Bellat and her colleagues have concluded that it “seems fairly clear that the overall organization of school systems correlates with their degree of equity” (2004, p.4). Streaming during compulsory education and the segregation of schools by ability both increase school inequality without any offsetting improvement in the performance of the elite.

Another study aiming to evaluate the specific effects of the structure of school systems, taking into account the relative wealth of each country and the extent of social inequality, comes to the same conclusions. The type of school structure has a direct influence on school performance and the integrated systems come out on top (Dupriez & Dumay, 2005).

International comparisons have made a small country like Finland into an educational paradise. The media have flocked to this new Holy Land of school success where the highest average levels of attainment have been reached along with lowest level of inequality. Germany, on the other hand, is usually lined up with the dunces, with low average attainment and very pronounced inequalities.

Of course, we need to bear in mind that the Finnish system also has the special distinction of being attended by young Finns who think of reading as their main hobby, and of valuing highly both education and those who dispense it. But this does not take away from the fact that their choice to integrate their school system in the 1970s produced very

positive results; and, contrary to the usual refrain, there was no dumbing down to the lowest common denominator.

Unfortunately, Quebec has proposed maintaining a common education only to the end of Year 2 of secondary school (Grade 8 in English Canada) and has allowed selective streams to multiply, thereby abandoning that democratic trend. The introduction of numerous tracks at the end of the Year 2, including a one-year program leading to semi-skilled employment, does not augur well for equalizing opportunity...

Only when students have come to the end of the common curriculum should the educational structure adapt to the different abilities and interests of the students and emphasize preparation for the workplace, even while still striving to equalize opportunities...

A NEW SOCIAL COVENANT FOR EDUCATION

As we struggle to achieve greater equality, to accommodate increasing diversity and to meet the ever-increasing demands of citizenship, we need an educational structure and an approach to teaching that promotes the mixing of social groupings, ethnic backgrounds and abilities throughout the compulsory years. Obviously such a mix is desirable for integration, since access to full citizenship is quickly lost in a segregated school system, but it is equally effective in achieving academic success.

To be truly democratic, the new pact must ensure that the highest number possible attains what our society agrees to be an acceptable educational minimum, i.e. a secondary school diploma... A total package of educational and social reforms is needed to achieve this and they must be a priority.

This means a New Deal for education in Quebec. As with the social policies adopted after the Great Depression of the 1930s, educational policies must place school justice and equality back on the agenda.

ENDING SCHOOL APARTHEID

The notion of school apartheid has surfaced in recent years to expose the ethnic and social segregation affecting the educational systems in many countries. Education in Quebec offers a pretty good illustration of this problem. Ethno-religious schools are financed by public funds. The

selective nature of private secondary schools and the proliferation of selective mechanisms in public schools have come about as schools in poor districts are charged with taking in “all the wretched of the earth” and carrying more than their share of the “educational burden.”

Practically speaking, basic education is being separated from the democratization we strive to attain. The least favourable school settings are the fate of children of poverty while the wealthier ones benefit from better teaching and learning conditions...

Numerous research studies on school mix show that the influence of the SES of others in the school is a determinant of achievement, and that the weakest students are the ones most sensitive to school setting. The Anglo-Saxon world speaks of the effect that school mix and class mix have on achievement. According to researchers in the Harvard Civil Rights Project, the experience of diversity has beneficial long-term and short-term effects on students; attendance at a less segregated school can even succeed in breaking the poverty cycle (Orfield & Lee, 2005)...

Canadian studies, based on international test results, (...) conclude that student performance is affected by the dominant SES in the school attended and that this effect is magnified for students of poor backgrounds (Bussière, 2004; McMullen, 2005)...

To sum up, the higher the proportion of children from privileged backgrounds in a school, the better the results of the whole student body, and the children from poor backgrounds gain most. On the other hand, the higher the proportion of the latter, the lower the expectations, the lower the demands of the courses taught, and the higher the level of insecurity.

These are not new findings. This was one of the conclusions of the monumental research study in the Coleman Report, published in the US in 1966 and showing the importance of students' peers on success rates⁵. Being in school with children of wealthier backgrounds and higher academic aspirations was the factor that did most to influence school achievement by black students. These results indicated clearly that school composition was a critical element for equal opportunity; they served as an argument in favour of bussing, something we shall return to below.

The common good must reclaim its lost ground in the face of the neo-liberal educational agenda, which extols the virtue of freedom of

choice. Education is a public good and it is the State's responsibility to set the benchmarks for educational justice. As we are reminded by the philosopher Michael Walzer, "limits placed on a few are necessary for the freedom of the majority" (1997a, p. 154); in this way, we can aim to prevent the most powerful from becoming all-powerful in the name of liberty.

Education is indispensable for the development of society as a whole. It is the responsibility of all citizens and not only of the parents who set their hearts on the education of their own children. While you can opt out of public school education, you cannot opt out of a collective responsibility for public education.

The rules will have to be clear if we want everyone to join this common effort. To quote Daniel Weinstock's image, nobody will agree to abandon the weapons of early competition until everyone lays down their arms at the same time. This multilateral disarmament will not be easy. But it is related to social needs and curriculum quality.

We must contest school segregation, which has gathered momentum with increasing private school enrolment, and the concomitant development of streaming initiatives in the public sector. Three things can be done in the short term: a stop to state funding of private schools, greater limits on school choice, and destreaming.

GENUINELY PRIVATE EDUCATION

The choice of private education is a parental right. But this right in no way obliges public authorities to fund it. That is the crux of the debate. This debate has been under way in Quebec ever since the Parent Report which stipulated that "the mere fact of opening a private school does not in and of itself confer the right to receive State subsidies, either for the school itself or for the parents who send their children there" (paragraph 357). Neither Ontario nor the USA spends a cent of public money on private schools.

The reasons for choosing a private school vary. Some maintain that the quality of education is higher, some are looking for stricter discipline, some prefer a more homogeneous social mix, etc. Some parents even make huge financial sacrifices, so certain are they that their children's future depends on it.

To defend public funding, it is argued that parents choosing private education are doubly taxed. The counter-argument is that people who choose to drink water other than the water provided by municipal services must bear the cost and that public funds should be reserved for public services. You can also point out that people who have no children pay no less of a contribution to the costs of public education.

In early 2005, two things happened that put this question back on the agenda. First came the decision to increase the funding of Jewish schools from 60% to 100%, which caused such an outcry that the Charest government had to back off. But it raised public awareness of the special situation of ethno-religious schools. Secondly, the Assembly for the Defense and Advocacy of Public Education (*Regroupement pour la defense et la promotion de l'école publique*) put out a statement calling for the phasing out of the public funding of private schools and this too sparked off a great debate...

For the first time in many years, editorials and columnists in Quebec agreed that the current situation could not continue. Some argued for an immediate end to all public funding for private elementary and religious schools. Others wanted to integrate private schools further into the public system, as advocated by the journalist Michel Venne. According to Venne, it was preferable “to insist on open admission requirements, the retention of students in difficulty, French education for immigrants, and closer collaboration with local public school boards. And all this according to one principle: same grants, same rules” (*Le Devoir*, December 13, 2004, p. A7).

Such a recommendation is not inconsistent with the earlier one made by the Assembly above. In fact, an end to public funding of private schools along with a process for integrating students and teachers into the public sector would have to be phased in. During this transition, private schools would have a tough choice: accept public requirements, such as those proposed by Venne, or lose public funding.

Two experiments are worth mentioning. In the early 1960s, Quebec went from a school system where private schools played an important role – notably in the form of *collèges classiques* – to a genuinely public education system. Volume IV of the Parent Report laid out the course to follow. Private schools willing to sign an agreement with the State could receive funding on the same basis as State schools; at the same time,

they would be expected to admit all pupils without distinction, they could not charge additional fees, and they would have to guarantee the same employment conditions as the public system. "Behaving otherwise," wrote the commissioners, "would amount to having the State funding its own competition and undermining public education" (paragraph 370). As for private elementary schools, they were receiving no public funds at that time and the Commission recommended that this should continue to be the case.

Changes now under way in Spain are equally enlightening. Educational authorities must now guarantee an equitable distribution of children with special needs among the various schools, public and private, along with equal admission criteria. Private schools will also have to retain all admitted pupils until the end of compulsory education; they will not be allowed to discriminate on the basis of religion, ethnic origin, or sex and cannot receive funding from associations or private households. A public school representative must be on every private school council as an advocate for integration and as a monitor of compliance with the new regulations.

Quebec could follow suit, as long as the change was phased in. A first step could be the cessation of all public funding to ethno-religious schools⁶, since they do not conform to government policy either on integration or on the development of democratic citizenship; secular schooling must be the rule in all institutions supported by public grants. As for private elementary schools, there ought to be a rapid return to the situation before the 1960s, when they had no access to public funds.

For secondary schools, the integration process could be phased in over several years so that schools could make adjustments and choose the model that works best for them. Even so, the State could immediately require all schools entering into funding agreements to admit all pupils without discrimination or selection and to comply with the rules on compulsory school attendance. This would lay the foundation for comprehensive schooling later within a framework designed to serve the public good.

The private school lobby has already made its position known. The withdrawal of public funding, it says, would lead to the closing of virtually all such existing schools and would cost the State a fortune. This is not the opinion of public school organizations, which estimate that the State would actually save about \$75 million. A study by UQAM, which

estimated possible fluctuations in private school enrolments in Quebec based on the experience of provinces across Canada, concluded that the demand for private education would not be affected as severely by tuition increases as the private school advocates are claiming; and the State could save anywhere between \$75 and \$200 million.

Of course, there will always be some differences in the way costs and savings are calculated, but what we are talking about here has more to do with principles and democracy than money. Private schools do not serve the public good, and for this reason they cannot justify public funding. So the issue is how to come up with an integration model that will allow the desired changes to occur.

CONSTRAINTS ON FREEDOM

Residential areas form a patchwork of social and educational inequalities. While urban planning and social housing policies can have some effect on such inequalities, it is still the case that school policies do have a part to play in reducing the consequences of these patterns. A case in point: we know that many Canadian parents consider the local school when choosing where to live.

School policies must aim at reducing the gaps among schools. This means questioning any measure that could exacerbate inequality, as is the case with free school choice. In many other countries, public school choice is limited by statute. This can involve anything from hard-edged school districts to bussing, with room for the occasional relaxation of admission limits along the way.

Let's begin with the situation in the USA, where bussing was introduced with a political determination rarely encountered elsewhere. In 1954, the Supreme Court was asked to rule on the case of a black youngster, Linda Brown, who had been refused admission to a white-only school. The Court decided that the separate education of white and black children was unconstitutional; children denied admission could acquire a sense of inferiority from which they would never recover.⁷ The famous dictum of "separate but equal," which had always dominated education in the Southern States, was thrown out.

But change came at a snail's pace. The Civil Rights legislation of 1964 demanded a research study on equality of opportunity. The upshot

was that James Coleman and his colleagues published a report, which, as we have already stated, marked a turning-point in education. *The Equality of Educational Opportunity Report* showed that black students were more successful in schools where they studied alongside white students, and there were no adverse effects on the latter.

These findings weighed heavily in court decisions over the ensuing years. Given the high degree of residential segregation in many large cities, the Supreme Court required integration plans to be put into effect. To ensure the desired racial balance, school boards had to redraw the boundaries of school districts and implement voluntary or compulsory bussing of students to other school districts.

In some cases, the Supreme Court actually imposed the integration plan. In the spring of 1974, for example, the Boston Judge Arthur Garrity decided that all schools should reflect the proportion of blacks and whites of the city as a whole, a ratio of 1:2. Race thus became the major factor in the assignment of pupils to schools. Bussing created huge tensions. One of the consequences was white flight to the suburbs.

It was not until 1991 that the Court reversed the integration requirement by encouraging admission by school district, on the grounds that such a policy could not be seen as intentionally discriminating. Since that time, we have seen an intensification of school segregation in the USA.

This thumbnail history is cited only because, even in as liberal a society as the USA, the State had been able to impose limits in the choice of school for reasons related to public policy. Thus, the struggle against racial segregation and the desire to improve success rates among black youth served as the justification, at one time, for policies, which put powerful constraints on individual liberties.

In Europe, a majority of the countries still maintain hard-edged school districts and these regulations are found to keep the extent of inequality down. Where no such controls exist, there is pressure to review free choice policies (as in Belgium, for example)...

Others, without going so far as to advocate bussing, propose various ways to broaden the social mix: redrawing school district boundaries, huge investments to make schools in disadvantaged areas more attractive, and so on. In the latter view, rather than banning flight to the suburbs, a better choice is to give families a reason to stay.

In Quebec, even if, as a result of the Public Education Act, parents can choose their child's school, the choice is limited by language and religion. Until the adoption of the French Language Charter in 1977, one could study in English or French and, until the end of denominational education in 1997, one could choose between Catholic, Protestant and non-denominational schools. Quebec society would not think of going back to those times, even if the mentioned reforms interfered with the freedom of school choice that is being praised to the skies these days.

But Quebec will have to place even more stringent limits on the freedom to attend the public school of one's choice. The State has a responsibility to ensure that public schools strive for equality and integration. Freedom of choice accentuates the situation where struggling students and students from immigrant backgrounds are concentrated in certain schools.⁸ This "segregated schooling" is on the increase. As we have seen, many studies show that free choice encourages the avoidance of schools where there are many students struggling, from immigrant backgrounds or from visible minorities. This only makes the chances of academic success more remote as well as making compulsory French education tougher.

In this sense, section 240 of the Education Act, which allows for "schools with a specific project," should be abrogated or changed to allow only those schools consistent with a national character. The law should stipulate that school districts be drawn to ensure the greatest social and ethnic diversity possible, so that all public schools can take their share of the responsibility for the education of children in difficulty or from immigrant backgrounds.

Reaching this goal will involve locally imposed limits on parental choice, and for this purpose, school boards should be given the power to impose them.

MIXED-ABILITY CLASSES

A good social mix is not only desirable in the school as a whole, it is also important in the classroom. The make-up of a class has an effect on social and pedagogical interactions, teaching activities, social climate, and even socialization. What sort of class groupings should we consider, when we

are taking the interests of the whole student body into account during the years of compulsory school attendance? Marie Duru-Bellat summarizes research on this issue: "Overall, the examination of scholarly achievement across a single age group shows that the most effective approach involves mixed-ability classes" (2002, p. 140). Such classes maximize progress among the weaker students without adversely affecting the progress of the better ones. On the other hand, segregation broadens the gap. The result: those who have less get less.

Generally speaking, we find that the weaker students gain from being in a mixed class while streamed classes often put them on a downward spiral to failure, since the climate is so non-conducive to learning. A class made up of weak students is subject to more interruptions and more frequent discipline interventions, with the result that learning time is reduced.

Classes streamed by ability accentuate learning disparities, generate inequalities in treatment and status, and extend the gap along socio-economic, cultural and ethnic lines. Labeling students has consequences for their attitude and their self-esteem as well as for teacher expectations. Research in Britain and the US has even shown that concentrations of students with low aptitude in poor classes lead to the emergence of sub-cultures of opposition that pave the road to expulsion.

On the other hand, research has shown that the better students lose little or nothing at all by attending mixed-ability classes. "The hypothesis that streaming is beneficial for good students has collapsed," concludes Marcel Crahay. "In other words, good students do not suffer from being together with average or weak students" (2000, p. 302). There is no "Robin Hood effect." In other words, a mixed-ability class does not take from the rich to give to the poor.

Some countries do encourage mixed classes, while others prefer streaming. In international studies of student performance, mixed classes trump streamed classes. For example, analysis of reading research concludes that the elite does not suffer from mixed ability grouping while weak students benefit from it; on the other hand, in countries that favour streaming by ability, the percentage of poor readers is generally higher than the international average. A culture of integration is particularly helpful for the weaker students.

In Quebec, the situation is to say the least paradoxical. On the one hand, the Education Act encourages the integration of students in diffi-

culty into regular classes. On the other hand, selective classes for gifted students are mushrooming, even in the elementary grades. The devolution to school councils of responsibilities such as the allocation of time spent on different subjects is a contributing factor. Claude Lessard (2006) recalls the usual requirements for participation in such selective projects: students must be performing above average, have demonstrated exemplary behaviour and, in some case, the parents have to bear a financial cost that may be considerable.⁹

To illustrate this, here is a very real situation in a medium-sized secondary school. There are nine classes in Year 1 (Grade 7). At the request of the parents, there are two enriched English classes, an arts studies program, a sports studies program, and a program in international studies. These options are open only to students experiencing no difficulty in school. That leaves four so-called regular classes, already made up of weaker students by a process of elimination, and these are the ones that must integrate students with learning difficulties.

So those students who need the most favourable learning conditions are placed in the most difficult school settings. A few randomly collected comments used to describe the students sent to the so-called regular classes now stripped of their good students are a good indication of the injuries inflicted by this practice; they are called classes of “dummies”, “slugs”, “pukes”, “bums”. The assignment of teachers to enriched classes is a bone of contention among the staff, since teaching conditions vary enormously from class to class.

However, there are many teachers and parents who do not accept the research results that favour mixed classes. It seems like just plain common sense to group students with similar abilities together to get the benefits of teaching at their level. At the same time, they feel that mixed classes would hold back the good students and that having weak students present would cause major headaches.

A Canada-wide survey has shown that mixed-ability groupings rank third among the problems identified by teachers. This indicates that the vital expedient of de-streaming during the years of compulsory school attendance will have to be accompanied by improvements in teaching conditions and educational support, especially in difficult districts.

The State has a duty to indicate that mixed classes are a priority. That is a political decision motivated by principles of solidarity, consideration

for others and the mixing of different students. And so the Public Education Act could specify that until the third year of secondary school, classes must be open to all students, except for students with really special needs that can only be met in a separate class. Themed projects must be open to all without selection based on performance.

These mixed classes will need to receive resources in line with their ambitions. The development of enrichment activities on the one hand and booster activities on the other must be a priority. A pedagogy based on co-operative principles, particularly on student collaboration, has long ago proven its worth; you learn best when you are teaching others.

The second half of this third part expands upon the same principles backed up with more research with respect to early childhood education, compensatory education for vulnerable student groups, school-community relations, professional autonomy of teachers, post-secondary education and training.

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NOTES

¹ Director of the Centre de formation sur l'enseignement en milieux défavorisés, Université du Québec à Montréal (A training centre for teaching in disadvantaged areas).

² *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté*.

³ By pupils of immigrant backgrounds, we mean pupils born abroad or with one or both parents born abroad.

⁴ A 2002 cross-Canada study by the Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies revealed that very few young Canadians had access to an adequate curriculum and that they knew very little about First Nations.

⁵ The scope of this research study means that it is still one of the most important pieces of social science research in the history of the USA. It covered almost 600,000 students, 60,000 teachers in more than 3,000 schools.

⁶ There are currently thirty or so such schools enrolling 10,000 pupils from the Jewish, Greek, Armenian and Moslem communities.

⁷ This decision is known as *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

⁸ Currently, more than 60% of the pupils from immigrant backgrounds attend schools that have an visible minority enrolment in excess of 50%.

⁹ On this matter, the TV show *La Facture*, broadcast on Radio-Canada on January 17, 2006, instanced special programs in elementary schools with parental contributions varying between \$1,500 and \$2,500.

¹⁰ As a corollary, this implies the powers given to school boards to opt out of the required curriculum “in favour of special learning projects applicable to a group of students” (section 222) should be solely limited to measures intended to help children in difficulty succeed in school.