THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COMMITTEES AND PARENTS' COMMITTEES IN EDUCATION IN QUEBEC

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COMMITTEES AND PARENTS' COMMITTEES IN EDUCATION IN QUEBEC

By

Isabelle L. Shannon

This study concentrates on one of the manifestations of the new democratic spirit in the educational system of Quebec. It explores the implementation of a mandated structure for parent participation designed to reinforce the idea of the school as part of the community and to help make that institution more democratic and humanistic. Thus it is a local phenomenon needing some measure of local autonomy to be effective. However, it is advanced that this local control is difficult to achieve under the extreme centralization of education which has been imposed by the Ministry of Education. It is expected that an innovation imposed uniformly on each school throughout the province will bring about different results in each locale. This innovation of school committees and parents' committees is really quite startling considering the rural and clerical tradition in the history of Quebec.

The introductory chapters of this study provide necessary background information on the history of Quebec and on the Parent Commission Report which provided the basis for the educational reforms begun in the 1960s. The Parent Report was quite unique in that it recommended a total change in the philosophy and structure of the school system, disturbing the complacency of many Quebeckers. This study makes some comparisons between the old and the new system.

One of the interesting, innovative measures brought about by the Parent Report is the involvement of parents in the educational system. While this is common in the United States, it has not been the tradition in Quebec. This study describes the story of the mandate for this innovation along with a description of the history of school committees and parents' committees from their implementation in 1972 to the present time. Since these committees had only been in existence for four and a half years, the writer was dependent upon newspaper and magazine articles as well as personal interviews for much of the data for the study.

Educators realize that change occurs slowly. It is tremendously significant that Quebeckers recognized the importance of parent participation, developed the structure, and implemented it in the schools. The accomplishments noted in this study are considerable.

The problems hindering its effectiveness in no way diminish the importance of the achievement. It is a dramatic indication of the changes which are finally coming to the formerly tradition-bound province of Quebec.

In conclusion, it is submitted that parent participation is in a state of evolution resulting in considerable variance throughout the province in the degree of participation, effectiveness of operation, and acceptance. The concept of the school as part of the community has not been totally accepted by all the partners in the educational system. The innovation of school committees and parents' committees has not been successfully adopted on a province-wide basis, although the committees are functioning effectively in some areas.

Because the participation of parents in the education of their children is assumed to be a democratic right, recommendations are made to facilitate more effective operation of school committees and parents' committees until such time as this particular structure is no longer needed.

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By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The joint borderline shared by the United States and Canada extends for approximately 3,000 miles. This important neighbor is often overlooked or passed off as a carbon copy of the United States. This is unfortunate, for its vast expanse of territory offers a nation with even more contrasts than are found in the United States. Canada is a federation made up of ten provinces. The people of French and English heritage who coexist there give it its bilingual, bicultural flavor. Numerous immigrants representing other cultures provide further enrichment.

The educational system of any country or society reflects the culture of that society. It prepares the young people to take their place in the society that exists. When that society changes, its educational system changes. In Canada each province exercises the power of establishing and regulating its own educational system. The province of Quebec affords a great deal of interest in that its leaders have made sweeping educational reforms in the last twelve years.

Some of the history of Quebec, including the political, social, and economic events leading up to the educational reforms, will be described in Chapter II of this study. The most important event was the "Quiet Revolution" which took place in the 1960s. At this time, Quebeckers broke away from the old traditions and began making the economic and social advances which were necessary to enter the technological age.

As part of this revolution, Premier Jean Lesage commissioned a study of the current educational system. This study, called the Parent Report after Monsignor Alphonse Parent who headed the group directing it, was a five volume report which contained a thorough description of the educational system as it was at that writing and made numerous recommendations for improving it. This report will be described more fully in Chapter III of this dissertation.

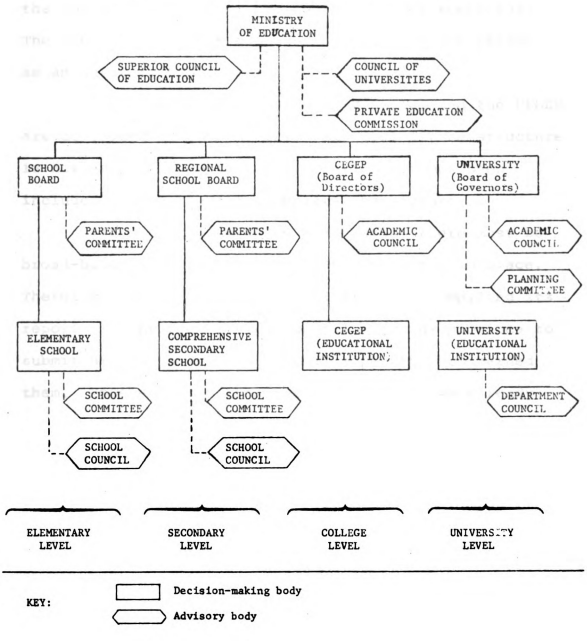
In the report, an entirely new philosophy was prescribed for Quebec's educational system based on the concepts of democracy, participation, and humanism. From this philosophy new goals were developed. To implement this new philosophy and the resulting goals, a number of radical changes were made to bring education in Quebec from its tradition-bound elitism into modern democratic society. The new philosophy and goals will be described in Chapter III, and the most important educational innovations will be explained and discussed.

A chart is provided on the following page to acquaint the reader with the total structure of the educational system of Quebec. The decision-making bodies are marked with rectangles; the advisory bodies are marked with elongated hexagons. The Ministry of Education and the Superior Council of Education will be described in Chapter III.

The school board is the body which has charge of the kindergarten and elementary education for those children who live in its district. It is either Catholic or Protestant. It is composed of a Trustee's Council, elected by the population of the district, and an administrative body of permanent personnel who implement the policies of the council. The term "school board" is often used interchangeably with "school commission."

Several school boards are grouped together in a given geographical area and are placed under the jurisdiction of a regional school board. This regional school board is responsible for providing secondary education in that area. The Trustee's Council of this board is formed from members elected by the individual school boards. Since the law of 1971, which reorganized school boards, some districts have chosen to combine elementary and secondary education under a single control. The power of taxation resides with the local school boards, but each must contribute to the expenses of the regional school board.

DECISION-MAKING AND ADVISORY BODIES ESTABLISHED BY LEGISLATION RELATIVE TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF QUEBEC



[1]Quebec, Ministry of Education, Planning Branch, Review of Educational Policies in Canada, Quebec Report (Quebec, March 1975), p. 66.

The school committee and the parents' committee are made up of parents and serve as an advisory body to the local school and to the school board respectively. The school council is composed of teachers and serves as an advisory body, also.

The comprehensive secondary school and the CEGEP are described in Chapter III. The rest of the structure is not essential to this dissertation but has been included in the chart to complete the picture.

If a system is to be democratic, there must be broad-based participation on the part of the populace. Therefore, when the Parent Commission was compiling its report, it invited people from all over the province to submit briefs on any educational topic that concerned them. However, when the resulting reforms were ready to be implemented, it was necessary to set up a strong central control under the new Ministry of Education to insure that reforms were effected uniformly throughout Quebec. When the effects of this centralization were felt, people thought that all control had been taken away from the local level. It was important to re-establish some feeling of local input.

The Parent Report contained a recommendation to develop parent participation in the school system at the local level. In 1971, the Legislature passed Law 27, which gave parents the right to elect school board

members in their district and also the right to form committees of parents to work with principals and teachers. Until this time parents had been told that their duty lay in getting their children to the school. They had nothing to say once the children entered the doors. Therefore, parent participation was a tremendous innovation in Quebec schools. This innovation has been singled out to form the focus of this dissertation.

The historical development of this innovation will be discussed in Chapter IV. The Parent Report stressed the importance of involving parents in the education of their children. After all, parents are the first and primary interpreters of the rights and needs of their children from birth through maturity. It is the parents who provide the original value system for that child. The years of schooling are an important influence and should be a complement to the values of the home. This idea of parent participation in the educational system was considered so important that it was not to be voluntary for the schools but mandatory. In 1971, the Legislature passed a law requiring each school to establish a "school committee" on or before October 15 of each school year. A school committee is composed of from five to twenty-three parents, depending on the size of the school, and the principal and one teacher. The school committee is to serve as an advisory body to the

local school. The presidents of each school committee in a district form a "parents' committee" which serves as an advisory body to the school board.

After the law was passed, the Ministry of Education drew up guidelines, school boards were informed, newspaper articles were printed, and the innovation of school committees and parents' committees was introduced into the school system.

In this dissertation, these committees will be studied from their beginning in the fall of 1972 through the end of 1976. During the four and a half years of their existence, parents and educators have been struggling to define the role of these committees. Since it is a local phenomenon, each school and school district has had to determine the role of its own committees. There has been resistance on the part of administrators and teachers coupled with lack of competence and knowledge on the part of parents. Parents had to begin by familiarizing themselves with the schools before being in a position to fulfill their consultative function. For this reason, the development of these committees can best be described as evolutionary. Chapter V discusses the role and function of school committees and parents' committees, describes the degree of parent participation, and gives examples of the matters handled by various committees in three main areas of the province.

The evolution of school committees and parents' committees in Quebec has not been smooth. Many problems have hindered their development. Chapter VI details some of the more important problems and discusses the solutions that have been found, if any.

When an innovation is introduced and its role is vaguely defined, there is a difference in the perception of the innovation by the individuals and groups involved. Therefore, a questionnaire was formulated and used in interviews with a number of people directly concerned with the implementation of this innovation to ascertain how they saw these committees. The methodology employed is described in Chapter VII, and the results of the questionnaire are discussed.

The final chapter contains the writer's evaluation of school committees and parents' committees. Comments are made on the success and failure of this innovation. Benefits, if any, to schools, parents, children, teachers, and administrators are noted. Recommendations are made concerning the continuance, modification, or discontinuance of these committees.

The idea for this study evolved from a consideration of the changes made in the educational system of Quebec after the acceptance of the Parent Report. The goal of democratization is being achieved in a number of ways. However, encouraging parents to participate

is making the school a better place for the development of the child. In addition, the educators are developing a broad base of support for the total school program. The community has been bewildered by the scope and rapidity of the reforms; this provides an opportunity for parents to obtain first-hand information on what is going on in the schools and share it with others. Informed, involved parents are usually supportive of administrative efforts and encourage rather than resist needed change.

This study seeks to determine the success or failure of parent participation in school life through the work of school committees and parents' committees. It also deals with the extent to which local control is derived from parent participation. The hypothesis is advanced that local control is difficult to achieve under the extreme centralization which currently exists in Quebec. It is further hypothesized that an innovation which is uniformly imposed on each school in the province will bring about different results in each locale. The conditions in each local school district will determine the extent of parent participation in that place.

Before embarking on the work for this dissertation, the writer determined by checking Dissertation Abstracts International that no previous research had been completed. After a study of relevant history and

background information, the writer spent time in Quebec in intense investigation of the topic.

Since a large part of the population of Quebec is concentrated in the valley of the St. Lawrence River, the major portion of the research was done in this area. Quebec City has considerable importance as the capital and the location of the Ministry of Education. The second city visited was Montreal; the city and its metropolitan region contain 45 percent of the total population of the province. The triangle was completed by a visit to Sherbrooke which is important as an urban area and which also provides access to certain rural towns. Knowledge of other areas was obtained from annual reports of school committees and parents' committees.

The Ministry of Education, through its Information Officer in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, was an important source of documents, articles, and personal contacts bearing on the committees and other aspects of the educational reforms. The Superior Council of Education provided more information complementing that received from the Ministry of Education. Contacts were made at universities and school boards. Information was gathered on both the Catholic and the Protestant school systems. Parents were contacted from current lists of school and parents' committee members. Forty persons were interviewed

on various aspects of the school system as well as on school committees and parents' committees.

Gradually an accurate picture emerged as informants repeated the same information that had been heard elsewhere. There was some divergence of information on certain questions, but this was expected since it reflected differences occurring in various localities.

A knowledge of the French language proved to be invaluable in this research. A large portion of the written material on the subject was available only in French. All of the interviews were conducted in French except for those with people from the English schools. Even though a number of respondents spoke English, they were more receptive and felt more comfortable conversing in French. Several informants spoke no English at all; some spoke a little. On several occasions when one informant was setting up an interview for the writer with an associate, he was able to obtain the meeting only after he assured the associate that the visitor spoke fluent French. This leads the writer to believe that the research accomplished is more accurate and more complete than could have been produced by a non-speaker of French.

This study provides some historical background, an account of the most important educational reforms, some comparison with the previous situation in Quebec,

and a detailed accounting of school committees and parents' committees and their function.

Parent participation is in a state of evolution. Most parents need to become acquainted with the schools and the educational process before they can make a contribution. In some areas parents have made an important contribution and must await decentralization before making further progress. In other areas little is happening and apathy exists.

The participation of parents can be beneficial to the schools, the children, and themselves. It should facilitate decentralization and help in restoring some local control to the schools. The participation of parents is one indication that the people of Quebec have moved a long way from the traditions of the past.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In Quebec City in front of the Legislature there is a rotary in Dufferin Avenue. In the circle is a floral display which is planted to form the words "Je me souviens" (I remember). It is a reminder that life in French Canada is firmly rooted in the traditions of the past. It reminds the French-Canadian of the founding of New France and the early days of the French in North America.

When the original French settlements were established along the St. Lawrence River, they were governed in a manner similar to that of the Ancien Régime in 18th Century France. There was a governor who was in charge of military affairs and an "intendant" who controlled economic, financial, and judicial matters. The people did not have a voice in anything. The French Revolution, which ended despotic rule in France, did not have any impact on life in French Canada. Therefore, there has always been a lack of understanding and belief in democratic principles and institutions in Quebec.

When the British began introducing democratic institutions, the French-Canadians did not understand them fully, but they accepted them because they thought it was a means of preserving their cultural heritage. The primary concern of French-Canadians has always been the preservation of their language and their cultural traditions. This, coupled with the long-term domination of the Roman Catholic Church, has hindered their development and slowed their emergence into our present day industrial, technological society.

The Church shared the authoritarian role with the French civil authority until the time when the English gained control of Canada. Since the French-Canadians did not accept the English colonial government as the ultimate authority over them, they turned completely to the Church in order to preserve their French language and customs. Thus the Church was able to enforce its values more strictly.

The Church decreed that spiritual values were more important than material concerns. The ideal Christian society preserved the family as a strong patriarchal economic and social unit whose basic function was reproduction. The parish was the center of life beyond the family unit. The parish priest was the authority for all matters of everyday life.

The school served to extend the work of the home and parish in indoctrinating the children with the value system of the Roman Catholic Church. This included instruction in the importance of their agricultural mission. They were taught that their faith and religious values could only be preserved by leading a rural life. It was not until after World War 2 that the Church changed its position on this matter.

Most children at this time had only an elementary school education or less. Higher education was reserved for the elite.

The Catholic Church stifled democratic ideology because it instilled the idea that power flows from the top down. Democracy holds the opposite view.

With all of this in mind we can see more clearly how and why the French-Canadians often differed in their position from the English speaking population in Canada.

The 1860s

Factors Working Toward Confederation

Recently in Canada, people, especially French-Canadians, have questioned the workability of the constitution under which they have lived since the formation of the Canadian nation in 1867. Therefore, it seems necessary to go back to the 1860s when Confederation took place and try to understand this event. The idea

of Confederation had been discussed widely for a number of years, but it did not become a priority until the 1860s.

At the time, the colonies of British America consisted of a number of scattered settlements. There were Vancouver and British Columbia in the far west, the Red River settlement in northern Manitoba, Upper Canada (Ontario), Lower Canada (the St. Lawrence settlements of Quebec), and the Maritime provinces. These colonies were so divided by land and by interests that only the most far-sighted believed that one government would suffice.

However, more people became caught up in the idea of Confederation when they felt threatened by events in the United States. In 1861 the American Civil War broke out. At first, Canadian support was on the side of the North as a result of their dislike of slavery. Later they saw the South as a separate new nation and tended to support that area. The situation was further complicated by United States-British conflicts such as the Trent Affair. Two Confederate commissioners to France were removed from a British Steamer by a United States warship. Great Britain demanded their release; war was threatened. The British sent 10,000 reinforcement troops to Canada. It became obvious that war between Great Britain and the United States might be waged in Canadian

territory. This caused Canadians to look at strengthening their government in order to provide more effective defense and a larger army.

Further trouble resulted from the St. Alban's Affair in 1864. A group of twenty-five United States Southerners who had taken refuge in Canada crossed the border and raided the town of St. Albans, Vermont. Although captured on their return to Canada, they were soon released. The United States strengthened their border patrols and discussed the possibility of rearming the Great Lakes.

The Fenian Brotherhood, a group of Irishmen from New York who wanted to revive the struggle for Irish independence, staged a number of raids across the Canadian border over a period of more than ten years. American authorities, resentful over the lack of Canadian action in the St. Albans Affair were slow in restraining the Fenians. This was another contributing factor to Canada's need to defend herself.

Economic Situation

About this time the economic situation in Canada worsened. Canada had enjoyed a Reciprocity Treaty with the United States which had facilitated trade and provided an outlet for its products. However, there was also a need to encourage interprovincial trade. Some of the measures that Canada employed to implement

this generated American hostility. Additional resentment was created by American groups who wanted to diminish competition in certain product areas. In 1865 the United States Congress gave notice that it planned to terminate the Reciprocity Treaty in 1866. Since Quebec had been marketing agricultural and forest products, the French-Canadians were concerned (as were the English) about the loss of their United States markets.

The expiration of the Reciprocity Treaty would cause further financial problems for the Grand Trunk Railroad as Canadian exporters would no longer be using its services to send goods to the United States. The railroad had been completed from Sarnia to Montreal with extensions to Quebec and to Portland, Maine. Building had been costly, and by the mid 1860s it was in financial difficulty. In order to save it, they needed to expand toward the Pacific. Therefore, backers of railway expansion began to push for Confederation.

Along with sentiment for railway expansion came the desire to colonize the North-West. A number of Americans had already settled there. Canadians were concerned over a possible takeover by the United States. It quickly became a priority for Canada to acquire this territory.

Meanwhile the French had been developing settlements in the North-West since the early days of the fur

trade. The most notable, the Red River colony in Manitoba, had become known as a "little Quebec." There was an ethnic mix, but the majority of the population was Métis, a group of half-breeds who were French-Indian or English-Indian.[1] They gradually became unified. The success of this colony raised French hopes of having a new Quebec develop in the West. Therefore, French-Canadians were just as concerned as the English-Canadians over United States' thrusts into the North-West.

Political Situation

About this time the political situation in Canada had also become grave. In 1864 a political deadlock was reached over the issues of nationality, religion, and sectionalism. The dominant political leader of Lower Canada at the time was Georges Etienne Cartier, who headed the conservative Liberals. This man was a lawyer with a business background. During his tenure, he was instrumental in accomplishing judicial, administrative, and educational reforms. He was also a strong backer of a transportation system that would unify Canada. During the 1850s he had formed an alliance with John

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[1]According to John W. Chalmers in Schools of the Foothills Province (University of Toronto Press, 1967), pp. 261-62, a Métis may also be a full-blooded Indian whose ancestors accepted scrip or land instead of signing treaty in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Thus, not being registered with the Indian Affairs Branch of the Federal Government leaves him without the privileged status of the treaty Indian.

MacDonald, the political leader of Upper Canada. It was after the Cartier government fell and the Liberal, George Brown, succeeded him that the political stalemate was reached.

For years Upper and Lower Canada had enjoyed equal representation in the Legislature even though the population of Lower Canada was greater than the population of Upper Canada. When the population of Upper Canada became greater, the Brown government supported representation by population. Naturally Cartier and the French Canadians opposed this idea.

In addition, the effects of the economic and psychological factors previously mentioned caused government after government to collapse; neither party could maintain itself in office.

Eventually Cartier and MacDonald (leading the French and English conservatives) formed a coalition with George Brown (leading the Canada West Liberals). This surprised everyone since they had been bitter enemies for over fifteen years. Etienne-Pascal Taché provided unifying leadership for this government. They hoped to bring about Confederation now that they had a large majority in the Legislature. The leaders of the opposition were the Canada East Liberals or Rouges.

Quebec Conference

On October 10, 1864, the Quebec Conference was held. During the two weeks of meetings, seventy-two resolutions were passed. These were to form the basis of the new constitution. The Legislature adopted the Quebec Resolutions in February, 1865. Next the plan had to be ratified by each province who had sent delegates to the meeting at Quebec.

Now Cartier had to persuade the people of the province of Quebec that this plan for Confederation should be ratified. It was not easy. Cartier tried to emphasize the fairness of the proposal and the advantages for French-Canadians. The French would have a majority in the provincial government and a large minority in the federal government. Most of the leading French-Canadian newspapers supported him but not with enthusiasm.

John MacDonald had the job of maneuvering the measure through the joint Ontario-Quebec Legislature. Cartier did all possible to support him, even making a three-hour speech. (This was notable since public speaking was not counted among his strong points.) He traced the history of the proposal and emphasized that all basic rights and privileges would be preserved and guaranteed for all. He also touted it as a safe guard against absorption into the United States. Finally the French Canadians supported him 27-21.

The vote in the House was taken on March 10, 1865; the Quebec Resolutions were passed 91-33 (21 of those opposed were French Canadians).[1]

Approval was finally granted by all provinces involved, and in March of 1867 the British North America Act was passed by the British Parliament and became the written constitution of the Dominion of Canada. Dominion Day is celebrated on July 1, the anniversary of the date when the Dominion of Canada became official.

British North America Act of 1867

The British North America Act adapted and combined the British Parliamentary System and the federal principles of the United States. Canadians wanted to create political and judicial unity but preserve cultural and religious diversity. Canadians rejected the intolerance and conformity that currently shaped the brand of nationalism prevalent in Europe and in the United States. Therefore, the system is the opposite of ours since it gives to the federal government all the powers which are not specifically granted to the provinces. These specific powers were given to the provinces so that each could retain its individuality. Quebec and Ontario, which previously had a single Legislature, were now

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[1]Mason Wade, The French Canadians, vol. 1 (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1968), pp. 320-27.

separated to the satisfaction of both. This separation was especially important for Quebec where there were strong feelings over preserving their system of education, civil law, language, and religion.

From the date of Confederation, French as well as English became the official languages of Parliament and the federal courts. The province of Quebec was declared bilingual, also.

The new government was to have two Houses of Parliament. The principal areas of the Dominion had equal representation in the Senate. In the House of Commons, representation was by population. To protect minority rights, Quebec was to always have sixty-five members. Other provinces would be allowed a smaller or larger number according to whether their population was less or more than that of Quebec.

Benefits

The French-Canadians benefited economically under the provisions of the British North America Act as the whole country prospered. The French-Canadians controlled cultural and political matters within the province of Quebec, but the English exercised much of the economic control. They provided management; the French provided the labor.

This was especially true in Montreal where the population was still more English than French. Each

culture had its own section of the city. The city was growing rapidly along with the economic expansion and was becoming a great rail center. By 1867 Montreal had eclipsed Quebec City as the center of British import and export trade.

All of this economic growth and industrial activity was the beginning of the industrial age in Canada. This was welcomed by the English but not by the French. They were much more resistant to change since they tended to be conservative and traditional. As a result, the French were behind in industrialization until recently.

As industrialism grew, the union movement began in Quebec. Here again the English were receptive; the French preferred the Guild tradition of Europe. The Church, which had accustomed the people to the agricultural tradition, considered the unions "dangerous secret societies."[1] The Church also warned against the materialistic and socialistic views of the union leaders because they considered the unions a threat in the social realm.

The Riel Rebellion

The last major event of the decade of the 1860s was the story of the Riel Rebellion in the Red River Colony in Manitoba. This territory was inhabited by

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[1]Ibid., p. 338.

Métis, and some Americans and Canadians, as previously mentioned. It had been governed by the Hudson's Bay Company. The French-speaking Métis were concerned over losing their French culture and religion if the settlement were taken over by Canada. On the day after the lapse of the Hudson's Bay Company's authority and the day before the Canadians were to take over, Louis Riel (a Métis) set up a provisional government, hoping to allow the area to enter the Federation as a separate province. The small group of Canadian settlers opposed him, and this led to Riel's shooting of an English-speaking Canadian. The territory entered the Federation as the province of Manitoba, but the English-speaking Canadians protested the killing. This caused much hostility between Quebec and Ontario for a number of years to come and was intensified when Riel was later executed.[1]

It should be noted that the most important result of the Riel Rebellion and the execution of Riel was the growth of nationalist sentiment in Quebec and the formation of the new Parti National. A major goal of this party was to fight the national government by all constitutional means.

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[1]J. M. S. Careless, Canada, A Story of Challenge (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963), pp. 260-63.

Philosophical Considerations

In describing this period in Canadian History, it is not enough simply to discuss the events that occurred. Strong feelings were held by the French Canadians during this decade, and an attempt must be made to understand these, also.

Ultramontanism and Liberalism

The two philosophical waves in Quebec were ultramontanism and liberalism. However, much confusion existed because these terms were borrowed from Europe where they were used differently. In Quebec the ultramontanes believed in the supremacy of the Pope. They were nationalists who believed that they, the French-Canadians, united by a common language, religion, and culture, had a mission--to create a center of Catholicism in the New World. The State was subordinated to the Church.[1]

The liberals advocated a democratic government, independent of the church. They believed in the rights of free speech and free thought. Conflict between the two groups continued for a number of years.

Role of the Catholic Church

The role of the Church was of primary importance in French-Canadian life. In the years just before the

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[1]Wade, The French Canadians, p. 346.

1860s the authority of the church had been strongly reinforced. An intellectual middle class had developed in Quebec. These people were instrumental in forming a strong nationalist philosophy based on the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

In 1866 Mgr. Laflèche gave a speech which was widely reproduced. In it he explained that the mission of the French-Canadians was largely religious. Their purpose was to convert the population to Catholicism and to develop a predominantly Catholic nationality. He lauded the efforts of Cartier and Champlain and stressed group unity and strict adherence to Catholicism.[1]

Others before him and after him stressed the agricultural nature of their mission. This was not only a priority of the clergy. During the 1860s a whole school of writers emerged to deify and glorify the rural mission.

Chief among these was Antoine Guérin-LaJoie. His novel Jean Rivard: Le Défricheur (the pioneer settler), published in 1862, emphasized "la vocation rurale."[2] For years the Church had told the French-Canadians that their mission was to establish

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[1]Ramsey Cook, French-Canadian Nationalism (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1969), pp. 92-106.

[2]Ramsey Cook, Canada and the French-Canadian Question (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1966), p. 85.

agricultural settlements and work the land. This author wrote the novel because he felt a missionary desire to remind French-Canadians of this ideal.

La survivance

A constant preoccupation with French-Canadians has been the idea of "la survivance." This word has a larger meaning than the English word survival. It is a philosophy formed about the time of the 1812-1814 War and is considered to be a form of nationalism. It is an expression of the French-Canadian determination to preserve its language, religion, institutions, laws, and culture. It is a struggle against being assimilated by the English-speaking Canadians. It is a preservation of its own group with no thought of converting others to join them in their way of life. In contrast, the English looked upon survival as not only maintaining what they had but also expanding their territory.

One of the leading proponents of cultural survival was Francois-Xavier Garneau, who is regarded as the father of French-Canadian literature. Among his many books, he published three editions of his history of French Canada and prepared materials for a fourth which appeared after his death. In his history he expounded the relationship between French-Canadian language, laws and customs, and also between religion

and nationality. These views were widely accepted, and his history was read as a "national bible."[1]

It is easy to see how the spirit of "survivance" pervaded the whole struggle for setting up the Confederation in the years preceding 1867. The French-Canadians looked upon every development from an ethnic point of view, wanting to preserve equality of rights not only for those French-Canadians who lived in Quebec but for those who had chosen to live in other parts of Canada. However, one cannot say that it was only Quebec who wanted a federation rather than another form of government. The province of Ontario was just as set on having local control, and therefore, was in agreement with Quebec on this important question.

Ideals of Cartier

Georges Cartier, the French-Canadian statesman who worked so hard to achieve Confederation, tried to set a Canadian ideal rather than a provincial one. "We are of different races, not to wage war among ourselves, but to work together for the common welfare."[2] [sic] It is discouraging to see that after many years of

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[1]Wade, The French-Canadians, p. 289.

[2]Mason Wade, The French-Canadian Outlook (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1964), p. 41. No notation of the original source of this quotation.

statesmanship, as he emphasized a Canadian nationalism, he lost power with the French-Canadians but never was fully trusted by the English Canadians.[1]

Renewal of Ties with France

It should be noted also that from the moment of Confederation, the French-Canadians displayed a certain defensiveness coming from the fact that their numerical strength was less than one-third of the total population of the new nation. This is undoubtedly responsible for the reactionary spirit which still exists among the Quebecois.

During the 1850s and 1860s Quebec had renewed its interest in France. This feeling of loss of power in 1867 caused the French-Canadians to turn even more toward France and to heighten the renewal of ties between France and Quebec. For awhile the French-Canadians were thought to be more French and more Catholic than the French in France! This ended about 1870 when France became a republic after the defeat of Napoleon. At this time, the French-Canadians decided they had been "chosen by Providence to carry on the true French and Catholic tradition, uncorrupted by liberalism and republicanism."[2]

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[1]Wade, The French-Canadians, p. 309.

[2]Ibid., p. 352.

Ultranationalism

Everything moved together to bring about the ultranationalism born at the end of this decade. This ultranationalism used religion for political ends and politics for religious ends. One can see how this easily aroused hostility among the English-speaking, who favored separation of Church and State. This intensified French-Canadian feeling of being a minority and strengthened the inferiority complex, which resulted in arrogance and aggression.[1] And this is how it was at the end of the 1860s.

In the years which followed, the provinces of Canada continued to develop. Geographical areas were added until the Federation of Canada grew into the ten provinces which we know today. The population grew considerably, partly as the result of immigration. Because of its tremendous size and its potential for growth, Canada became known to many as the land of opportunity and therefore attracted many immigrants of various nationalities. Economic growth continued with the advent of industrialization and the development of new technology.

This occurred in Quebec also, but the changes in the French sector were not as rapid. The struggle for "la survivance" continued to be uppermost in importance

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[1]Wade, The French-Canadian Outlook, p. 46.

in the minds of the Québecois, and the dominance of the Catholic Church remained in force. However, the people were beginning to be aware of the social and economic changes being made elsewhere, and they began to question their way of life.

The 1960s

Political Events in Quebec

Duplessis Era

The 1960s were both an exciting and disturbing time for the people of French Canada. This period marked the emergence of Quebec into the 20th century.

Formerly, the province had been controlled by Maurice Duplessis, who had been premier for all but five years during the period from 1936 until he died in 1959. Duplessis, son of a judge and trained as a lawyer, began his political career in 1927 as the legislative delegate from Three Rivers. Later his goal was to defeat the Taschereau government and replace it with his Conservative Party. He accomplished this in 1936, but once in office, he abandoned his proposed social and economic programs and showed his true economic conservatism.

During his campaign Duplessis and his Union Nationale Party had promised to establish a badly needed provincial hydro-electric power company and to regulate the large ones already in business. This was to conserve and control the use of natural resources and to provide

power at a reasonable rate to all citizens. Once in office, he stated that the government did not have the financial resources to undertake this project so the abuses in this area continued.

In the area of social legislation, the Duplessis party had proposed a number of reforms to aid the poor and the workers. Only a few minor changes were made here.

The labor legislation that was passed was more beneficial to the employers than to the workers. The Fair Wage Act gave the impression that it helped labor; it did not. The government set the wage level lower than many of the companies had been paying. This allowed employers to decrease the amount of wages paid which hurt the labor force considerably.

During Duplessis' campaign, he had talked against the practice of allowing foreign investors to provide capital for Quebec industry. While in office, he did nothing to change this situation. Quebec continued to be industrialized by foreigners at a tremendous cost to French-Canadians.

There was one important area where the party's promises were kept. Laws were passed to give farmers liberal financial assistance. Why? It was important to have their support because the farm districts still carried more influence on election day than did the

urban districts. The province needed to be redistricted, but Duplessis preferred it the way it was.

Duplessis was also responsible for maintaining the status quo in the school system. He supported the old-fashioned conservative schools desired by the Roman Catholic leaders.

It is important to understand how this one man was able to dominate Quebec for a quarter of a century when he did not carry out his proposed programs. There are three factors which explain this.

First, it must be remembered that the primary concern of the French-Canadians was "la survivance" or the preservation of their language and customs. Since Duplessis was a strong supporter of this and fought for provincial rights, the voters overlooked his performance in economic and social matters.

In addition, it was easy for a party in power to stay in power. The people did not understand the principles of democratic government. They did not realize that they had certain rights. Therefore, it was easy for the leaders to dispense favors to the party faithful. If contractors wanted government contracts, they had to donate large sums to the campaign fund. If a town wanted a badly needed bridge or road, they had to vote the right way or Duplessis made sure that they didn't get it.

A third important factor was the position of the Roman Catholic Church. While it did not at this time openly support a political party, it was opposed to communism because it was atheistic. Church leaders thought that any shift toward the left in economic or social programs would pave the way for communism. Therefore, they backed Duplessis.[1]

Duplessis was a master politician whose whole life revolved around governing Quebec. He thought he was indispensable.[2] However, during the latter years of this tenure, a growing number of Québecois were beginning to question his policies.

The Quiet Revolution

When Duplessis died in 1959, these liberals who had begun to realize that Duplessis' policies were not in their best interests supported Jean Lesage, leader of the province's Liberal Party. Lesage was elected prime minister of Quebec in June of 1960; this marked the beginning of the Quiet Revolution.

All over the province, people were questioning the values that had been held for so long--such things as the role of the State, the place of the Church in

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[1]Herbert F. Quinn, The Union Nationale (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), pp. 69-151.

[2]Pierre Laporte, The True Face of Duplessis (Montreal: Harvest House Limited, 1960).

Society, the place of the layman in the church, the educational system, the place of Quebec in the Confederation. It was a time of turning inward, of disinterest in the rest of the nation.[1] People no longer felt that their cultural survival depended on the concept of Confederation.

These people found an echo and a support in Le Devoir, a Montreal daily newspaper. Articles called for higher educational standards, attention to the French language, social security, public morality, and the rights of trade unions.[2] This newspaper was, however, still committed to "la survivance." The commitment to this philosophy was just as strong as ever. It was one idea which remained unchanged.

About the same time a book expressing these same views appeared and began to circulate widely. A young Catholic brother and teacher wrote Les Insolences du Frère Untel (The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous). The success of this book showed that a great number of French-Canadians were taking a critical look at their society and were anxious to have those changes made which would free them from tradition and enable them to make the social and economic advances which they saw as necessary.

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[1]Cook, Canada and the French-Canadian Question, p. 17.

[2]Ibid., pp. 104-05.

The new Lesage government addressed itself to these demands. Immediate priorities included cleaning up corruption, enacting several social welfare measures, improving labor laws, and expanding educational progress. Lesage even established a ministry of education. In 1962 he nationalized eleven private hydro-electric companies. The following April he announced a new tax plan to Ottawa. He felt Quebec should have 25 percent of income taxes, 25 percent of corporation taxes, and 100 percent of the succession taxes. The earlier reforms had not provoked any reaction from the English because they were measures to which English-Canadians were accustomed. However, the tax measure attracted some notice.

Lesage had his own approach to federal-provincial relations. He was very successful with his positive autonism. He never said no to Ottawa but would respond with all possible alternatives. He succeeded in making his voice heard in Ottawa and caused the Québecois to notice that their province could once more be a viable political unit.

The structure of French-Canadian society at the time could well be compared to an iceberg. The tip above the water represents the educated elite--priests, lawyers, doctors, and scholars. These people were bilingual, cultivated, charming, equal to or better than the best of English-speaking North America.

However, this only represented one-ninth of the French-Canadian population. The other eight-ninths were underprivileged, both economically and educationally. Whether inhabitants of rural areas or hangers-on in the cities, their standard of living was far below normal.[1] Some from this group were attempting to become educated, but were finding it difficult due to the elitist educational system. This caused them to turn from their traditional clergy and lawyer-politician leaders.

One of the measures designed to help the underprivileged masses was the family allowance. French-Canadians traditionally had large families. The English were vocal in their opposition to this welfare measure because they did not want to financially support or encourage the high birth rate. Some of the French-Canadians opposed family allowances also, on the grounds that the money was not sufficient to fully meet the needs of the people. In addition, sending the checks to the mothers instead of to the fathers was against the male tradition. There was further controversy over the fact that the French-Canadians wanted the financial help for all of the welfare programs, but they did not want any control by the federal government.

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[1]Wade, The French-Canadian Outlook, pp. 81-82.

Revival of Separatism

During the time that Lesage was effecting his reforms, other political parties were attempting to make some gains. The Social Credit Party under the leadership of Réal Caouette took twenty-six of Quebec's seats in the federal election of 1962. These represented the interests of people from the lower class and lower middle class who were voting against the old order. However, one of the party's tenets was French-English coexistence. Therefore, splinter groups from the Social Credit Party shifted and after several regroupings, name changes, and mergers, they gradually evolved into the separatists.

These people represented about 13 percent of Quebec's population. A profile of a typical separatist showed a well-educated professional person, under thirty, from a prosperous middle class family. This person had rejected the absolutes of the Roman Catholic Church, had become fiercely nationalistic, was ignorant of economics, was interested in the rise of the new African and Asian nations, and noted with pride the accomplishments of modern France.[1]

A noted supporter of separatism was Dr. Marcel Chaput, a federal civil service employee. He authored a book in 1961 entitled Why I Am a Separatist which

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[1]Cook, Canada and the French-Canadian Question, pp. 18-19.

called for Quebec to secede from the Confederation. Chaput resigned from his job in order to work in support of separatism.

The most extreme group, The Front de libération québecois, or the F.L.Q., began attracting public notice in the spring of 1963 with bomb explosions in public places. The following year, among other activities, they staged demonstrations during Queen Elizabeth's visit.[1]

The Johnson Administration

In the election of 1966 Daniel Johnson, leader of the Union Nationale party, narrowly defeated Lesage. French-Canadians cling to their traditions, and many thought Lesage had gone too far too fast. Therefore, they voted for Johnson. Johnson continued the "quiet revolution" but progress was slowed down considerably.

Before his election, Johnson had stated his position on the future status of Quebec. He said, "What we must claim and obtain for Quebec, as the main seat of a nation, is recognition as a national state." After the election Johnson wavered in his position regarding Confederation and worked for a closer alliance with France. During DeGaulle's visit to Quebec for Expo '67,

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[1]J. Bartlet Brebner, Canada (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1970), p. 546.

the French leader called for "le Québec libre" (a free Quebec) during his speech. As can be imagined, this brought forth a strong reaction from the English.[1]

The Johnson tenure ended with his death in 1968. Jean Bertrand succeeded him and moderated the separatist tendencies of the Union Nationale government.

Federal Politics

One of the major issues in federal politics during the 1960s was the struggle between the French and the English. Each group had its own public philosophy which may be traced back to the British conquest in 1760. The French-Canadians were a conquered group and a minority and therefore have traditionally been concerned with group rights. Cook calls their philosophy Rousseauian because it evidences a general will of the group to survive. He calls the English philosophy Lockean since the English Canadians concern themselves with individual rights and equality of opportunity. They feel that groups do not have a right to special privileges; they consider that undemocratic.[2]

The English feel that the basic concept of confederation worked well. The French were questioning its

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[1]Kenneth McNaught, The History of Canada (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 309.

[2]Cook, Canada and the French-Canadian Question, p. 146.

validity. They felt that in a democratic majority, all issues of public business were decided in favor of the English. Therefore, they were looking for a system where more than a simple majority was used to decide these questions. Some proposed a system of "associate states." An obvious drawback was the realization that almost every issue would result in voting along French-English loyalties, culminating in a deadlock similar to the one in 1864. Where that one led to Confederation, this one might lead to separation.

Pearson Administration and the Bilingual-Bicultural Commission

When John Diefenbaker was prime minister of Canada from 1957-1963, he did not show much concern for French Canada. This changed when Lester Pearson came into power. He thought that action should be taken to alleviate French-Canadian grievances.

Pearson's first effort was made in July, 1963, when he appointed André Laurendeau, editor of Le Devoir, and Davidson Dunton, president of Carleton University in Ottawa, to head a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. They were to investigate the current status of bilingualism and biculturalism and then to make recommendations on what should be done to provide equality between the French and the English. They

were also to make note of cultural enrichment by other ethnic groups.

In the first report in October, 1967, the commission recommended that English and French should both be declared the official languages of the Canadian parliament, the federal courts, the federal government, and the federal administration. They further advised that Ontario and New Brunswick should recognize English and French as official languages due to the fact that they had large French-speaking minorities. In fact, any province where the minority had reached 10 percent of the population should declare both languages official. A later report in December, 1968 centered on education. All Canadian children should have the right to be educated in the official language of their choice.

About this time, the English reacted to what they considered to be too many concessions made to Quebec. They cited the Bilingual-Bicultural Commission, the increasing bilingualism in civil service, the increased decentralization to allow more money and more freedom in policy in the provinces, and the choice of the maple leaf flag over the former more traditional English design.[1]

This enlivened the discussion held during the Dominion-Provincial Conference held in Ottawa in

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[1]Ibid., p. 158.

February of 1968, just before Pearson left office. At the conference, Premier Johnson of Quebec wanted more power in international affairs, social welfare, and broadcasting. Another French-Canadian, Pierre Trudeau, who was Minister of Justice at the time, expressed his opposition. The conference did endorse the research of the Bilingualism-Biculturalism Commission and stated that "French-speaking Canadians outside Quebec should have the same rights as English-speaking Canadians in Quebec."[1]

The Trudeau Administration

Shortly after this conference, Pierre Trudeau became the leader of the Liberals and then prime minister of Canada. Under his leadership the Official Language Act, carrying out the recommendations of the commission, was passed in July, 1969. Trudeau's government also continued to help alleviate the problems of Quebec. When Air Canada wanted to shift its overhaul base from Winnipeg to Dorval, the battle between Manitoba and Quebec went on from 1962-1969 when the transfer was finally made. In addition, all the help received by Quebec caused the Maritime Provinces to demand more help, also.

Trudeau is a champion of the philosophy of Canada as one nation. Therefore, he is not popular with the separatists. He has an ally in Robert Bourassa, an

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[1]Brebner, Canada, p. 549.

economist trained at Harvard and Oxford, who became premier of Quebec in 1970. Bourassa feels that Quebec can best preserve its culture and attain its goals by staying within the Confederation.[1]

Therefore, all through the sixties, Quebec has been involved in arguments over the future shape of Canada and its role in it. French-Canadians have been free in their own province to effect the changes that were necessary. They have also had to give attention to making their position more secure within the nation of Canada. As Andre Laurendeau said, "At Quebec one does what one wishes; at Ottawa one does what one can."[2]

Economics

While French-Canadians have been more dominant on the political scene, English Canadians have had financial control over the economy. In order to attain prominence in big business and in the higher civil service posts, it was necessary to be English-speaking. Thus, the majority of the immigrants flocking to Canada in large numbers elected to become English speakers. This heavy immigration became a serious threat in the eyes of French-Canadians, especially since their birth rate was

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[1]Walz, Portrait of Canada (New York: American Heritage Press), p. 176.

[2]Cook, Canada and the French-Canadian Question, p. 117.

now declining while the English birth rate was rising. This threat to economic security was a major factor in increasing Quebec's efforts for survival.[1]

The desire for economic security caused French-Canadians to be more receptive to the union movement. They were much less willing to work longer hours for lower wages. They also began to push to improve their working conditions.[2]

There was a great need for French-Canadians to be involved in business management so that French-Canadians who wanted the opportunity could rise above the level of labor. However, the financial capital was largely in the hands of the English. It had been hard to fight the indifference of French-Canadians who had been taught for years that their mission was agricultural. Some thought that the government should provide financial assistance for French Canadians to start their own businesses. René Levesque, Quebec Minister of Natural Resources, said in 1963 that "our principal capitalist for the moment--and as far into the future as we can see--must therefore be the state. It must be more than a participant in the economic development and the emancipation

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[1]McNaught, The History of Canada, p. 290.

[2]Wade, The French-Canadian Outlook, pp. 80-81.

of Quebec; it must be a creative agent."[1] Progress in this area of increased economic participation for French-Canadians has been slow.

In searching for a key to understand contemporary Quebec, one finds as worthy of comment the writings of Professor Michel Brunet, the director of l'Institut d'histoire (Institute of History) of the University of Montreal. According to Ramsey Cook, he is the best contemporary nationalist historian. He has not only studied Quebec's past to seek clues for survival, but he has delved into the modern problems of class structure, economic organization, and political power. He has urged French-Canadians not to withdraw from the urban-industrial society but to be active participants in it. However, he is conservative; he is clever at identifying problems, but he does not provide solutions.[2]

For descriptive details along with the flavor of life in Quebec during this period, one can peruse the novels of Gabrielle Roy. In contrast to the poverty stricken farm family of Maria Chapdelaine, she chronicles a poverty stricken Montreal slum family in her novel The Tin Flute. It is depressing to read about their desperate attempts to survive in the face of one

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[1]Cook, Canada and the French-Canadian Question, p. 93.

[2]Ibid., pp. 127-28, 140-42.

catastrophe after another. In contrast, a friend of the daughter with an intense desire to move up, manages to deny himself all the usual pleasures to get a better job elsewhere.

Resulting Crisis

From these writings and others, we see how economic factors caused a crisis in the sixties. There existed in French Canada a series of rising expectations. The area had been in the process of becoming industrialized for many years. Social transformations had lagged behind because the political system had moved too slowly in relation to the other changes. At the same time that the Québecois were desiring these changes, they began to recognize the danger of assimilation into the English-speaking population now that they were also industrialized. This increased their desire to gain economic control representing their 80 percent of the total population in the province.

Education

The rising expectations of the Québecois resulted in demands for more educational opportunity and helped pave the way for the important educational reforms which took place in this decade. This, along with a general discontent with the educational system in Quebec

especially noted in Les Insolences du Frère Untel mentioned earlier, caused action in this area.

Paul Gérin-Lajoie became Minister of Youth in 1960. He immediately took over responsibility and financial control of the Department of Education which had been run by the office of the Provincial Secretary. He then moved to expand secondary education. To do this, he provided for upgrading of quality of teachers, abolished tuition, increased compulsory attendance from age fourteen to age fifteen, and regrouped the school boards to encourage cooperation.

Meanwhile, under the Lesage administration, a royal commission had been formed under Monsignor A. M. Parent to explore thoroughly the educational system and make recommendations. The reports presented in 1963, 1964, and 1966 recommended a thorough revision including the appointment of a Minister of Education to coordinate education at all levels. A year later a law was passed to achieve this last goal. A major aid to the passage of this bill was the fact that the Roman Catholic hierarchy had been sensitive to the changing societal needs and decided not to oppose it.

Following this, the entire school system was reorganized. A major reform in secondary education was the change to the comprehensive school where all students would take certain core subjects at various levels

instead of being separated into academic, general, and vocational programs.

> The initial reaction of the Province to this panorama was something approaching awe. Intellectually and emotionally, the government, educators, the press, and the public found themselves swept along with the combination of enthusiasm, certitude, and vision which characterized both the commissioners and their recommendations. Although reservations were voiced concerning specific recommendations and concerning the time and methods needed to effect this miraculous transformation, a consensus developed around the "spirit" of the Report.[1]

Later the CEGEP[2] was added. This was a two-year program leading to university entrance or a three-year terminal program. Pressure from increased enrollment here led to the creation of the University of Quebec with its five branches.

Several controversies developed during the efforts to implement the recommendations. One of the major ones concerned the organization of school boards. Should they be unified? Should they be separated along confessional lines? Or along language lines? The Parent Commission advocated unified boards. Here they lost the support of many of the people. School boards continued to be French-Catholic or English-Protestant.

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[1]Norman Henchey, "Quebec Education: The Unfinished Revolution," McGill Journal of Education 7 (Fall 1972): 103-04.

[2]Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionel.

A second crisis arose from teacher demands for money and power. Eventually this was solved when teachers won the right to form a bargaining unit. Salaries were established on a single scale for the whole province, and teachers were allowed into the decision-making process.

The dispute over the French/English education/ language problem reached new heights over the St. Léonard affair. St. Léonard, a suburb of Montreal, had a mixed French and Italian population. Many of the Italians wanted an English education for their children even though many of them spoke French. A group called Le Mouvement pour l'intégration scolaire (movement for school integration) won a majority in the Catholic school board election in 1968. Shortly after, the board announced that they were abolishing instruction in English beginning in grade 1 that fall. The Ministry of Education did not interfere; there did not seem to be anything in the law to prevent the school board's action. It looked as though Quebeckers wanted a unilingual Quebec. The English were alarmed, and it was obvious that the whole problem of French, English, and minority cultural groups would have to be defined.

In December, 1968, the Gendron Commission was formed to study the issue of linguistic rights. The

issue was not settled by the end of the sixties and was carried over into the seventies.

Quebeckers wanted to become "maîtres chez nous" (masters of our own province) and were looking for the educational system to provide them with the necessary skills.

To sum up the decade of the sixties we may say that

> . . . most of the effort of the last decade has consisted in trying to enlarge the responsibilities of the government of Quebec without breaking up the Confederation, and in trying to redress the balance in the whole of Canada in favour of a little more justice for the French-speaking community. This effort on the linguistic plane has taken on special importance in the services of the federal government, in the educational systems of other provinces than Quebec, and also to a large extent in the private sector of the economy. Important gains have been made, but these have not been enough . . . to satisfy important segments of the Quebec society.[1]

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[1]Claude Ryan, "French Canada," Social Education 35 (October 1971): 673.

CHAPTER III

THE PARENT COMMISSION REPORT AND ITS EFFECT UPON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

It has already been mentioned that the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s necessitated considerable changes in the educational system in order to make a break with the traditions of the past and to accelerate Quebec's emergence into a technological society. Premier Lesage appointed a royal commission in May 1961 to make a thorough study of the educational system, to frame new objectives for education, and to formulate a plan for their implementation. This Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Quebec was headed by Monsignor Alphonse-Marie Parent, professor of philosophy and vice-rector of Laval University. Eight other members were chosen: Gerard Filion, Managing Director of the newspaper "Le Devoir"; Paul Larocque, Assistant Secretary, Aluminum Ltd.; David Munroe, Director of the Institute of Education, McGill University; Marie-Laurent de Rome, Religious of the Holy Cross, Professor of Philosophy at Basile Moreau College; Jeanne Lapointe, Professor in the

Faculty of Letters, Laval University; John McIlhone, Assistant Director of Studies, The Catholic School Commission of Montreal; and Guy Rocher, Director of the Department of Sociology, University of Montreal. Arthur Tremblay, Assistant Director of the School of Pedagogy and Orientation, Laval University, and Technical Counsellor for the Department of Youth, Quebec, was appointed an associate member with the right of discussion but not the right to vote. There was a secretarial staff of five.

The Parent Commission started its work on May 16, 1961. Its first act was to invite everyone, but especially educators, to present their views and suggestions in written form. These briefs were discussed first by the members of the commission and later by those attending the public meetings. Three hundred written statements were received.[1] Public meetings were held in eight Quebec cities for a total of about forty days. Members of the commission met in private interviews with about 125 other people who were specialists in education or in related disciplines. Each week, the commission spent two or three days exchanging opinions, holding discussions, studying texts written by members of the commission or by special work-study teams that had been asked to work

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[1] A list of these may be found on pages 267-72 in vol. 5 of the Parent Report.

on a particular question. Later commission members visited about fifty institutions on all levels in the Province to obtain first-hand information on how the school system functioned.

In May of 1962, the commission began an investigation of the educational system of each of the other Canadian provinces. Later they familiarized themselves with the systems of several American states. Early in 1963, commission members visited the following European countries: Scotland, England, France, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, West Germany, Switzerland, and Russia. With all of the above information in hand, the commission began to produce its report.

The first volume of the five-volume Parent Commission Report appeared on April 23, 1963. This volume established the underlying philosophy for all the recommendations that were made. The volume contains a history of education in Quebec, a description of the legislation which controlled education at the time, and a census of the whole system of public and private education. Most importantly, the volume contains a discussion of the goals of education in Quebec as well as the philosophy behind them.

At the beginning of the decade of the sixties, education in Quebec was rather fragmented and uncoordinated. The Public Education Council had two permanent

committees, the Catholic Committee and the Protestant Committee. Each of these was responsible for public education in its sector. However, there was no articulation between the two since the Public Education Council had not met as a body for over half a century. To further complicate matters, public education ended with the ninth grade in many areas.

In addition to the Public Education Council, there was a Provincial Superintendent of Education appointed by the government. He was responsible to the Legislature through the office of the Provincial Secretary. This Superintendent of Education supervised the Department of Education (formerly the Department of Public Instruction), which watched over the implementation of the regulations of the Protestant and Catholic Committees.

There was also a fairly large grouping of private schools. Many of these were convents or classical colleges. The latter schools were the exclusive route to higher education. These as well as the teacher training institutions were under the jurisdiction of agencies of religious affiliation, dioceses, or religious communities. Government aid was furnished on an irregular basis, and many survived only because there were many teachers who turned back their salaries to the colleges or schools.

A variety of specialized schools existed under the support of certain Quebec ministries, hospitals, and private corporations. These provided training in such areas as nursing, agriculture, fine arts, naval pilot training, technology, military engineering, and theatre arts.

Due to the lack of coordination, it was impossible to transfer from one school to another. It was nearly impossible to arrange late entry into a university. The severe discipline imposed in many private schools resulted in expulsion of some very able students. Once out of a particular school, it was virtually impossible to enter another because of differing instruction and regulations and because of an unwillingness to accept a person who had caused a discipline problem. This, in turn, made it impossible to follow any of the prescribed channels for university entrance, resulting in barring some talented people from higher education.

All of the above contributed to the need to redesign the educational system in order to standardize the opportunities available to all Quebec school children.

Summary of the Parent Report

Up until this time this democratic ideal had not been perceived as desirable. Quebeckers, for the most part, had accepted the traditional, elitist system. The

new philosophy, however, as stated in Volume One of the Parent Report, declares that the new educational system must be based on the concepts of democracy, participation, and humanism. This philosophy will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Volume One of the Parent Report also sets forth the goals of the educational system: There must be equality of opportunity to learn, accessibility of advanced education to all, and adequate preparation for each individual for life in modern society.[1]

The commission decided that Quebec needed to centralize its educational system in order to achieve its goals. The report explained that three phases were needed: developing a plan, the study of proposed legislation, and the carrying out of the new policy. For these three phases, there should be collaboration between a consultative council, the Cabinet and Legislature, and government officials. The commission recommended the appointment of a Minister of Education to be a Cabinet Minister, sit in the Legislature, direct the Ministry of Education, and consult the Council.[2] This Council, to be named the Superior Council of Education, is needed

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[1]Quebec, Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Quebec, vol. 1 (Quebec: The Quebec Official Publishers, 1963), p. 75.

[2]Ibid., p. 83.

to ensure broader representation and provide democratic participation in planning.[1] The commission further spelled out the organization and functions of the Ministry of Education and the Superior Council of Education to conclude Volume One.

In October of 1963, Volumes Two and Three, the largest volumes of the Parent Report, were submitted. They contain the bases for the reorganization of elementary and secondary education. Volume Two deals with the structure and levels; Volume Three treats programs of study and educational services.

Volume Two is divided into two sections: The Reform of Education and The Levels of Education. The first section contains a discussion of the new humanism as it relates to the aims of education. It also provides a rationale for the proposed structure and the length of time devoted to each segment of this new structure. The second section discusses in detail each stage of the educational ladder from pre-school through Continuing Education.

The Parent Commission recommended developing pre-school education, first for five-year-olds and later for four-year-olds. Elementary school should be six years in length, divided into two three-year cycles with a remedial year provided at the end of the first cycle

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[1]Ibid., p. 87.

for those who need it. During the first cycle the student learns the basics: reading, writing, arithmetic, and civil, moral, and religious training. The second cycle is for the purpose of learning methods of individual and team work as well as a systematic exploration of the environment.[1]

Secondary education should be five years in length, divided into a two-year cycle and a three-year cycle. The first cycle is for general education; the second is for the beginning of specialization.[2]

A separate level of education was recommended for pre-university and vocational education. Students preparing for university would take two years of studies while those undertaking training in a specialized vocation would elect three years of course work.[3]

Higher education was defined as all studies taken after the thirteenth year diploma. Three years of university work is required for the first degree. Teacher training would now be a part of higher education.[4]

Volume Two concludes with guidelines and recommendations for a Continuing Education Program and the structures for the education of exceptional children.

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[1]Ibid., Vol. Two, pp. 362-63.

[2]Ibid., p. 365.

[3]Ibid., pp. 368-69.

[4]Ibid., pp. 371, 377.

In Volume Three the Parent Commission explained the basic assumptions underlying its organization of education. First and foremost, education was to be child-centered. Each child was to be encouraged to develop himself to the utmost of his capabilities. It was up to the teacher to provide appropriate experiences to accomplish this. Thus, teachers would have to learn to adapt to new methods and new curriculum.

The importance of effective communication was stressed in a chapter devoted to the proper teaching of the mother tongue, whether it be French or English, by well-trained specialists. Subsequent chapters defined and discussed each of the subject matter areas. A wealth of courses was to be provided in each area to provide for the individual needs and interests of the students. Whereas before students elected a total program (academic or general) depending on their goals, now they could choose any subject they wished but on a level commensurate with their abilities.

Other aspects included in this volume are curriculum and textbooks; support areas such as libraries, medical services, and psychological help; and construction of physical facilities.

The final volumes of the Parent Report were presented in March of 1966. Both volumes are concerned with administration of education. In Volume Four the

commission defined a general policy for education, reiterating some of the important philosophical considerations such as democratic participation and the right of all to be educated. Since all have a right to equal opportunity of education, the government must control the distribution of tax monies. This money must be distributed equally among the various levels of the educational ladder and also among the different geographical areas of the province. The gap must be closed between urban and rural areas. The burden of the taxpayer must be equalized throughout the province as well.

An important issue handled in this volume is that of confessionality and nonconfessionality. The commission stated that the school system must accept the religious diversity of the population and heed the desires of parents on the type of schools they wish their children to attend. Both confessional and nonconfessional schools have their place.

The commission recognized the problem of the two official languages and the cultural diversity that exists. It recommended close contact between French and English schools in order to encourage mutual enrichment.

Two chapters were devoted to the problem of local school administration. A rationale was presented for reducing the number of local school boards and creating

one single school board for each given area. This board would be responsible for all types of schools (French, English, Catholic, Protestant) in that area. This single school board would assess the tax rate as well as direct the schools. Local control would be realized by the creation of school committees made up of the parents of the students in each individual school.

The regional boards of a given economic region would form a Council of School Development to coordinate certain regional matters. The commission recommended that Montreal and Quebec be given special consideration in reforming the school administration due to the complexities that existed in these large metropolitan areas.

The remainder of Volume Four proposed new policies for improving Indian and Eskimo education and enumerated recommendations for private education in Quebec. Formerly, the Indian Affairs Branch of the federal government had controlled Indian education; but it had then decentralized to the point of giving control to the regional officers within each province. It took a further step in encouraging the integration of Indians into the public schools. The federal government encouraged transfer of the responsibility for Eskimo education to the provincial governments also. In Quebec the responsibility was given to the Bureau for New Quebec in the Department of Natural Resources since people in this

office were familiar with Eskimo problems. The Parent Commission recommended the continuance of these policies along with certain refinements to incorporate the new philosophy and objectives. The Commission further recommended that Indian parents be able to participate in the school committees of the public schools attended by their children and that school committees be established for Eskimo parents also.[1]

The major portion of Volume Five is concerned with a detailed study of the cost and financing of the whole educational system. An attempt is made to forecast the increase in expenditures to implement the reforms. The revision of the tax system is outlined. A chapter is devoted to pre-university, technical, and university education since this level was expected to increase dramatically.

The participants in education have their turn for attention in this volume, also. The commission develops the concept of teaching as a profession and notes the rights and responsibilities of teachers. Parents are recognized as having a role and function in the system. The commission saw them as partners with the school in educating children. The students were to have responsibilities also.

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[1]Ibid., Vol. Four, pp. 117-32.

Almost all of the fifty-four chapters of the report end with conclusions and recommendations for each topic discussed.

Many of the changes that were recommended in the Parent Report were actually implemented. In order to understand why this was done, it is essential to be familiar with the philosophical bases for the reforms as set forth in the Parent Report.

Changes in Philosophy

The three most important concepts are democracy, participation, and humanism. These represent a total change in thinking from the French-Canadian tradition.

Previously the French-Canadians thought it necessary only to educate an elite. Top students were encouraged to attend the classical "collèges" where they underwent a program of intellectual, moral, and cultural development. Later they entered university where they were urged to become doctors, lawyers, or priests. Less able students went from elementary school to certain trade or commercial schools or dropped out to work on the farms or in the factories. In many rural areas secondary education was not even offered.

The English, who represented about 13 percent of the population of the province at the time, had their own educational views and favored a shorter ladder to university (eleven grades). Public high schools were

available to most students and were oriented toward the pre-university student. The English were interested in careers in science, engineering, and business as well as medicine and law.

The Commission noted that Quebec in recent years had all the ingredients common to the world-wide crisis in education. There was a large increase in the number of people desiring not only some schooling but also more years of schooling. Life in the province had changed. It was no longer that of an agricultural or pre-industrial society. It had become an industrial, technological culture with all the resulting problems. Many people had moved from rural to urban areas seeking increased opportunity for more gainful employment and better living conditions.[1] People's attitudes had been greatly influenced as the result of exposure to world events and the mass communication media.[2]

The Parent Report states that the world has become divided into two groups--those which have democratic institutions and those which have not. Democracies have spent time and money overthrowing dictatorships. Countries have had to decide which of the above two power groups they wish to join.[3] Canada has had a history of

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[1]Vol. One, p. 57.

[2]Ibid., p. 66.

[3]Ibid., p. 69.

democratic institutions, particularly in the English sector. Therefore, Quebec has had to attempt to understand what the democratic spirit really means. The democratic spirit requires active participation on the part of all citizens at whatever level is suitable. All should have enough education to formulate an idea of the common good and how they may contribute to it. They need to be aware of the rights of others. Each person needs to develop his own capabilities so that the democracy may have the benefit of many skills and ideas.

Therefore, the Parent Report contains the following statement of goals for the educational system: "In modern societies the educational system has a threefold goal: to afford everyone the opportunity to learn; to make available to each the type of education best suited to his aptitudes and interests; to prepare the individual for life in society."[1]

In order to provide equality of opportunity, Quebec schools must admit every child, "regardless of religious belief, racial origin, cultural background, social position, age, sex, physical or mental health."[2] In addition, comparable educational opportunities must be offered regardless of geographic location. Higher education, formerly for a minority, must be provided for all who want it. Each child must have a chance to

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[1]Ibid., p. 75.

[2]Ibid.

receive adequate training or preparation for the occupation of his choice as well as a chance to develop interests for leisure time activities.

Along with a renewed spirit of democracy, there is a new humanism to be infused into education in Quebec. Before, when secondary and higher education were only provided for a minority, students received the same humanistic instruction, designed, "to cast in a single intellectual and moral mould those destined to be the nation's upper class."[1] Now the mass media are disseminating a wide variety of material to all. All people have some knowledge of science, technology, and literature. The schools must consider this and provide a broader general culture. There must be a balance between general knowledge and training for a specific career. The new humanism must prepare the child for life in contemporary society.

Continuing with the discussion of the philosophy found in the Parent Report, the Commission noted that education in Quebec must turn from the fixed programs of the past toward a child-centered education. Efforts must be made to develop the initiative and curiosity of each individual child. This should result in strengthening important personal characteristics as well as creating diversity of individuals.

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[1]Ibid., Vol. Two, p. 5.

Changes in Structure

Having dealt with the new philosophy, the Commission looked at the modifications that had to be made in the structure of the school system to accommodate the new philosophy and goals. The first important problem was the dispersal of control under the old system. As previously mentioned, there was the Public Education Council with its separate Protestant and Catholic Committees, the Superintendent of Education, the private schools, the classical colleges, and the variety of specialized schools all under separate management. If equality of opportunity were to be established, it would be necessary to consolidate. The Parent Report states,

> (1) We recommend the appointment of a Minister of Education, whose function shall be to promote and coordinate educational services at all levels, including the private and public sectors.
> (2) We recommend the creation of a Superior Council of Education whose function shall be to advise the Minister.
> (3) We recommend that the Superior Council of Education act as a unified body.[1]

In March, 1964, a law was passed which provided for a Ministry of Education, a Superior Council of Education, and Protestant and Catholic Committees to oversee moral and religious matters.

The Ministry of Education, headed by the Minister of Education, is to coordinate the entire system of

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[1]Ibid., Vol. One, p. 88.

education throughout the province. The State is the dominant authority. However, school commissions may be Catholic (usually French-speaking but may include some English-speaking) or Protestant (usually English-speaking). Jewish children attend Protestant schools.

The Ministry regulates both public and private schools; it is not always easy to distinguish between them. Public schools are totally financed by public funds but may have a strong Catholic atmosphere. Private schools are 80 percent subsidized by the government but are controlled by a private authority. Most elementary and secondary schools are public; many post-secondary and higher schools are private. Teachers (lay or religious) may apply for a vacant post in either a public or private school. Private schools as well as public are organized along the Ministry guidelines since they are so heavily subsidized. Differences between the schools are largely cultural. French-Catholic schools reflect the French-Catholic value system. English-Protestant schools tend to have a secular-scientific emphasis.

The jurisdiction of the Ministry encompasses curriculum, examinations, teacher qualifications, issuing of diplomas and teacher certifications, and school services. The Ministry has a large role in planning. It defines general objectives as well as specific ones for

each level. It allocates resources according to priorities it has established. The Ministry has eight branches to carry out its responsibilities.

The Superior Council of Education is an independent body which does its own studies on educational policies and problems. It may be consulted by the Ministry on any educational question, but it must be consulted on the following:

a) the classification and nomenclature of schools and other educational institutions, and of the diplomas conferred by them;
b) subject to the powers contemplated in section 22, the curricula, the examinations, the diplomas, the teaching certificates and the qualifications of the teaching personnel, for all subjects, except subjects leading to a university degree and private education not leading to a diploma conferred under the authority of the Minister;
c) the coordination of education in all grades;
d) the standards for territorial division and the equipment of the educational establishments administered or subsidized by the province.[1]

The Council appoints a Catholic and a Protestant Committee. The Council must consult these committees on the following:

--classification of educational institutions by faith;
--regulations concerning Christian education and religious and moral instruction;

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[1]Superior Council of Education Act, March 19, 1964, Section 28, quoted in Quebec, Superior Council of Education, Participation in Educational Planning, Annual Report 1964/1965 (Quebec: Queen's Printer, 1966), p. 147.

--approval of curricula, textbooks and teaching aids from religious and moral standpoints;
--approval of courses in the Catholic or Protestant religion.[1]

The Council also has five advisory commissions to assist it in formulating its recommendations.

The Ministry of Education and the Superior Council of Education have jurisdiction over all of the steps in the educational ladder. This must include free public education for all children from kindergarten or grade one through the CEGEP (grade 12 or 13). This represented a compromise between the original two systems; it shortened the time for the French, it added extra time for the English to enable their students to be better prepared for university.

According to the regulations, kindergartens were to be set up wherever the number of children warranted it. Elementary schools should have a six-year program divided into two three-year cycles. Elementary education should be child-centered rather than program-centered. Teachers should be allowed more freedom and initiative in planning experiences for their students. Enrichment should be provided for gifted children.

After the six-year elementary program the children move on into the five-year secondary program. The former

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[1]Quebec, Review of Educational Policies in Canada (Government of Quebec: Ministry of Education, Planning Branch, March, 1975), p. 52.

separate academic, general, and vocational programs were set aside in favor of an array of subjects which all students are allowed to choose from. Each subject has various levels designed to appeal to the individual abilities of students. A wide variety of courses is offered to provide each student with as many options as possible. This has resulted in the "école polyvalente," similar to the comprehensive high school in the United States.

The Parent Report recommended that each secondary school house 1,000-1,200 students. Unfortunately this was not followed. Many have from 2,000-5,000 students; this causes many of the problems that people are attaching to the fact of the polyvalent school.

The Parent Report recommended "titulaires" (advisors) for the students who are eleven to fourteen to ease their transition into adolescence and into high school. This has not been put into practice uniformly.

It was hoped that the polyvalent school would cause all students to develop similar cultural, societal outlooks and eliminate the class distinctions that had been so prevalent in the old system. Quebeckers said that this has not been achieved.

There is a general uneasiness which permeates teachers and students alike at the secondary level. Students feel isolated due to the physical size of the

buildings and the large number of students. Motivation is low. Since there are no highly structured programs, students have no vision of where they are going. Requirements have been lowered. Mediocrity is encouraged. Grouping by levels lowers incentive. Long bus trips (some students are away for twelve hours) leave students too fatigued at the end of the day to do homework. End of year programs have been eliminated. The teachers have so much freedom that now the quality of course content and instructional methods are directly related to the competency of the teacher. However, the quality of the teaching staff has improved greatly due to the revamping of teacher training programs as well as the opportunities provided for retraining of less qualified teachers.

Unfortunately, other factors are at work here. Since teachers have seven or eight classes now, they feel responsible only for their subject matter. They no longer pay much attention to character building or the formation of the whole student.

Part of the uneasiness in the schools is due to the bitter contract struggle between the teachers and the government. All the laws governing education (and therefore, teachers) are contained in a book entitled Receuil de Lois sur l'Education (Collection of Laws on Education). About 90 percent of the old laws are still there; each time that a new law was enacted, it was

added to the collection along with a statement which annulled the old law. Article 545 of this book is the Code de Travail (Labor Code). This law, which governs all workers, has been applied to teachers. This has resulted in a lessening of the social status of teachers, for in the eyes of parents they have become workers. Formerly, parents looked upon them as professionals. Since teachers now receive their salary indirectly from the government, they have the same right to strike as all government workers.

Teachers (including those with religious affiliations) first formed a union in 1955 on the advice and urging of Bishop Léger. They began a fight for higher salaries, a pension system, and improved working conditions. In 1967 teachers held their first strike over money and working conditions. The Legislature passed a law sending them back to work and prohibiting a strike for four years. According to a respondent, parents did not understand or support the teachers. They had the attitude that people were teachers because they couldn't do anything else. In 1971 teachers tried to make parents aware of the whole situation by the use of a huge media campaign. Teachers felt that this did not help. Between June of 1975 and the summer of 1976 there were no negotiations with the government even though the teachers had presented their demands. As a result there were

problems all during the school year which interfered greatly with the education of the children.

Because of their unhappiness, teachers engaged in a number of disruptive practices. Since they had again been forbidden to strike, they staged a series of one-day walkouts in one school at a time when all teachers took sick leave on the same day. At other times students would arrive, attend classes as usual, change classrooms as usual, and discover that the teachers had disappeared. The administration would have to send the students home. No one knew at what school or on what day this would happen. Students stopped doing homework because they were never sure that their classes would meet as scheduled. Teachers refused to begin any new programs such as an open classroom pilot program that had been planned for a school in Ste-Foy. Teachers refused to help in after-school activities or do anything other than teach their regular classes. On certain days it was decided that female teachers would not speak to the principal. This kind of harassment made it a difficult year for all concerned and contributed greatly to the unpleasant atmosphere in the schools, especially at the secondary level where there have been so many problems due to the reforms.

According to the principal of a polyvalent school in the province of Quebec, the new high school system is

a success for those students who can accept responsibility. Unfortunately, he said, about 15 percent cannot. Another administrator thinks that students need the identity which comes from belonging to a group and taking courses together. In Catholic schools some help is provided by an "animateur." This is a person who has been trained as a priest but who is hired by the school board to work in the schools. He organizes groups to get acquainted and to participate in activities together on school days and occasional weekends. When possible, he provides a religious orientation to the activity. The animator also provides counseling and may serve as an intermediary between the administration and a student involved in a discipline problem.

Respondents in Quebec stated that there is a lack of discipline in public schools. This, along with the lack of confidence in the program and the recent unpleasantness with the teachers, has resulted in a number of transfers to private schools. Since private schools are 80 percent government subsidized, fees are low; most families can afford to send at least one child. Private schools have a calmer atmosphere since they may be selective in their student body; students who do not conform to their standards are expelled. Private School teachers have not participated in the union-government negotiations nor in the disruptive behavior; however,

they do reap all the same benefits when granted. These factors give private schools an unfair advantage and help to undermine the position of the public schools.

On the post-secondary level of the new educational structure in Quebec are the Cegeps or Collèges d'Enseignement Général et Professionel. At this level a student completes his general education in a two-year pre-university program or in a three-year terminal advanced technical program. At this level also, one goal is to promote integration of students with various backgrounds; this goal is not being achieved. Perhaps this is because there are "programs" rather than courses. If a student stays within a suggested program, it is easier to schedule the necessary classes. In addition, social activities revolve around the programs. Physical education is almost the only class where students from various programs mix.

The director of a Cegep said that a major reason for not implementing all the proposals of the Parent Report was money. The government did not realize how much costly equipment was necessary to set up each new technical program. Two good examples of this are the program for chefs, which requires expensive kitchen equipment, and the program for auto mechanics, which necessitates garage space and costly tools.

Another problem can be illustrated by the programs in the health professions. These programs are popular, but student enrollment is limited by the number of trainees a hospital is willing or able to accept. The Nurses Association puts pressure on to limit enrollment, also. It wants to maintain job security for those already in the profession. The Health Care Programs require costly equipment also. It is much less expensive to set up a pre-university program as no special facilities or equipment is needed.

The Parent Report recommended that a Cegep have at least 1,500 students. It did not set a maximum. Therefore, many are large. In 1975 there were thirty-seven Cegeps with a total enrollment of about 100,000. In addition, there were twenty-three private institutions with a total of about 10,000 students.[1]

The CEGEP provides accessibility to higher education for many students who formerly would not have had that opportunity. Thus it helps to carry out the philosophy of the democratization of the school system as stated in the Parent Report. As part of the democratic ideal, the CEGEP, with its dual purpose of technical-vocational and pre-university education, was also

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[1]Louis-Philippe Audet, et al., Le Rapport Parent, Dix Ans Après (Montreal: Les Editions Bellarmin, 1975), p. 123.

expected to facilitate the fraternization of students from all social and economic levels to enable students to better understand each other and to contribute to the formation of a general culture. This has not happened.

There are several factors which have contributed to the failure of that goal. Students tend to group together with others whom they already know because this gives them a certain identity. In addition, the structuring of the various programs tends to separate the pre-university student from the technical student as well as separating technical students preparing for certain fields from technical students in other fields. There are certain general courses required for all students. However, when students register, they find it is easier to register for a complete schedule of courses set up for their particular program. If a student attempts to select his courses separately, he finds it more difficult to arrange a schedule which includes all the necessary classes. Usually the student settles for a prearranged schedule, often choosing the same one as his friends. Therefore, he does not come into contact with students in other programs.

The CEGEP has improved the job qualifications of technical workers. It was expected to increase the number of skilled workers entering technical occupations. Contrary to expectations, many students who formerly

would have ended up in these vocations have opted for the pre-university program now that it is available to them.

Maurice Lebel, in a study of the success and failure of the CEGEP, suggested that the choice of courses at this level is so vast that it seems like a supermarket.[1] Such a proliferation of choices inevitably raises the question of whether or not this results in the weakening of the instructional program or of student development.

According to the source material, another problem area in the CEGEP is the fact that the average age of the teachers is about thirty. The students at this level are from seventeen to twenty. With so many teachers still in their twenties and therefore so close to the age of the students, a spirit of camaraderie prevails. These new teachers have been trained with the idea of participation and want to give students more voice. As a result, they listen too much. All this results in an undisciplined atmosphere and may not result in a maximum amount of learning.[2] This, along with other problems mentioned, contributes to what one observer has called a general untidyness throughout.[3]

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[1]Ibid., p. 125.

[2]Ibid., p. 127.

[3]Ibid., p. 135.

On the positive side, the CEGEP seeks to fulfill a needed role in providing evening schools for Adult Education programs. It seeks to create a new type of person, less materialistic, more interested in contributing to the common good of society, seeking a philosophy of life, a value system, but less interested in hard work.[1]

As a result of the changes in the lower levels of the educational ladder, the universities have had to adjust to the students they are now admitting. Obviously, it has affected the curriculum. It has also caused the existing universities to burst at the seams. Laval University has moved from its old downtown Quebec facility to a new modern campus in suburban Ste-Foy. A new institution, the University of Quebec, was created with five branches scattered across the province.

University fees were frozen at the level of the mid-sixties to make them accessible to more students. Universities have been receiving government help to make up the difference. Recently a new commission was formed to investigate university financing and to come up with a solution to the problem of providing reasonably priced university education.

Perhaps a few words are needed about the financing of other levels of the school system. The government

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[1]Ibid., pp. 131-32.

provides about half the money needed to run the schools. It tries to apportion it in such a way as to equalize the school districts. Teacher salaries are negotiated with the government on a province-wide basis.

In general, it may be said that the recommendations of the Parent Report have been followed closely. There is one notable exception. The Parent Report recommended that the confessionality of school boards be dropped. School boards were to be organized territorially and govern whatever schools happened to be in their area. This was not accepted by the people in the province. The element of confessionality has been retrained. Eventually, as people become less bound by tradition and more alienated from the Church, this will probably change.

In summary, these reforms have benefited Quebec by making education accessible to all, contributing to the general development of the individual, improving the quality of teachers, bringing the world inside the school, allowing more choice, providing more professional options. There are important improvements which are still to be made.

The above are the most important changes in the educational system of Quebec with a few comments on their effectiveness. It is in no way complete as each part could be the subject of a detailed study. However,

on the basis of information read and material gathered from informants, it seemed that those generalizations could be made. Hopefully, it will provide some background as we move into a study of one aspect of the democratization of the school system.

CHAPTER IV

MANDATE FOR PARENT PARTICIPATION

In order to make the schools more democratic, it was thought necessary to have a broader base of participation. Therefore, the leaders began to think about involving the parents in the school system. Historically, this parent involvement had been a part of the English tradition but not a part of the French. The English have had a very active Home and School Association for about fifty years. The French, on the other hand, had been taught by the Church that their duty lay in sending their children to school every day. Once the children arrived at school, the school authorities took over and parental involvement ended. In the late 1960s while the reforms were being implemented, there was some parent interest in Quebec and Montreal. In these two cities, committees of parents were formed about five years before they were mandated in 1972.

The Recommendation of the Parent Report

The mandate for school committees and parent committees came about as a result of the Parent Report.

The commissioners stated that the parents must assume some of the responsibility for training the child. They said that parents have an important role in providing religious, moral, and linguistic training. They should take an active interest in the child's schoolwork and spend time with the child engaging in activities designed to enlarge his horizons. Another need is more cooperation between parents and teachers. Parents must become acquainted with the educational problem as a whole in order to effectuate the success of the reforms. They must become less individualistic and more oriented to the needs of society. When they become involved as citizens as well as parents, this will result in the school administration becoming more democratic.[1]

Specific recommendations regarding parents are found in Volume 4 of the Parent Report.

(30) We recommend that it be explicitly understood that every public body to which the state delegates some responsibility in school administration has as its primary aim to provide for all pupils, without distinction, education of good quality promoting the most complete personal fulfilment of each individual, always subject to a proper respect for religious pluralism and linguistic and cultural dualism.

(31) We recommend that, in order to effect this, the present system of local and regional school commissions be replaced by a unified, three-fold administrative structure--the school committee, the regional commission and the Council of School Development.

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[1] The Parent Report, Vol. 5, pp. 219-26.

(32) We recommend that a school committee be set up for each elementary or secondary public school.
(33) We recommend that each school committee consist of five members, elected annually by the parents of the pupils and by the students enrolled in courses for adults, and that, in addition to all those having the right to vote, any person of full age resident in the region shall be eligible for membership on it.
(34) We recommend that the principal and a representative of the teaching staff be associated with the school committee as consultants.
(35) We recommend that the following functions be vested in the school committee by law:
--to watch over the quality of education given in the school and the welfare of pupils and teachers;
--to make certain that the pupils receive religious or moral instruction corresponding to their parents' wishes;
--to accept or reject any regulation proposed by the school authorities or by the directorates of Roman Catholic, Protestant or non-confessional education, as the case may be, affecting the specific applications of confessionality or non-confessionality in the school;
--to stimulate new projects and cooperate in any undertakings connected with the organization of extra-curricular recreation, and, in a general way to support anything which may promote popular culture;
--to maintain the interest and cooperation of parents and of the community in anything which may serve to improve educational services;
--to express opinions on the selection of teachers, on modifications in the curriculum and on the choice of textbooks and teaching material;
--to present to the regional commission any recommendations concerning financial or administrative problems.[1]

These recommendations were not among the first to be implemented. First, the Ministry of Education was set up and the structural reforms effected. In November of 1966, the Ministry set up a Service des

[1]Ibid., Vol. 4, pp. 171-72.

Parents to assure parent participation in school life. A man in the Ministry who had formerly been in charge of that program explained that at that time, workshops for parents were held in various places around the province of Quebec. This was an attempt to provide information for the parents concerning the educational system and to interest parents in becoming a part of the educational process. In general, this was not well accepted. In some areas the workshops had much impact but in most there was very little. Parents were not used to being involved with the school. This Service des Parents continued until the present school committees were begun in 1972.

Bill 27

After many of the reforms were in progress and things began to settle down, people realized how centralized the control of the schools was. It was necessary for the Ministry to make the people feel that they had a voice in the process. At this point, Bill 27 was introduced in the Legislature.

Bill 27 had two parts. The first was concerned with the reorganization of school boards with the exception of those on the Island of Montreal. This part of the bill was rather controversial since it was reducing the number of school boards from more than 800

to fewer than 200. The bill did retain the confessional division of Catholic and Protestant.

It is the second section of this bill which interests us for it became the law which mandated the parents' committees and school committees.

After the bill was introduced, the Legislature invited a number of interested groups to testify in behalf of or against the proposed legislation. This was a lengthy session during which legislators were allowed to question the participants, give comments, and attack each other verbally. Much of the debate concerned the restructuring of the school boards. Some revolved around the section on parents' committees and school committees.

The principal comments were on the following questions: Was the law in line with the Parent Report? Do parents really want a way to have a greater say? What should be the role of parents in the school? Will it bring local control to education? How will the parents participate when the new school districts will be forty to sixty miles wide? Should there be more than one teacher on the committee? Should the teacher have the right to vote? Should students (especially on the secondary level) be on the committees? Should parents be involved in establishing criteria to select principals, teachers, instructional materials? How

specific should this law be in outlining the function of the committees? How much authority should the school committee have?

Bill 27 passed on July 10, 1971. Articles 66-70 of the Education Act are the part of the legislation which mandates the parents' committees and school committees. The text follows.

66. Before the 15th of October each year, the principal or the person responsible for each school administered by a school board or a regional board shall call a general meeting of the parents of the children who attend such school to establish therein a school committee before such date.
The principal or the person responsible for the school and one representative designated by the teachers of the school shall be members of the school committee but shall not be entitled to vote thereon or be appointed chairman thereof.
The school commissioners or trustees of the school board or of the regional board which administers such school cannot, however, be members of such school committee.

67. Each school committee has as its duties:
a) to stimulate by appropriate means participation by parents and the community generally in the improvement of educational services in the school.
b) to study measures likely to promote more personal educational services in the school.
c) to make to [sic] the administrators of the school any recommendation to ensure the best possible operation of the school.

68. A parents' committee is established for each school board or regional board; it shall consist of the chairman of each school committee.
Every parents' committee shall have the following functions:
a) to ensure such cooperation as is necessary for the proper operation of school committees;

b) to express to the school board such needs as are identified by the school committees and direct recommendations of a general scope to it;
c) to promote participation by parents in all activities of the school board, and to designate especially for such purpose, from among them, if need be, the members required for the various committees established by the school board;
d) to recommend to the school board any measure that may improve the administration and management of the schools.

69. The composition of the school committees as well as the means of setting them up, their duties, and their financing and of the parents' committees are determined by regulation of the lieutenant governor.

70. In articles 66 to 69, the word "parent" designates the father, the mother, or failing them the guardian of a child enrolled in a school on the preceeding 30th of September, and the word "school" means one or more groups of children and teachers under the authority of a principal or of a responsible person if there is no principal.[1]

In comparing Bill 27 with the Parent Report, we find that the law does not specify the number of persons a school committee should have. The report suggested five members. The report also suggested certain specific functions of the committees. The law suggested three general functions. The law set up parents' committees as well as school committees. The former were not mentioned in the report.

Document VI B

Following the passage of the law, the Ministry of Education appointed a committee, Mission 27, under

[1]Quebec, Education Act as amended by Bill 27 (1971) cited in Quebec, Ministry of Education, School Committees and Parents' Committees, Document VIB.

the leadership of Kathleen Francoeur-Hendriks, Director of Elementary and Secondary Education. It was the work of the committee to draw up appropriate regulations for setting up the school committees and parent committees.

These initial regulations, dated February 2, 1972, were contained in Document VI A, "School Committees and Parent Committees." Interested organizations studied this document and submitted their suggestions and criticisms. The project was revised and then submitted to the Superior Council of Education. This resulted in further adjustment. The finished product, Document VI B, dated September 15, 1972, is the guide now used by each school board to implement the operation of the school committees and parents' committees.

The introduction to this document refers to remarks made by Mr. Guy Saint-Pierre, the Minister of Education in 1970, on the occasion of the opening of that school year. He suggested that having made certain changes in the school system "in size and volume, the school system should now be transformed in depth." Later the introduction continues,

> This preoccupation with the humanization of the school certainly agrees with the profound aspirations of the Quebec population today. This humanization objective may be difficult to attain if the community and particularly the parents are not called upon to co-operate, or if they fail to respond to the call for an improvement of school life.
>
> Bill 27 (1971), in a sense, is the hinge upon which the objectives of the two decades are linked

> to one another. It helps bring to completion the restructuring of the school and it aims at bringing closer together, in a quite novel fashion, the school structures and the community by institutionalizing the presence of parents at the level of each school and of each school board.[1]

Document VI B is divided into three parts: Bill 27 (1971) and Parent Participation in School Life, Guide for School Committees and Parents' Committees, and Regulations for School Committees and Parents' Committees.

The first section makes parents aware that there are two ways to participate in school life. They may be school board members or members of school committees and parents' committees. They may not be both. This section reminds parents of the high level of responsibility demanded by participation on the school board as that is the policy and decision-making level. Parents seeking election to the school committee should have a sincere desire to become acquainted with what happens at their own school in order to interpret it to the community and to seek to improve the quality of school life.

Parents may also participate by recommending candidates for election to the school commission, voting for school commissioners, attending general meetings to elect school committee members, or by participating in various school committee activities.

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[1]Quebec, Ministry of Education, School Committees and Parents' Committees, Document VIB, p. 3.

It is important to emphasize the fact that part II is entitled a "guide" for school committees and parents' committees. Later on it will be seen that some school committees caused problems for themselves because they saw this document as "the law." It is not worded that way.

This section puts forth a tentative definition of the two kinds of committees. It says:

> School committees and parents' committees must be defined as organizations cooperating with school administrators and school boards toward the improvement of school life. They are complementary structures which, without encroaching upon the duties and authority of school commissioners and school administrators, will allow these persons to better fulfill their duties. They are equally the structures of participation where leadership is practiced by parents.
>
> School committees and parents' committees will enable parents to participate in greater numbers, and in their own way, in the improvement of school life:
>
> --by better understanding the internal operation of the school system;
> --by fostering renewed interest;
> --by helping, without replacing, those who are already entrusted with school administration;
> --as parents, by directing the administration's attention to questions of concern in a given segment of the population;
> --by clarifying their proposals to the administration.
>
> Based on this spirit of co-operation, school committees and parents' committees constitute an official channel of communication between parents and school administrators or school boards. Such co-operation points up the importance and advisory nature of school and parents' committees.[1]

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[1]Quebec, School Committees and Parents' Committees, Document Number VI B (Government of Quebec, September 15, 1972), p. 10.

Two ideas from this section are stressed in the guide. The concept of cooperation is most important. Parents and school administrators are to be working together to create the best atmosphere for students to grow as a result of their schooling. This is an opportunity for administrators to work with parents to become aware of the concerns parents have for their children. It is an opportunity for parents to become aware of the role of the school in the socialization of their children.

The other key idea in this section of the document is that of the advisory role of the school committees and parents' committees. This implies that parents have every right to become informed and to present their views. Administrators have the responsibility to consult with the parents and to listen seriously to their opinions. However, the word "advisory" implies that the intent is for school administrators to retain the ultimate authority. Both of the above ideas will be discussed further in other chapters.

This second section of Document VI B attempts to define the role of the school committees and parents' committees. Based on Section 67 of the Education Act, it lists the duties of school committees as the following:

> The first duty the Education Act stipulates for school committees is to see that parents and the population in general are informed on the school's objectives and the means it has of attaining same;

> to interest parents and the community in general; to gather parents' suggestions so that the school may continue improving its services. . . .
>
> The second duty focuses the school committee's concern on the pupil and on the search for means and action likely to make school more interesting, friendly, and humane. . . .
>
> The third duty of the school committee is but an extension of the first two. As a result of information supplied by parents (first duty) and its concern (second duty), the school committee is in a position to make recommendations likely to improve the school's operation.[1]

The document continues with the duties of parents' committees. These duties reflect those of the school committees. After quoting Section 68 of the Education Act, which enumerates the functions of the parents' committee, the document says,

> Thus, parents' committees exist to assist school committees reach their objectives; to see that school committee recommendations that call for a decision within the school board's powers or are important enough to be brought to the school board's attention, are submitted to the board. On the other hand, the parents' committee may according to opinions expressed and the activities of the school committee formulate recommendations that may improve the administration and management of schools. The committee must report to the school board. The parents' committee is the usual means of communication between the school board and the school committees.[2]

Thus we see how the school committee operates on the level of the individual school and how the parents' committee serves in an advisory capacity to the school board.

This guide suggests that in order to operate within the definition and delineation of duties, the role

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[1] Ibid., p. 11.

[2] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

of the committees will be confined to three topics. The first is that of information. Parents need to become familiar with the complexities of the school system to reduce or eliminate their anxieties and frustrations. This leads to community interest and involvement. Once parents become familiar with the school system, they may become a communication link with others in the community with a view to keeping them informed and also generating their interest and involvement. The third topic is that of advisor. After exercising the above two functions, these committees should be ready to provide advice and recommendations to school administrators.[1]

Next in this second section of Document VI B is an outline of the decision-making procedure. Subjects to be decided upon may be initiated by either an administrator or the school committee. Either way, the school committee should have an opportunity to provide input. The guide is quite clear in stating that the decision itself is to be made by the administrator or by the school board. Parents may offer comments while the decision is in the process of being implemented. They may also participate in an evaluation of the project at a later stage.[2] This is a source of parent complaints; many would like to have decision-making power. This will be discussed further in a later chapter.

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[1]Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[2]Ibid., pp. 13-16.

Guidelines are established in this document regarding the scope of parental participation.

> The choice of subjects should be guided by, among others:
> the training and competency of the committee members,
> the urgency of the local problems,
> the need to establish contact with other educational bodies without causing unnecessary duplication,
> the availability and rapidity of necessary information to undertake studies,
> the possibility of improving unsatisfactory situations and expressing well informed recommendations to the school principal and/or the school board.[1]

According to the guide, certain themes are considered appropriate at the school committee level. These include opening the school to all, organizing field work and related activities, suggesting changes in school regulations, improving school bulletins and reports to parents, discussing new teaching methods.[2]

Following is a list of suggested problems considered appropriate for the consideration of parents' committees.

> Opening schools to all.
> Preparing general regulations for school boards and schools.
> Suggesting and assessing measures taken by the school board in order to personalize educational services available to students of the school board.
> Cooperation with other family and community bodies with a view to rational use of all available resources.
> Policy making for the use of the funds granted by the school board.
> Use of the building and facilities after school hours.
> Distribution of students in schools.

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[1] Ibid., p. 17.

[2] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

Regrouping of schools.
School construction and modernization program.
Organization of school transport.[1]

Next, this section of the document discusses rules to guide the relations between the committees and the schools. It is suggested that the type of atmosphere be established that will facilitate friendly, respectful communication between parents and administrators. This has been a trouble spot; not all administrators are receptive to the idea of parents becoming involved in "their" school.

In addition, it is suggested that parents be respectful of the professional expertise and duty of the teacher. Here is another trouble spot. Respondents stated that due to the nonprofessional conduct on the part of many public school teachers during the recent long negotiations with the government, parents have become unsympathetic, for the most part, toward the teachers. The parents have also lost respect for the teachers.

It is further suggested that each year, the school committee establish a list of concerns for consideration during that school year. This will provide for more efficient operation and allow concentration on only those activities which are most important.

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[1]Ibid., p. 19.

The guidelines acknowledge the fact that parent participation is in its infancy. They have tried to provide a framework that will facilitate the formation of these committees but which will allow room for individual initiative in each local situation.

> It should be borne in mind that this is a period for innovation and experimentation. The setting up of school committees and parents' committees creates a situation of research and training.[1]

Other rules are provided dealing with the operation of these committees. However, it does not seem necessary to list them here. The ones presented should provide the reader with an understanding of how these committees are expected to function. Others will be referred to later as necessary.

The third section of Document VI B is more technical and concerns itself with regulations. In addition, definitions are provided for the words "parent," "school," "institutional school," "school board," "school principal."

An important provision in this section is the one which sets the size of the school committee. According to Mission 27, it should have at least seven members but not more than twenty-five. Included in this number are the principal and one member of the teaching staff; neither may vote nor chair the committee.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 22.

[2] Ibid., p. 26.

The principal must call a general meeting of parents before October 15 for the purpose of electing the committee members. The teachers elect their representative before the date of the parents' meeting. Within fifteen days of that general meeting, the school committee meets to choose a president and any other necessary officers. The president becomes the representative to the parents' committee. Thereafter, the school committee meets once a month with the exception of July and August. The committee must call at least one more general assembly of parents between October 31 and May 31 of that school year.[1]

It is the school board which calls together the presidents of the school committees by October 31 to form the parents' committee and to elect officers. This committee must meet at least once every two months except for July and August.

Other rules are detailed in this third section regarding operation and financing of school committees and parents' committees but, again, it seems more useful to refer to them later as needed.

Press Reaction

As stated earlier, this document was published in final form in September, 1972. During the summer of

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[1]Ibid., pp. 27-28.

that year, the newspapers began to comment on the idea of parent participation in the schools. A headline in the Montreal Gazette on August 22 read, "By Bill 27 parent power now law." This article reported on the fact that under the law parents would be invited to a meeting to elect the members of the school committee. The major thrust of the article centered on the question, "But are parents ready to take advantage of this opportunity?" The article reviewed the history of the parent consultative committees that had been operating in Montreal since 1965. At the beginning there had been thirteen committees; in 1972 there were 350. These comments were made on the effectiveness of this program:

> Principals, school administrators, and board members have now, in most cases, reached the stage where they can work as partners with parents.
>
> The parents, to a certain extent, have also become more involved in the affairs of their school. They are realizing more and more that it is not sufficient merely to wash and feed their offspring, and let the school do the rest.
>
> If we speak from our experience at the M.C.S.C. with parent participation through our school consultative committees, we have to admit that those committees have depended on the degree of goodwill shown by school authorities and also the degree of parent involvement. It cannot be denied that in some cases principals may have put up a "good front" by allowing the establishment of a school committee, while at the same time actually limiting parent consultation and participation to minor issues.
>
> It must also be said, in all fairness, that parents took little interest in their school committees and were content to let the school "run the whole show."
>
> With the new school committees becoming compulsory under Bill 27, the education authorities have no

> alternative but to accept parent participation in school affairs. Now, will the educators simply apply the letter of the law, or will they catch the spirit of it?
>
> As for parents, will they take full advantage of the opportunity offered to them by the law to get truly involved in the education of their children?[1]

A similar article explaining the school committees appeared in Le Nouvelliste (Trois Rivieres) on September 23, 1972. The surrounding commentary expressed another viewpoint.

> Several are incredulous. How will it be possible to have 50,000 fathers and mothers participate in a field where the complexity is equalled only by the large size of the task to be accomplished? Is it utopian to believe that one day, there will be means sufficiently flexible to permit the first teachers of our children to become involved in their schooling? Anyway, this is the new challenge offered to the administrators of the school commissions. . . .
>
> That which disarmed our parents in the past and which is still a sizable handicap in 1972 is the feeling of powerlessness which they sense as soon as they enter this field of activity. They are not the only ones who wonder what their action will result in changing.[2]

The reporter cites one area where he sees an interesting dimension in parent participation. He says, "There is no doubt that the absence of information is at the root of many evils that affect the world of

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[1]The author of this newspaper article, Joseph Pellegrino, was adviser for relations with parents in the Montreal Catholic School Commission.

[2]Author's translation from the French.

education." Therefore he reasons that the idea of parents acquainting themselves with the school system will result in a better understanding of what educators are trying to do. Informed, supportive parents will facilitate the educational process.

This has been a sampling of how the press viewed the idea of parent participation in the schools.

It was now the beginning of the 1972 school year. That was the time for general meetings to be held in every school in the province before October 15 for the purpose of electing members of the first compulsory school committees.

CHAPTER V

THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF SCHOOL COMMITTEES AND PARENTS' COMMITTEES

As of January 1, 1977, school committees and parents' committees have been in existence for four and a half years. During that time these committees have made considerable progress in their development from their earliest beginnings. In some areas they have made more progress than in others. This may be partly explained by the fact that parent groups existed in some cities and towns, notably Quebec, Montreal, and Sherbrooke, for about five years before the government mandate. As a result, the committees made a better beginning there than in other locations where there was no history of parent involvement in the schools.

Several other factors have hindered the general development of these committees. These should be kept in mind while studying their evolution. Throughout Quebec, there has been no history of the school as part of community life, such as exists in the United States. From its earliest beginnings, education had been under the

jurisdiction of the Catholic Church. Quebeckers were reminded of their duty to send their children to school, but once there, the children were to be totally under the authority of the school. The school served to separate out an elite and send them on for further education, while instructing the others in the importance of the agricultural mission and other values of the Catholic Church.

Another inhibiting factor is the lack of a collective spirit among the Québecois. They were used to looking to the authority of their former French civil authority and the Catholic Church. After the English gained control, they turned even more to the church in the attempt to preserve their language and customs. They were not used to discussing issues or in forming opinions or in worrying about the common good.

Another factor is the lack of expertise on the part of many parents in Quebec. It must be remembered that, for the most part, only the elite received an education beyond elementary school. The successful evolution of the committees has a direct bearing on the number of competent people involved. In general, it is safe to say that, in Quebec, there is a larger concentration of trained people in urban areas than in rural areas. Thus, it is natural to see a better beginning for parent participation in urban areas. As a result of

all of these factors, the development of these committees has been uneven throughout the province. However, it can be seen that there has been an evolution in the performance of these committees since 1972.

The Structure of the Committees

The structure of the committees varies somewhat depending upon the size of the region. At the base of the pyramid is the School Committee. This is the committee of parents which must be elected in every school of the province before October 15 of each school year. This committee, which also includes one teacher and the principal, serves as an advisory body to the individual school.

Whoever is elected president of the school committee automatically becomes a member of the Parents' Committee. The Parents' Committee is composed of the president of each school committee, elementary and secondary, in the region. In some areas, realizing the burden this puts on the school committee president, the parents have chosen to elect a delegate to the Parents' Committee to serve in addition to or instead of the school committee president. This committee serves as a consultative body to the School Board.

In some areas such as Montreal, Quebec, and Sherbrooke, the large number of school committees results in a parents' committee that is too large to function

effectively. Therefore, a central executive committee is elected. The central committee serves as consultant to the school board. The parents' committee then becomes a link between the school committees and the central committee.

To give an idea of the number of parents involved, consider the city of Quebec. Each school committee has twelve to fifteen parents which totals 722 for the city. The fifty-five presidents form the Parents' Committee. From this group, twelve are elected to form the Executive Council.[1]

Recently a Provincial Federation of Parents' Committees has come into existence. Every parents' committee in the province is automatically a member. This organization is rather controversial and will be discussed later.

The Role of the Committee

The structure of the school committee has been well defined in Law 27 (1971) and in the Ministry's Document VI B. The role of the committee has not. Some people are disturbed by the vagueness of the law; others feel it is a good opportunity for people in each locality to work out the role to best meet the needs of the community.

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[1]Quebec, "Rapport Annuel du Comité de Parents de la C.E.C.Q.," 1975-1976, p. 18. (Mimeographed.)

The law and the Ministry guidelines suggest that the role of school committees and parents' committees is to become informed on the objectives of the school, to interest parents and the community in becoming involved with the school, and to make recommendations to improve the operation of the school. The emphasis seems to be one of friendly collaboration and cooperation among all the partners in the educational community. It is to provide a link between the home and the school in order to establish communication and to ultimately provide benefits for the students.

Members of the educational community as well as parents are split over the extent of the role of the committees. Some feel that it is strictly a service organization to engage in fund-raising, supervision of the lunchrooms, sending bulletins to parents, helping with field trips and classroom needs, serving coffee at meetings. Others feel that the committee should not perform these service functions but should become closely involved with all facets of the operation of the school such as instructional methods and materials, curriculum, and finances.

Many see that all of the above-mentioned activities are part of the role. They feel that providing service is a good way for a parent to begin involvement in the school. In this way, parents become informed

about the operation of the school and gradually grow into the larger role of collaboration on school policy. In many communities this has been the pattern, a real evolution. As long as the committees stay within the limits of friendly cooperation, they seem to be within the role the government envisioned for them. When they become pressure groups or call for decision-making power, they seem to be surpassing these limits. It seems clear that the role of these committees is to be advisory in nature. Parents who wish to have decisional power have the option of running for election to the school board.

It is important for parents and school administrators to understand the idea of collaboration as essential to the role of the school committee. Parents need to become involved; administrators need to invite the participation of parents. The degree of success in bringing the actual role close to the theoretical role depends in many areas on the good will of the principal and the competence of the parents. If the parents themselves have a limited vision of their role and/or the school principal and the teachers are not receptive to parent participation, then the scope of the role is severely limited.

At the other extreme there are those who feel that there should be joint management of the schools by parents, students and school authorities. A committee

charged with studying this topic at the Montreal Catholic School Commission published a report called Participatory Management. This report presents several models for co-management of the schools. The report is controversial and has received limited acceptance. The Central Parents' Committee of Montreal wants to begin experimentation in some schools with one or more of the proposed models.

In defining the role of school committees and parents' committees, it is necessary to distinguish them from the former most active parent organization in the province of Quebec, the Home and School Association, which has been active in the English school system for about fifty years. The Home and School Association is a provincial organization which speaks on a provincial level. Each local group must collect dues and send a payment to the provincial headquarters. In contrast, the school committee works on the local level and does not require dues.

In the schools which are under the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, the school committee works with principals and teachers on regular educational offerings, course content, teaching methods, busing, supervision of lunch periods and recess. The Home and School Organization offers after-school subjects such as music, French, scouts, fund-raising, and field trips. A spokesman for the Protestant School Board of Greater

Montreal, stated there does not seem to be a conflict between the two groups. He stated that any conflict is on a personal level. There are people who were active in Home and School, worked their way up to vice-president, but never became president. Some of these people left Home and School and became involved with a school committee. They are disgruntled over the way they feel they were treated by the Home and School Association and therefore, occasionally cause friction between the groups.

There has been a question in the minds of people as to whether or not parents have a real role to play or whether this is simply a facade set up by the Ministry of Education to make people feel they have a role, to create the illusion of local control.

Part of this feeling seems to come from the fact that when parents make recommendations to the Ministry, they do not see any action. Some school committees have written a number of letters which they feel were ignored. In September of 1976, an assistant under-secretary of Education sent out a letter to school boards acknowledging that the Ministry had received many requests from parents to modify Document VI B and amend Law 27. However, he stated that it would be better to become more acquainted with the benefits and problems of the school committees and parents' committees before making any modifications.

School committees had been in existence for at least five years in some areas before they were officially mandated by the government. The Ministry did not take into account the experience of these groups nor did it consult with them before the law went into effect. People feel that if the government honestly wanted effective parent participation, it would have done so.

The third factor which contributes to the feeling that the role of these committees is a facade is the extreme centralization of the school system. Often the principal or the school board is unable to consider parent recommendations because of some regulation under which the schools must operate. The Ministry has been promising for some time to move in the direction of decentralization, but this has not happened. The Central Parents' Committee in Montreal stated in its annual report for 1975-1976 that it has done all that it can do until this decentralization takes place. They stated that the role of the parents lies in adapting the school to its environment. It is not possible to do this unless the school administrators have sufficient autonomy.

The role of the committees in general has been outlined, but who are the members of the school committees and how do they facilitate this role? Each school committee is made up of from five to twenty-three parents,

the principal, and one teacher. The principal and the teacher may not hold office nor vote.

The principal has a key role in bringing the parents and the school together. He helps inform the parents on school policy and helps to set the objectives for the committee's work for the year. He becomes informed on the desires of the parents and serves as an agent from the community to the school board and vice versa. This, of course, is the ideal role. In practice, it does not always work out that way.

The teacher has a role in bringing the parents and teachers together. He/she helps inform parents about teaching methods, course content, classroom management. He/she communicates with the other teachers regarding parent/teacher concerns. Again, this is the ideal role.

Participation

In order for the school committee to play its role effectively, there has to be adequate participation. Since 1972 parents have been slow in accepting the idea of participation in the life of the school. They are now beginning to realize, some more than others, that they are the ones to have the right to have a voice in shaping the education of their children.

There is not much data available at the moment to indicate what percentage of eligible parents actually attend the fall meeting and how many parents actually

present themselves as candidates for election to the school committee. When asked this question, respondents supplied a variety of information and figures. One person mentioned a school where no parents appeared for the meeting. This was an inner city school for the Protestant School Board of Montreal. It was attended by English-speaking students who lived geographically distant from the school.

A school committee president in Ste-Foy (a suburb of Quebec) stated that about 47 percent of the parents came to the general meetings. A spokesman for the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal cited a few schools where about 50 percent of the parents attended. Some respondents considered it good attendance if 20 percent of the parents were there. Many reported attendance of about 10 percent.

Some respondents mentioned that the number of parents attending depended on the purpose of the meeting. If the meeting was held for the sole purpose of electing the school committee, attendance was low. If some additional attraction was offered, attendance was much higher. Examples given were the opportunity to meet with teachers, a performance of the school band, a well-known guest speaker, and the distribution of report cards. In Quebec City, this type of inducement had boosted attendance from 40 percent to 80 percent.

One respondent made the comment that the percentage of parent participation is probably no better or no worse than in any other group in other vital facets of our life today. Another respondent felt that it was unrealistic to expect the percentage of parent participation in the school to be any greater than in any other organization. With all the demands on one's time, a person cannot be involved in everything. He also observed that the people involved in the school tended to be those who were also active in church affairs, union activities, political meetings, and similar things. This limits the degree to which they are free to participate. It also shows that the people who are disinterested in the schools are often those who aren't interested in other activities either.

In Montreal the Catholic School Commission planned a concentrated publicity campaign in the late summer and early fall of 1976. There were messages in the newspapers, on the radio, and on television; posters were placed in stores; brochures were sent home. Even after all this, the attendance throughout the territory served by the Catholic School Commission at the fall general meetings was, on the average, about the same as the previous year.

Parents seem to fall into three main groups. There is one group of parents who have no interest in the school at all. They do not attend the meetings.

A second group encompasses those who are interested in the school primarily as it relates to their child. These people appear at meetings if it provides an opportunity to discuss an issue that is important to their child. These people may agree to serve on a school committee but limit their participation or attempt to limit the work of the committee to that which involves their own child. A third group of parents has advanced to a higher level. They are interested not only in their own child but in all children. They are interested in what the school is and what education it is providing for the well-being of all. If people on the school committee are from this third group, this facilitates more effective operation of the committee.

Respondents did not feel that socio-economic background made much difference in the number of parents participating. The mixture of parents at the general meetings and of those elected to the school committee was fairly representative of the mixture of the population of the school district. They thought there was a slightly higher percentage of the more highly educated people but that all backgrounds were represented.

An informant from the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal mentioned that there were about 8,000 Greek families with children in the Protestant schools. Some schools were all Greek, some part. There was good parent participation in all of them.

This informant felt that there was more interest than ever during 1976 in the schools and in the school committees. She cited two reasons for this impression.

In October of 1976 she had been a panel member on an Open Line radio program on parent involvement in the schools. She was surprised at the large number of phone calls received--even many long-distance ones--from people genuinely interested in the topic.

She also explained that the geographical area of their school board is divided into three regions. Each region elects five parents to serve on the Central Parents Committee. This year every post had at least two candidates in contrast to other years when almost everyone who volunteered was automatically on the central committee.

Some parents do not wish to serve on school committees but will volunteer to work in or for the school when needed. Others will express their opinion when asked to participate in a written or telephoned survey.

There are those who wonder why parents are interested in serving on school committees. They do not realize that some parents really care about the educational system. The town of Sherbrooke asked this question in a March, 1974, survey on "The Needs, Roles, and Expectations of Members of the School Committees of the Sherbrooke Catholic School Commission." Participants

were asked to rate each reason given as very important or important, indifferent, not important or nonexistent. Out of 217 respondents (parents, principals, and teachers), 99 percent participated in order to make suggestions to improve the life of the school. Ninety-six percent thought it important to better their understanding of the child's school environment. Ninety-two percent considered it important to achieve a better understanding of the school system. Ninety percent welcomed the opportunity to express an opinion on what happens at school. Eighty-nine percent said they were motivated by the chance to represent the opinion of the parents of their community. Sixty-nine percent considered it important to be able to influence the decisions of the administration of the school.[1]

An article in Prospectives[2] written by the president of the Parents' Committee of the Catholic School Commission of Quebec City states that since parents have the primary responsibility for their children, they have priority in determining their children's needs. The school should respect the fact that the children's values come from the parents. Since we live in a

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[1]Rapport Synthèse du sondage sur les besoins, les roles, et les attentes des membres des comités d'école de la CSCS (Sherbrooke, March 1974), p. 9.

[2]Monique Grégoire, "Les Parents veulent participer," Prospectives (December 1975), pp. 265-69.

democratic society, parents should participate in the schools in behalf of their children. As the children grow older, their participation should increase, and that of the parents should lessen.

In a discussion on this article and related topics, the author stated that parents do not participate enough. Some of those who do, work for personal goals, using it as a springboard to political office. She sees parent participation as a humanizing factor for the school system.

Another reason for participation may not be typical. Some highly enlightened people are involved because they consider it the best way to force evolution and to change people's minds.[1]

A number of reasons are advanced to explain non-participation on school committees. Some explain why some parents have never served; others reflect the discouragement and frustration of those who have served and decided not to continue.

Many families throughout the province find it difficult to support their families due to existing economic conditions. When the father arrives home tired, he prefers to relax with his newspaper and his beer in front of the television set instead of attending school

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[1]Montreal, "Central Parents' Committee of the Montreal Catholic School Commission," Annual Report, 1974-1975. (Mimeographed.)

committee meetings. The mother may like to send the kids off to school and get some rest during the daytime instead of participating in sub-committee work. For many parents, school is the least of their worries.[1]

When entering the school, most parents are entering a milieu they are unfamiliar with. Some do not feel at ease. They do not know what is expected of them; they do not know what they are supposed to do there. They are not sure they know or can say what they want for their children. Some sense a climate of uncertainty or mistrust and react by being afraid to express themselves honestly or by simply staying away.[2]

Some parents feel keenly their lack of educational background. They feel inferior; they do not want to show their ignorance in front of others. Some are afraid of the responsibility; some are indifferent. Others are prevented by their job or by lack of a babysitter. In rural areas a number of parents live twenty-five miles away from the school. They feel it is too great a distance to travel. Some parents have the attitude, "My child is doing well; why should I go?"[3]

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[1]Jacques Antoons, "Nos enfants sont-ils des orphelins?" Education et Société (Décembre, 1973), pp. 18-19.

[2]Raymond Genest, "Les comités d'école," Education et Société (Février, 1973), p. 3.

[3]Robert Picard, "Après un an d'expérience," Education et Société (Décembre, 1973), pp. 4-5.

In certain areas, such as the northeastern section of Montreal, there is a language difficulty. The principals of two English Catholic secondary schools in the area said that many parents spoke only Italian, Portuguese, Slavic, or French. They were not confortable attending meetings carried on in English. In one of the schools, however, there were two non-English speakers on the school committee (one French, one Italian). Other parents on the school committee interpreted for them.

Parents who served on school committees but who chose not to present themselves for reelection were often discouraged for several reasons. They found that often after spending considerable time discussing a problem, the principal or school board was not receptive to their recommendation. They did not feel wanted by administrators, teachers, students. They felt that the whole thing was a facade. In many regions, their advice was never asked on any subject even though the law stated that they were to be consulted.

There were other kinds of problems, also. Some parents were poorly informed or misinformed and thus false problems were created. Some parents were impatient and lacked the necessary perseverance to follow things through. Some parents found that they did not have an adequate amount of free time to participate effectively.

Some parents were not willing to dialogue; they were not able to adapt to or be flexible toward today's child. A number of parents were frustrated by the lack of continuity on the school committee.[1]

One respondent, a high school teacher, stated that it takes a crisis to get parents involved. Usually they just do not want to know what is happening. They are so busy and so tired at night that they prefer to retreat into the world of television. At a Parent Conference Day in 1976, this teacher had only three parents visit his classroom to inquire about their children. Most teachers in the school had less.

There is always less interest in the school committee on the secondary level. As the children grow older, the parents tend to lose interest. Another problem is the large size of most secondary schools. A teacher said that the bigger the school, the less parent participation.

One of the more serious problems noted above is that of the lack of continuity on school committees. Most school committees are elected in October. It is November before they meet and begin to plan for the year. An interruption occurs over the Christmas holiday. If

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[1]Sherbrooke, "Rapport synthèse du Colloque Régional des Comités d'Ecoles de la Commission Scolaire Régional de l'Estrie" (Sherbrooke: le 25 mai, 1974), p. 29. (Mimeographed.)

anything is accomplished, it happens in January, February, March, and April. When spring arrives, interest lags, and the committee disbands without making plans for the next school year. More often than not, little has been accomplished, so none of the old members present themselves for reelection in the fall.

Several suggestions have been made to improve this situation. As a result, some school committees now hold their election in May, leaving a few positions vacant to be filled in the fall. This accommodates parents whose children are not enrolled until then. (Parents of all known incoming students are invited to the May meeting.) This enables the new and old committee members to meet in June to formulate plans for the next school year. Some school committees are discouraged by their principals from doing this or they feel that this is illegal. The law states that the election is to be held on or before October 15.[1] The Parent Animator from the PSBGM stated that a lawyer advised her that since "parent" refers to the parent of a child enrolled in a school on September 30, it is illegal to hold the election before that date. A Ministry official stated that he saw nothing in the law to prevent the elections being held in May. There is no record to date of any problem

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[1]Quebec, Law 27 (1971), Comités d'écoles comités de parents, article 66.

developing over any elections that have been held in May. Another suggestion made was the advisability of electing school committee members for a two-year term, electing half of the committee each year. Most feel that the law does not permit this, but they see nothing to prevent them from electing a person to a second one-year term. However, it has not been easy in many locales to persuade people to want to be reelected.

One former parent committee president who is now a school board member suggested that Law 27 was merely a guideline. She had been in the happy situation of having many parents wanting to participate. Since the law stated that the school committee was to have a maximum of twenty-three parents, she included about twenty-five others by establishing sub-committees for each grade level in the schools where parents were eager to serve.

In the Montreal Catholic School Commission, continuity has been established. A spokesman said that the overall average of parents remaining on the school committees was about 60 percent. However, problems are seen when looking at the figures for each individual school committee. Some had all new members, some had all former members. The former situation destroys continuity; the latter does not permit new parents to participate and gain valuable training.

On the Central Committee in Montreal, only six people are new out of fourteen. The president has been reelected for the third year. An official from the Montreal Catholic School Commission said that usually it would be better to have a change, but this man commands much respect and has been responsible for developing a good relationship between the Central Committee and the school board. Because of his competence, he was appointed a member of the Montreal Catholic School Board in November to fulfill the unexpired term of its president who was elected to political office in the November provincial election.

A spokesman for the Montreal Catholic School Commission felt that there were two possible reasons for so many parents remaining in office. There is a feeling of waiting which is prevalent. These Montreal parents are waiting and hoping for the Ministry of Education to announce the decentralization they have been asking for. They are also waiting for the new plan for the reorganization of school boards on the Island of Montreal which is expected to be announced in late 1976 or early 1977.

Much has been said about the participation of the parents on the school committees. Each committee also has the principal and one teacher. From a number of interviews, three main views of the participation of the principal emerged. Some parents felt warmly welcomed by the principal and thought that genuine consultation

was taking place. Others felt that the principal was going through the motions and telling them only what he felt they should know. The rest felt that their principal did not want parents in his school.

Some of this reluctance to work with parents may be explained by the fact that many principals in Quebec are former teachers who were placed in this position as a result of having performed well in the classroom. They have not been trained as administrators nor have they been trained in school-community relations. They do not see the school as part of or belonging to the community; they see it as their domain. They do not see the need for working with parents or considering their opinions and recommendations. Courses in school-community relations and parent relations are beginning to be offered by some universities to fulfill this need. Some principals have availed themselves of this opportunity.

Teacher participation varies, also. The past year was not typical because teachers were involved in extended negotiations with the government over their contract. However, respondents felt that, in other years, some teachers had been interested and helpful. On the contrary, in other schools a different teacher attended the meeting each month so there was no continuity. The feeling was widespread that not many teachers went back to their colleagues and reported

what was said at school committee meetings. In general, it does not seem that the teacher member fostered much communication between other teachers and the parents.

A question was raised by several people over the propriety of a teacher at one school serving on the parent committee at another. Respondents to this question said that this could result in conflict of interest if the school committee position differed from that of the teacher's union.

The Function of the Committees

School committees are now firmly established in the Quebec School System. After the yearly election, the school committee members meet to elect officers. It is suggested in the guidelines that the next step is to formulate objectives for the school year and to set up sub-committees to work on the stated objectives. It is also important for the school committee to plan its meetings for the year. An agenda needs to be set up for each monthly meeting. At each meeting minutes must be taken and written up to be distributed at or before the next meeting. The president has to be prepared to preside at the meeting.

Immediately several problems arise. Many parents have had no training in presiding over meetings, writing minutes, setting up agendas or formulating objectives. This lack of training has been responsible for the lack

of success of school committees in some areas. In others, it has merely slowed down the involvement and development of the school committees. The next chapter will contain an explanation of what has been done to ameliorate this problem.

During the four and a half years of their existence, school committees have engaged in a number of activities in an effort to fulfill their role. There is quite a variety of activities with varying purposes. The following five categories have been suggested: activities which permit parents to get acquainted with the school, activities which inform other parents and the community, support activities for the school, service to students, subjects for study and consultation.[1] The following list of school committee projects gives an idea of what is being done around the province.

Getting acquainted with the school

Meetings where teachers and specialists provide information on Mathematics, French, Religion, etc.
Meetings with Student Council
Meetings with Staff Council (teachers)
Visits to classrooms-planned and unplanned
Coffee Corner-place in school where parents and teachers can meet for a chat and coffee
Teacher visits in student homes
Classes for parents using new teaching methods
Fifteen week class on the new Mathematics and the new French

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[1]Marthe Henripin et Vincent Ross, Les parents dans l'école (Québec: ministère de l' Education, 1975), p. 8.

Support activities for the school

Helping in school library
Cafeteria supervision
Snow classes
Dramatics
Health Week
Education Week
Babysitting for general parent meetings
Supervision of school yard at recess
Help for needy families
Safety-pedestrian crossing lights and guards
Campaign against vandalism
Handing out snacks
Helping to dress four year olds at end of school day
Classes in how to work on school committee
Fund raisers
  Bazaars
  Carnivals
  Marchathon
  Rockathon
  Collecting empty bottles and newspapers
  Book Fair
  Style shows
  Art Fair

Informing others

Newspapers
Monthly Bulletins
Parent Opinion Surveys
Preparation for "Welcome" in fall
Obtaining volunteers for special projects in the school
General meetings
Displays of students' work
Audio-visual presentations
Television programs
Telephone chains
Classes on how to be an effective school committee member, president, secretary
Visit to France

Service to students

After-school classes--art, music, sports, games, crafts, love, ecology, swimming, skating
Skate exchange
Christmas baskets
School Bank
Field trips

Invented mathematics games
Catechism
Reading program--individual help for students
Student exchanges
Christmas party
Spring visits to secondary school for students who will enter in fall
Party for First Communion
Nutrition Day
Saturday game day

Consultation

Sex Education
Cumulative School Record
May First booklet
Closing of schools (transfer of students elsewhere)
Changing school programs
Remodeling schools
Teacher negotiations
Transportation
Good citizenship training for students
School discipline
Problems of specialized schools
French language instruction
Parent Congress (annual conference)
Report cards
School rules
Dress code
School budget
Absenteeism
Dropouts

Many of the above are common in the American school system. Some are provided by the school; others are provided by local parent-teacher groups. As for the subjects for study and consultation, interested citizens may contact the school board directly in the United States without having the backing of a committee. The reader should remember that all of this is not common in Quebec. Parent involvement in the school system is an innovation.

The preceding five groups form an excellent network of participation. Parents new to the school environment usually begin with activities in the first group and then move on through groups two through five as they gain experience.

School committees themselves go through this network. Some are operating efficiently on a group five level; others have not gone beyond level one.

Most school committees have at one time or another scheduled their meetings for the entire school year with sessions on one or another of the subject matter areas of the school. The teacher of that subject matter area or the school board specialist presents an informative program and answers parents' questions. According to school committee annual reports and respondents, the most popular topics have been the "new Math" and the new methods and materials in teaching French as the mother tongue. A few schools have even set up classes for parents in mathematics and French spread over several weeks so that parents may be taught using the same methods and materials that their children are being exposed to. In this way, parents realize that the new methods are effective, and they can be more understanding of the experiences that their children have.

In schools where the principal and teachers are open to cooperating with and welcoming parents, some

parents have had interesting experiences visiting classrooms. In a few schools, invitations have been issued for parents to visit any time they wish. Those parents who have done so have seen their children in a different light. They also understand how the teacher works. They realize that when their children talk about playing games at school, they are describing learning experiences. This helps to dispel the illusion that the new schools are all play. These parents are more willing to cooperate with the teacher in helping the child.

School committees who have been informed on the new methods and materials and who have visited classrooms usually seek to share this information with other parents. Those who do usually choose to send information home in written form or they present a program at a general meeting at school. A few ambitious school committees have filmed television programs and broadcast them.

One example of written communication is a newspaper, "La Lanterne," begun by the school committee at St-Coeur-de-Marie School in Quebec. It informs parents of what is happening at school. Illustrations and the cover design are done by the children.

Plateau-Escale School in Charlesbourg started a newspaper that was to provide communication between all the partners in the educational system. Due to several unforeseen problems, only one of the four issues was

published. It contained, in interview form, information on the French program. Other articles were planned on mathematics, religion, and English. This newspaper was to be a forum for discussion of any topic which affected school life. There were to be articles for the children, also, and pictures for them to color. The school committee hopes to solve the problems and publish during the 1976-1977 school year if interest warrants the expenditure of time and money.

The Parents' Committee of the Quebec Catholic School Board publishes a four-page monthly information bulletin for all the members of the school committees in their territory. It contains a variety of articles and news relating to school committees and offers certain helps and services. For example, in the October, 1975, bulletin, a colored film on special classes for all types of handicapped children was offered for elementary school committees to show at a general parents' meeting.

The support services mentioned in the third group of school committee activities are so named because they help the school and the teacher to provide extras for the student. The emphasis here is on helping the principal and teacher, even though it indirectly benefits the students. Many of these, especially such services as the fund-raisers and helping in the library, are similar to those services provided by parent-teacher organizations

in the United States. These need no explanation or discussion. Two others will be mentioned to illustrate the activities in this group.

Having four-year-olds at school--especially in the winter months when the weather necessitates heavy clothing and boots--can be a chore for the teacher. At one school, two mothers arrive at the end of each school day to help the children dress for the trip home. Two different mothers are assigned each day by the school committee member in charge of this project.

Parents in some areas have achieved more safety for their children. In northeastern Montreal, a traffic light near the school to help students cross the street had been approved by the city but never ordered to be installed. The principal's attempts to have the light erected had not brought action. Through the school committee, the parents put pressure on the proper officials, and soon the traffic light was installed.

In the area of providing direct service to students, Quebec parents have made a large contribution. Traditionally the schools have not provided much in the way of after-school activities. In many schools the school committee has organized and directed some type of program, either after school or on Saturday. For example, one school from the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal has 400 of its 700 students enrolled

in some after-school activity. Art, music, and sports are offered including such things as judo and guitar. All classes are taught and supervised by the parents.

A school in the Catholic School Commission of Montreal allows its parents to provide supplements to the academic program during the school day. Last year the president of the school committee taught a class in astronomy, her specialty.

When parents have acquired experience and first-hand knowledge of the school, they usually get involved in issues and problems dealing with the pedagogical aspects of the school program. Such a case is that of an inner city school in Montreal. This school had many disadvantaged students; the needs of these students were not being met. The school asked the parents to submit projects to help provide a better education for these students. The parents have been submitting ideas; those deemed worthwhile are being funded. Teachers are helping with designing and implementing these projects.

The problem of a steady decline in public school enrollment has put school administrators in some areas of Quebec, especially in the cities of Montreal and Quebec, in the unenviable position of having to close schools. Parents are accustomed to having their neighborhood school and fight vigorously to keep it open. The school committee at Roxboro Elementary School in

Montreal did more than fight; it came up with an idea which has resulted in keeping the school open. They have begun a day-time continuing education program which has attracted 114 adults who are taking courses in French, flower arranging, painting, and sewing. Parents like it because they can attend while their children are in school. In addition, it is less tiring to take courses during daytime hours, and the fees are reasonable. The principal feels that the program is responding to the needs of the community. The school committee hopes to expand the program to include all kinds of cultural and recreational activities.

Real consultation involves dialogue between the parents and the school. Occasionally parents consult with each other to form a strong voice to make the school authorities listen. Such a case was the incident of the leaky roof on the school "La Source" in Loretteville near Quebec. The roof had been leaking for some time, it was making school unpleasant for the children, but nothing was being done to repair it. The older students decided to strike in order to get it fixed. The principal sent all the students home and wrote to parents that they must come to school and reenroll their children. Two-thirds of the parents attended the school board meeting to protest and to demand that the roof be repaired immediately. They received promises but no action. Therefore, they

unanimously decided to close the school until the roof was repaired. They kept their children at home. Finally the roof was fixed and classes resumed.

The examples show that parents are involved and they do get results. The school committees provide opportunity for some local control of the schools since parents can find solutions for problems which affect them and their children. What is a problem in one school may not be a problem in another.

It is not always easy to distinguish between problems handled by school committees and those handled by parents' committees. A school committee may identify a problem, decide it only affects that school, and work to solve it. A school committee may identify another problem and find that this problem exists in other schools in the district. In this case it may become the work of the parents' committee to help the school committees find a solution. In other cases, a parents' committee may identify a problem and present it to the school committees for solution.

In Ste-Foy the Parents' Committee appointed three members to form a joint committee with three members from the School Board. One project on which they have spent and will spend much time on is the idea of allowing each elementary school to have its own instructional specialty. They designed a pilot program for one elementary school

to have an open classroom for continuous learning. Another school is to have special instruction in music. This project was delayed by the teachers' contract struggle, but hopefully the pilot program will begin soon.

Certain topics were subjects of consultation for school committees and parents' committees throughout the province of Quebec. Among those were Sex Education, Cumulative School Records, the May First Booklet, teacher negotiations, and the closing of schools with low enrollment.

The Ministry of Education prepared a course of study on Sex Education to be used for the instruction of that subject in elementary and secondary schools. In November of 1974, the Catholic Committee vetoed the program without consulting the parents. Parents became concerned and let the Ministry know that they favored a program of sex education in the schools. The Ministry then designed another program which later was accepted by the Catholic Committee and the parents.

The Sherbrooke Parents' Committee appointed a sub-committee to study this problem. This was one of three priorities for the year 1974-1975. This committee, after several discussions, surveyed the parents to see if they wanted the program and to find out how parents thought it should be taught. Out of 220 parents who

returned the survey, 161 thought it was necessary to have a sex education program in the elementary schools. The majority thought that this should be part of the science program taught to children from ages nine to twelve in mixed groups. Opinion was split over who should teach the course. Seventy-nine parents favored the nurse, fifty-nine a married couple, and fifty a teacher. The committee thought that the course given by the school should be the complement of information given at home by parents.

Later the Association of School Boards at Sherbrooke issued a statement supporting the conclusions of the Parents' Committee. This document, entitled "Report on Sex Education in the Formation of the Individual," was studied by the Parents' Committee of Quebec. This group passed a resolution in support of the document. However, they wanted parents in Quebec to play an important part in preparing and teaching such a course. This subject of sex education appeared as an item for consultation in a number of Parents' Committee annual reports.

Another item of province-wide concern was the Cumulative School Record. This also appeared in many annual reports. In 1973 a cumulative school record was to be started for each student in the province. It was to contain information on the student's grades,

performance on the province-wide examinations, results of achievement, intelligence, and aptitude tests, and comments on the students' behavior. This record was to be kept on file for fifty years. This became a very controversial subject. Parents felt that this record could be harmful to their children during the major portion of their lives.

In Quebec the Parents' Committee held five information sessions for school committee members. Following the meetings, the school committees spent considerable time studying and discussing this matter. At the end, the parents felt that there was a necessity for a cumulative school record. However, they felt that the section of comments on the students' behavior should be destroyed when the student terminated his studies. The document should be helpful, not punitive.

The Parents' Committee in Sherbrooke appointed a sub-committee to compile a report on the subject.[1] This committee found that parents could see the benefits of such a record, but they did not want it to become harmful nor could they see any reason for keeping it on file for fifty years. They felt that students had ups and downs and occasionally did things which they

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[1]"Rapport de la Commission Ad Hoc Sur le dossier scolaire Cumulatif, Le Comité des Parents, Enseignement Primaire," July, 1974. (Mimeographed.)

later regretted; this should not haunt them for most of the rest of their lives. They did not feel that teachers knew the students well enough to make accurate comments. Therefore, they were in favor of the record but not in its present form.

The Parents' Committees became involved in the spring of 1975 with the "Manuel du 1er mai."[1] This was a booklet of suggestions for student projects to be used in the classrooms to teach about the life of the working class. It was prepared by the militants of the Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec, a strong teachers' union. The Quebec School Board forbade its use in the schools, saying that it considered the document Marxist. It wanted the Parents' Committee to support its decision. The Parents' Committee wanted to keep their autonomy and take some time to thoroughly study the manual.

In Montreal, the Central Parents' Committee sent a message to all the school committees inviting them to be extremely careful about the eventual use of this document in the schools.

The Elementary School Parents' Committee in Sherbrooke recommended that the Sherbrooke Catholic School Board and the Ministry of Education incorporate

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[1]Pour une journée d'école au service de la classe ouvrière, Manuel du 1er mai, Centrale de l'Enseignement du Québec, April 1975.

some of the ideas from the booklet into the instructional program to answer the needs of the child. The committee also stated where it was in disagreement with the document.

Mention has been made previously of the disruption in the schools due to the lengthy conflict between the teachers and the government over the teachers' contract. This was a cause for concern for parents throughout the province. In some areas there was no annual report for the school committee or parents' committee for 1975-1976 because the committee did not function as a result of the conflict.

In some areas this conflict became the focus for the major part of its work. Such was the case for the Regional School District of Tilly, in Ste-Foy. Its annual report states that this item was on the agenda of almost all of its ten meetings. Throughout the year it tried to take action to keep the two sides negotiating, and in April, it supported the action of the school board in obtaining an injunction to force the teachers to continue the work of the school year. The Parents' Committee report stated that the position of the public schools had seriously weakened that year. The students had not received the services to which they felt they were entitled for the amount of money they had paid. Some parents suggested that if all was not back to normal by the fall of 1976, they would feel justified in having

their tax monies placed in escrow until the negotiations were completed. All the parents agreed that the children should not return to school in the fall until the teachers had a signed contract.

The Central Parents' Committee in Montreal had stated from the beginning that it supported the idea of continued negotiations with the help of a mediator. It also felt that the methods of conducting the negotiations were inefficient and they recommended reforming them. In January, 1976, parents and school committees in the region put pressure on the Central Committee to take a stand on the matter. In attempting to do this, the members found it extremely difficult to get adequate information on the positions of the government and the teachers' union. In addition, there was so much diversity in the thinking of the parents that it was next to impossible to develop a statement which would convey their opinions. Finally, as stated in the annual report, the committee members realized that in conflicts of this nature, they did not possess efficient means of intervention. They felt that their views were hardly considered which proved to them that parents were not yet a real part of the school system.

According to the annual report of the Parents' Committee in Quebec, the parents felt that they were provided with much information on the teacher conflict

and that they were consulted by the School Board on this matter. Parents felt that their role was that of an observer. They tried to assess the effect of the conflict on their children and recommend the best course of action to ensure their well-being and the success of the school year. They wanted to keep the schools open and have them function as normally as possible.

In the fall of 1976 the contract was settled. The French schools opened in the fall; the English schools were disrupted by a three-week teachers' strike protesting the terms of the new contract, but conditions went back to normal after that. School committees and parents' committees are free to concentrate on other concerns such as the closing of underenrolled schools.

The decline in school enrollment is a pressing problem in the public schools, especially in the cities of Montreal and Quebec. No one is quite certain of the cause, but two contributing factors are the decline in the birth rate and the transfer of many students to private schools. The current budgetary pinch has made it imperative for school officials to attempt to close those schools which are economically unsound. Parents have become alarmed over this because none of them wish to lose their neighborhood school. This has become an even larger issue in certain areas where the French population does not want to see the last French school

close. They feel that this will result in a lack of French-speaking people moving in and therefore a decline in the area. The parents' committees in the neighborhoods involved are attempting to work this out with the school boards.

There are a number of other parents' committee projects that could be mentioned to show the scope of their activities. To close this section just one more will be discussed because of its unusual nature. In 1973-1974 the Parents' Committee of the Catholic School Commission of Quebec decided that it would be useful to send some parents to France.[1] They submitted a project to the Office Franco-Quebecois pour la jeunesse (French French-Canadian Youth Office). This project, "Schools and Parent Participation," was accepted in April, 1975. Six parents from Quebec City school committees as well as fourteen parents from other areas of the province were selected to make the three-week trip in October, 1975. They visited schools in Paris and four other locations to study current developments in the French schools and to investigate the work of parent groups in France. Upon their return, they prepared a forty-three page report on what they had learned.

Some school committees and parents' committees have functioned better than others because they have

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[1]Rapport Annuel, 15 Septembre 1975, p. 10.

been careful to spend time formulating objectives and setting up sub-committees to divide the work-study projects. Some of the school boards have prepared guides for the committees to provide help in setting up their objectives for the year. Some of these objectives are suggested by issues of current concern in the province. Others are determined by parent input on the local level where there are items of concern to that particular school population. Some of the school boards have a person in their office working as a liaison officer between the school board and the school committees. This person is usually available to help individual school committees set their objectives for the year.

CHAPTER VI

PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE FUNCTION OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEES AND PARENTS' COMMITTEES

It has already been established that some committees have been able to function more smoothly and with better results than others. Almost all of them have had certain difficulties at one time or another. They have had problems obtaining enough money to operate the way they would like. Some committees have not had a place to work or to store records. Access to proper secretarial help and supplies has been difficult in some areas. Parents have been hindered by their lack of training in functioning as a group or in fulfilling the responsibilities of serving as president or secretary. Many of the more competent people have found that they do not have the large amounts of free time available that the job requires. There has been lack of continuity in the work of the committees. Some parents feel the need for a stronger, more unified voice but are not sure that the Provincial Federation of Parents is the answer. Parents' committees have been hindered by a lack of

collective spirit and the large size of some of the regional school districts. This chapter will contain a discussion of these problems along with any solutions that have been found or proposed.

Financing

The method of financing the school committees and parents' committees has been outlined in the Ministry of Education's Document VI B.

> Participation in the school committee or its sub-committees, as a member or an advisor, is made on a voluntary basis. However, according to the provisions in the Budgetary and Administrative Rules for School Boards, expenses incurred by members of school committees and sub-committees and which have been previously authorized by the school committee in the budget assigned to it by the school board, may be reimbursed upon presentation of receipts, according to the modalities established by the school board in consultation with the parents' committee.
>
> The school committee must forward to the parents' committee, its budgetary provisions for the following school year.
>
> According to the policies established by the school board, the principal of the school places at the disposal of the school committee, in excess of the budget determined for the school committee by the school board, certain available resources of his school such as rooms for meetings, stationery and secretarial services.[1]

These rules establish the fact that parents serve on a voluntary basis. Every parent interviewed mentioned the fact that his work was nonpaid and seemed rather proud of the fact that he was making a contribution.

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[1]Document VI B, p. 29.

These rules delegate the power of determining the monies allowed to each individual school board. The Montreal Catholic School Commission includes a detailed section on financing the School Committee in its current guide for parents' committees. Each school committee is allocated "-$0.20 per pupil, according to the official registration of September 30th, with a minimum of $100.00 and a maximum of $350.00."[1] An informant stated the school committees in this school district now receive 25¢ per pupil. In addition, the School Board allocates $300.00 to the Parents' Committee for general expenses and $200.00 for the annual Regional Parent Congress. The Central Executive Committee receives $3,000.00 for its needs.

The figure of 25¢ per student allocated to each school committee seemed to be fairly standard policy at all the school boards. There was some variation in the minimum and maximum allowed and in the amount budgeted for the parents' committees. Many school committees supplemented their budget with money earned from various fund-raising projects. Others became self-financed through contributions made by community organizations.

The Catholic School Commission in Quebec, when faced with budgetary restrictions, surveyed other school

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[1]The Montreal Catholic School Commission, Guide for Parents' Committees, 2d ed., December 1975, p. 49.

boards to compare their school committee and parents' committee budget with that in other areas. It discovered that it was allowing these committees $2.25 per student (this includes all services rendered--personnel, secretarial, telephone, paper, printing, etc.) while Montreal provided $0.77 per student. The Quebec School Commission admitted that its method of calculation was different but still considered themselves too generous. Therefore, for the 1976-1977 school year, the amount was reduced to $1.25 per student. This meant the loss of the Coordinator for Parent-School Services, his secretary, and all the services of this office: paper, copying, telephone, stamps, printing. A spokesman at the School Commission Office expected this to drastically curtail service to the parents. This was stated in the annual report also.[1]

The rules previously quoted state that the principal of each school is to provide meeting rooms, secretarial services, and paper. It is clear that some principals provide more help than others. Principals do provide a room for the monthly meetings; not too many provide space for the committee to work at other times. Some provide adequate secretarial help; others do not. Some school committees are fortunate in having members who possess good secretarial skills and are happy to make

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[1]Rapport Annuel du Comité de Parents de la C. E. C. Q. 1975-1976, pp. 14-15. (Mimeographed.)

a contribution by furnishing this help to the committee. One parents' committee president stated that there was a pressing need for a filing cabinet to store school committee and parents' committee records. Most records were currently stored under the beds of the presidents and secretaries. This did not permit careful preservation of records or easy access to them. This respondent felt that the school should provide a filing cabinet for these records.

In its annual report for 1975-1976 (pp. 11-12), the Central Parents' Committee of the Montreal Catholic School Commission called for a law to define exactly what should be provided. It noted that some principals were most generous in providing help to the school committees; others were parsimonious.

Respondents believed in the principal of parents donating time. However, some parents, who often had to travel considerable distances, felt they should not be penalized financially. They thought that expenses should be provided for those who attended several meetings a week. One parent suggested researching the value of a person who has acquired competency through several years experience and using this information to receive a tax deduction for such an individual. Another parent remarked that little schools in rural areas should receive more money for their school committees because

their needs were greater. This parent felt that parents who had to travel more than ten miles to attend meetings or to do the work required by participation on a sub-committee should be reimbursed for their travel expenses. Another parent thought that the committees should receive money for secretarial help to relieve the burden placed on the school secretary.

Lack of Training

Parents have been hindered by their lack of training in functioning as part of a group and in fulfilling the responsibilities of serving as president or secretary. Some parents experienced difficulty in expressing themselves in front of the principal or teachers because they felt they had inferior education. Others needed to become acquainted with each other outside regular meetings in order to feel comfortable working together at parent meetings. Many did not know how to prepare an agenda, preside at a meeting, or write minutes.

The Ministry of Education has a man in each regional office to aid school boards and school committees in their relations with each other. However, the Ministry informant admitted that the availability of this service was not well publicized. He also mentioned that the regional offices can provide an animator

to lead school committee meetings in order to facilitate the work of the school committees.

The larger school boards have provided much service to school committees and parents' committees. The Montreal Catholic School Commission has published a 120-page guide detailing every facet of school committee operation. The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal has published a 40-page school committee manual which is not as detailed but which does explain how to set up and operate the committees. It also includes a section of useful information on programs offered in the school system. The 20-page guide from the Quebec Catholic School Commission lists the functions of the school committee and its members and provides a 10-page annex of lists, forms, and further information.

In La Prairie, the president of the Parents' Committee responded to concerns over the lack of technical and practical information by writing a manual of administration for school committees and parents' committees. This 39-page document provides concise step-by-step information on school committee operation, the roles of its members, and running the meetings. The annex provides important information on communication, participation, consultation, and team work.[1]

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[1]Christine Bertrand, Manuel de Gestion des Comités d'Ecole et du Comité de Parents, Commission Scolaire de La Prairie, Juin 1976.

These guides provide an important source of information for parents. Another most important source is the liaison officer employed by some school boards to organize the work of the committees. The Catholic School Board in Quebec had such a person who in 1976 had ten years experience in working with parent groups in the schools. He coordinated the activities of the committees, prepared the calendar of meetings, and provided invaluable help in many ways. He had a full-time secretary and was assisted by a public relations officer. He watched over the development of the school committees. Any committees which were not functioning well were invited to visit committees which were operating smoothly. This post was eliminated from the budget in the fall of 1976.

The Montreal Catholic School Committee has a full-time person whose job is to work with the Central Parents Committee. There are also parent advisors for each region of Montreal.

The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal employs a full-time person as Animator for Parents and School Committees. This woman has provided much help to individual school committees as well as writing the guide used by these committees. This year she will be spending half her time working with the concerns of parents and the other half helping to develop a policy

on the closing of underenrolled schools. Part of her role is putting schools in touch with the community.

School boards have also addressed the problem of parental need for training by providing a variety of training sessions. In 1973-1974 the Quebec Catholic School Board offered all-day sessions for presidents of school committees on how to run a meeting, prepare an agenda, edit minutes, and other useful information. It presented evening workshops for secretaries and treasurers on practical helps for fulfilling their duties. In the fall of 1975 this school board offered courses for school committee members for the first time. About 40 percent of the committee members were in attendance. Sessions were held on how to preside over a meeting, help for secretaries, human relations, and training for animators for the 1976 Parent Congress. They hoped to run the sessions again beginning in November, 1976. The later date would allow for more publicity announcing the meetings. They also hoped to change the time of some of the sessions. The women found it difficult to be out that many nights.

The Catholic School Commission in Montreal has also provided training sessions for the parents. One parent who had attended stated that he received good training in how to run a meeting. The training and help provided at the sessions gave him the assurance he

needed to function in the committee. This school commission has planned a new series to run from January through May of 1977. There will be three thirty-hour sessions, each spread over three consecutive weekends, three separated weekends, or three Thursdays and Fridays. Subjects of the workshops are Communication, Animation (Leadership) Techniques, and a combination of Leadership, Observation and Evaluation, and Decision-making.

At the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, the Parent Animator runs training sessions for members of school committees and the parents' committee. She, along with two McGill University professors, has designed a course for school committee members who wish to do their job more effectively. This pilot project was launched in the fall of 1976 with twenty parents attending. It was financed by two Montreal School Boards (the PSBGM and the MCSC), and there are ten parents from each board attending the classes. The success of this project will be evaluated in the spring of 1977.

Training sessions have also been held in other areas. This is greatly increasing the number of competent and knowledgeable people working on school committees. Some of them have now been making themselves available to act as animators to help school committees which need it.

Other help is provided for parents in the form of articles in educational publications. In addition, the regional office of the Ministry of Education at Sherbrooke is preparing a manual on "Methodologie d'Animation de Participation pour les Parents" (Methods of Animation for Parent Participation). This is expected to appear in the spring of 1977.

Continuity

The problem of lack of continuity in the work of the school committee has been discussed earlier. When parents are elected for only one year and a new group is elected for the following year, the committee has difficulty in sustaining any kind of meaningful work. This compounds the problem, for if nothing happens, parents do not want to present themselves for reelection for the following year. Fortunately, this is resolving itself in areas where the school committees have met with success and are supported in their efforts by principals and school boards.

Some problem is caused by the fact that the most competent people do not have the necessary time to devote to school committee work due to other demands on their time.

Communication

Lack of communication is another factor. In some areas school committees do not send their minutes to the parents' committee. This impedes their efficiency. The parents' committee needs this information in order to coordinate activities in the district and to use in their contacts with the school board. There also needs to be better exchange of information between teachers and school committees and between school boards and parents' committees. Some school boards have not yet made a practice of sending their agenda and minutes to the parents' committee. There are regions where it has not been possible to have a parents' committee member at school board meetings. There are also regions where school committee members have not polled the other parents before adopting an official position on an issue. Communication is often lacking in all directions.

Some communication between parents is effected by the annual Parents' Congress in Quebec. This convention, held in Quebec City, has met about the time of Easter vacation for eight years. In 1976, 800 parents attended to consider the topic, "The School of Tomorrow." In the general meetings and the workshops, parents heard about and discussed the changes in the educational system since 1960, the school as it is today, and what it will be in the future. Parent participation at this

meeting was greater in 1976 than before. Not only were there more parents in attendance but more were group leaders and secretaries.

An earlier convention in 1974 had brought 600 parents together over the theme, "The School . . . Why?" On opening night parents heard three addresses on the purposes of the school.[1] The following day they participated in workshops and discussion groups on the insecurity of school children, apprenticeship of the child (ways to integrate the child into society), new teaching methods, equal opportunities for all children, learning-disabled children, teaching of religion, and the quality of professional training provided by the schools. They also discussed the work of the school committees and made recommendations to improve their operation.[2]

Another example of helpful communication among parents is the Regional Convention of School Committees of the Estrie Regional School Board held in Sherbrooke in May, 1974. The purpose of the meeting was to reflect on the performance of the school committees, which had

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[1]Nicole Pomerleau Brodeur, "Des parents intéressés et décidés à agir," Education Québec, mai 1974, pp. 9-15.

[2]Pauline Beaulne, "L'école . . . pourquoi?" La Revue Scolaire, mai 1974, pp. 8-12.

then been in existence for two years, and to try to provide solutions for the problems which parents had encountered. They published a report so that others might profit from their deliberations.

Provincial Federation of Parents' Committees

At various times parents have sent communications to the Ministry of Education to make recommendations for the improvement of the functioning of the school committees. They do not see action being taken on their suggestions nor do they feel they are being consulted in decisions affecting them. Some parents feel that they need a stronger voice in order to make themselves felt at the Ministry of Education. They think that this voice might be provided by the Provincial Federation of Parents.

The Provincial Federation of Parents was reorganized under this name in 1974. It has ten administrative zones with a parent in charge of each area. The parent committees may bring their problems to this organization and ask it to take action. One of the zone administrators thinks that it must develop a better structure before it will have much power.

The Quebec Parents' Committee commented on this organization in its annual report of 1975-1976. All parents' committees in the province are automatically

members unless they officially resign each year. The Quebec Parents' Committee has not always been in agreement with the decisions made or the positions taken by the Federation. It has reservations about its methods of operation and its objectives. It does not always consult with the parents' committees before acting. The Quebec group feels that the Federation is not well organized and is not effective. However, it will continue to be a part of the Federation but will watch its decisions carefully. It will not hesitate to resign from it if necessary.

The Montreal Parents' Committee does not belong to the Federation. It sees it as an arm of the Ministry of Education and therefore feels it is not autonomous. If Montreal belonged, it would not have a voice that equalled that of the percentage of its students to that of the province. The president of a parents' committee in a suburb of Montreal said that the Federation was too political. It has no autonomy because it was receiving funds from the Superior Council of Education. She sees it as a pressure group to get parents to do things without consulting them.

The Sherbrooke Parents' Committee is not a member. It does not see it as playing an important role and feels it is too far away from local concerns. A Sherbrooke teacher and school committee member said that

the Federation was always three months late in taking action. It had planned to unite the province in a two-day attempt to keep the children home from school in order to accelerate the teacher negotiations. The Parents' Committee waited for the official order from the Federation; it never came.

During this period of conflict and teacher negotiations, the Provincial Federation sent a letter to the Ministry of Education suggesting that if it did not have the necessary funds to comply with the public school teachers' demands, it should cut off the subsidies to private schools. Parents' committees had not been consulted on this and the majority of them did not accept the Federation's position.

This has proven to be a controversial organization. Many people see its problems of budget, organization, and personnel. Yet, they feel that parents' committees may have to group somehow in order to have any power with the government. They see this organization as the only hope at the present time to develop a strong enough voice to convey their concerns to the Ministry of Education.

Some see that the Parents' committees are not operating well for a different reason. In an extensive report on elementary schools, it was found that in general, the parents' committees were rather inactive.

This was a surprise because the committees, being composed of school committee presidents, should be made up of people who have much leadership ability. The report stated that part of the explanation resides in the fact that a spirit of collectivity has not yet developed. A person interested in getting involved with his children's school is not necessarily interested in working on the school board level. Another factor is that school boards have not designated official representatives to parents' committee meetings. A third factor is the large geographical area served by some parents' committees. The distance of the four corners from each other makes attendance at committee meetings prohibitive.[1]

Thus it is evident that school committees and parents' committees are functioning better in some areas than in others. Often the more competent parents have a minimum of time to devote to school committee work. Some committees are restricted by economic problems. Lack of training has caused difficulty in the past, but training programs have now been developed to serve those parents who live in or near the larger cities. Communication between the committees and the school boards is improving. A beginning has been made in exchanging information between committees of various regions. People are

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[1]Quebec, Rapport du Groupe Commel (Quebec: Ministère de l'Education, Octobre 1974), p. 47.

watching the Provincial Federation of Parents' Committees to see whether it will develop into a useful organization.

CHAPTER VII

THE PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL COMMITTEES AND PARENTS' COMMITTEES BY MEMBERS OF THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY

Although the main thrust of this study is the history of school committees and parents' committees as mandated by Bill 27, it became not only interesting but important to question some educators regarding their perception of or their reaction to this innovation.

In any situation where an innovation is introduced into a school system, especially when some aspects of it are vaguely defined, differences occur in the way in which various individuals perceive the innovation. While discussing this innovation with educators in Quebec, it became evident that there was a difference in the way individuals and groups of individuals perceived the role and function of school committees and parents' committees. In this chapter, the word "perception" is used to mean the point of view of each of the individuals and groups as derived from the data gathered from a questionnaire.

Admittedly, the number of persons interviewed is small and does not constitute a real sample. On the other hand, it was necessary to test some of the tentative conclusions already formed by the writer after extensive reading and some preliminary interviews with other educators. More than forty persons were questioned regarding the educational scene in Quebec. Thirty-one of these were asked to respond to the questionnaire. The responses cannot be used as conclusive evidence in themselves but can be used as supporting evidence in conjunction with other materials.

Until this chapter, this study has been historical and comparative. Here, the interviews have been recorded in the form of tables to serve as a verification for the interpretation of the interviews.

Interview Procedure

Interviews were conducted during two periods of intensive field work in Quebec (August and November 1976). A few names had been provided as contacts in each of the three regions visited. Each of those suggested others who might provide pertinent information. After exhausting the resources of the Ministry of Education and the Superior Council of Education, the writer contacted people at various school commission offices. This led to meetings with several principals and teachers. Lists of parents serving on school committees and parents'

committees were available at school commission offices and at individual schools. Some parents were recommended by other respondents because they had been extremely active in school committee work. Others were selected at random from the lists.

Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the respondents. They were conducted in homes, offices, and restaurants according to the request of the respondent. During the interview, a conversational approach was used in order to help the respondent feel more comfortable in volunteering pertinent information. Some data were recorded during the interviews; the rest was recorded immediately afterward.

The questionnaire was administered to thirty-one people from three different regions in the province. Nine others were asked more general questions on education in Quebec. Some are from a large city and its suburbs, some from a medium size city and surrounding towns, and some are from another medium size city and neighboring rural areas. Not all of the questions were answered by all of the participants, usually because a given question did not apply to a particular respondent. The number of responses to each question is indicated in the tables.

The participants represented a variety of backgrounds. All had extensive knowledge of the educational system and/or personal experience with school committees

and parents' committees. For reporting the data, the respondents have been grouped into four categories: school board officials (elected and appointed), principals, teachers, and parents. No particular attention was paid to the gender of interviewees. However, since some people attach low importance to parent groups because they have the impression they are run by housewives, it seems necessary to mention that ten of the fifteen parents interviewed were men.

The questionnaire appears in the Appendix. It is divided into two sections, one consisting of closed-end or objective questions eliciting answers which may be tabulated or analyzed, the other containing open-end or subjective questions which may be analyzed according to content. Some of the data have been cited in previous chapters. It is necessary to refer to the questionnaire since the questions and answers have been abbreviated considerably in the tables.

Four sets of hypotheses have been generated dealing with central issues concerning school committees and parents' committees. Each set will form a division of the chapter.

Perception of the Role of the School Committee

The first set of hypotheses centers on the issue of the role of the school committee. Because this role

has been vaguely defined, it is expected that responses will vary within and between groups of respondents. As a consequence, the school committee experience will differ, leading some people to perceive the role as having genuine importance; others perceive it as a facade[1] created by the Ministry to make parents believe they were participating.

To obtain pertinent data, respondents were asked to explain their interpretation of the role of the school committee. They were also asked if they perceived the role as having genuine importance. The first question was originally posed as an open-end question. Informants supplied only the responses listed in Table 1. This should not be interpreted to mean that there is agreement on the role. The answers themselves are vague.

TABLE 1

PERCEIVED ROLE OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Role	Parent	Principal	Teacher	School Board	Total
Funds/Service	2	3	1	1	7
Consultation	2	0	1	0	3
Both	11	0	1	9	21
Genuine Role	8	1	1	8	18
Facade	6	2	2	1	11

NOTE: See questionnaire for full meaning of this and subsequent tables.

[1]Word used by respondents.

Eight respondents (25%) limited the role to one of raising funds and providing service to the school. In spite of the fact that the law mentions the advisory nature of the school committee, all three of the principals perceived the role as one of fund raising and providing service. This demonstrates the fact mentioned in an earlier chapter that the attitude of many principals does not facilitate the effective operation of the school committee. Three respondents perceived the role as serving as an advisory body to the school. Twenty-one (65%) saw the role as a combination of the two. This is significant in that it demonstrates the fact that the role is so vague that people cannot perceive it clearly.

In spite of the fact that the second question was also asked as an open-end question, only two different responses were obtained, showing a clear attitudinal difference. Eighteen respondents (62%) perceived the committees as having a genuine role to play. Eleven saw them as merely a facade created by the Ministry to make parents believe they were participating. Parents, principals, and teachers were evenly split on this issue. This is understandable since each has had a different experience with school committees. All but one of the school board officials considered the role genuine. The uniformity of the responses gives rise to the question of whether or not they are simply stating the official position.

Respondents who thought the committees were a facade had examples to support their opinion. Several mentioned the fact that the principal or school board paid little attention to the recommendations of the parents, even when parents had been invited to study a particular problem. Others mentioned the lack of response to the letters of recommendation that had been sent to the Ministry of Education. In the fall of 1976, a Ministry spokesman finally acknowledged in a letter to school boards the many letters and suggestions from parents. Many parents found it hard to understand why he said it was necessary to spend another year studying school committees and parents' committees before acting on the recommendations.

On the other hand, Gautier notes that one principal perceives it as a sincere effort on the part of the Ministry to permit parents to play an active role in a system that needs to be more democratic. Parents should see schools as an extension of the home and should consider principals and teachers as their associates and partners.[1]

Participation of Parents on School Committees

Because the role is perceived by 65 percent of the respondents to be genuinely important, it is expected

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[1]Wilfrid Gautier, "Attentes d'un principal," Education et Société (Février 1973): 16.

that participation is broad-based. Indices include the number of parents present at the meetings for the election of the school committees, the socio-economic levels represented on the committees, and the level of support of parents not on the committees. The latter includes parents willing to help in school committee activities and those who show interest by expressing their opinions on current issues. Three questions were asked to obtain these data (Table 2).

The figures given in response to the first question have been discussed in Chapter V. Fifty-five percent of the respondents state that attendance represents 10 percent or less of parents eligible to attend. This demonstrates the fact that, contrary to expectations, participation is not broad-based. Reasons for the lack of participation have also been discussed in Chapter V.

Sixty-eight percent of the respondents said that the mixture of people serving on the committees was representative of the people living in the community. All of the school board officials gave this response, which again raises the question of whether or not this represents the official position. Eight respondents (32%) perceived the committees as reflecting the people Living in the community but having a high proportion of professional people. These informants thought this situation was to be expected since these people are,

TABLE 2

PARTICIPATION OF PARENTS

Percentage of Parents at Meetings	Parent	Prin-cipal	Teacher	School Board	Total
10% or less	5	3	3	4	15
11% to 20%	5	0	0	1	6
21% to 50%	2	0	0	3	5
More than 50%	0	0	0	1	1
Socio-economic Level of Parents					
Reflects community	5	3	0	9	17
High proportion of professional people	7	0	1	0	8
Doesn't reflect community	0	0	0	0	0
Parent Help for Committee					
Show much interest and help	2	0	0	6	8
Sometimes help and show interest	10	1	2	2	15
Rarely or never	2	2	1	1	6

in general, more interested in community affairs. No data have yet been published so no comment can be made on the accuracy of these perceptions.

In response to the third question, more than half of the respondents agreed that parents who were not on the school committee sometimes provide help and information when requested to do so. Ten out of fourteen parents stated that help was only available on a "sometimes basis." On the other hand, six out of nine school board officials perceived parents as showing much interest and providing much help. Since school committee members are in a better position than school board officials to assess the amount of support they receive from other parents, it is assumed that their perception is more accurate.

One parent commented that parents of children at her school lived fairly close to the school and therefore were willing to attend meetings and help where needed during the school day. A parent in a rural area said that it was difficult to obtain parent participation at meetings and at school activities because they lived so far from the school. She was, however, able to obtain their opinions on school matters by mailing out a questionnaire. A number of school committees have used questionnaires, with varying results. One school committee president who had received only minimal response,

telephoned a number of parents. She found they were quite willing to discuss the questions, and they also volunteered their services for school projects.

From the above data, it can be summarized that these respondents do not perceive parent participation as being broad-based.

The Function of the School Committee

Because the school committee is a local phenomenon, the perception of its function will vary within and between groups of respondents. To obtain general data on the perception of the function of the school committee, the persons interviewed were asked in an open-end question to describe the function of their school committee. They were also asked to cite examples of occasions when parents were responsible for obtaining needed improvements in the school and examples of occasions when parental advice was ignored. Four closed-end questions on the function of the school committee resulted in data on four additional aspects of this issue. These data are tabulated in Table 3.

A summary of responses to the general question of the function of the school committee has already been made in Chapter V. Because of the fact that this summary includes a wide variety of responses, it suggests that the work of the committee has not been well defined, and, therefore, the perception of it varies greatly.

TABLE 3

FUNCTION OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Amount of Influence	Parent	Principal	Teacher	School Board	Total
Much	2	0	0	4	6
Moderate	9	1	3	5	18
Little or no	2	2	0	1	5
School Board Acceptance of Consultation					
Parents consulted regularly	3	0	0	3	6
Occasionally	4	0	0	6	10
Rarely[a]	8	1	3	1	13
Secretarial Help					
Adequate	7	3	0	8	18
Sometimes adequate	2	0	1	0	3
Not adequate	0	0	0	0	0
Provincial Federation of Parents' Committees					
Needed to provide strong voice	0	0	0	0	0
Needed but not functioning well	4	0	1	3	8
Unnecessary	4	0	0	2	6

[a]Two parents and one teacher reported that parents were consulted only when the parents demanded it.

Some of the examples cited were used to support the interviewers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the committee and will be included in the discussion of that question.

The first closed-end question centered on the perception of the effectiveness or influence of the school committee. Eighteen respondents (62%) saw its influence as moderate. The other respondents were almost evenly split between seeing it as having much influence and seeing it as having little or no influence. Nine of the thirteen parents perceived their effectiveness as moderate. Part of this may be explained by the fact that some of the reports on which they had worked hard seemed to have been disregarded by the principal or the school board, but some of their recommendations had been accepted. Part of this is explained by the fact that they were unsure of what they were supposed to do.

One parent perceived the school committee as having moderate influence but, nonetheless, cited an interesting example of a project that was accepted. The parents in his rural area wanted their children to be able to have a program in agriculture at the secondary level. The school committee developed this project and put pressure on the school board to initiate this program at one of the secondary schools in the district. After many discussions, the school board implemented this project.

Another respondent cited a project which was developed to keep an under-enrolled elementary school open. The school committee began an adult education program during the normal hours for school attendance. The program was well received, and the doors of this school are still open.

On the other hand, examples were given of occasions when the school committee did not succeed in influencing the administration. One school committee became concerned over a safety problem in a secondary school. The chemistry laboratory was never locked. It was feared that students would be tempted to experiment with the chemicals, resulting in fire or explosion. The school committee requested the principal to install locks on the laboratory doors. The principal refused, explaining that no money had been budgeted for this purpose. The school committee then requested that it be placed in the budget for the following year; this was not done. The parent remarked that his committee could accomplish anything it wanted as long as it did not cost money.

A school committee president detailed a six-month struggle to retain their new school principal. This man gave several sound pedagogical reasons why the parents wished the principal to be retained. In spite of the report of the school committee, the principal was relieved of his position by the school board in the middle of the school year.

Looking at the data on the perception of the school board officials, it is found that four of the ten see school committees as having much influence. Five perceive them as having moderate influence. School board officials cited examples of school committee successes but did not mention any failures. All three teachers evaluated these committees as moderately successful. Two out of the three principals stated that school committees had no influence.

Current literature supports the variance of perception of school committees by groups and individuals. One school board member said that, "Education is a service where parents should be able to define the quality of the services that they want to have in the schools and also be able to say what price they are ready to pay for these services."[1]

A school board member in another area thought that parents should not be making recommendations to the school board. They should restrict their involvement to organizing activities in the school, helping teachers individualize instruction, and similar service projects.[2]

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[1]Gaston Therriault, Rapport Synthèse du Colloque Régional des Comités d'Ecoles de la Commission Scolaire de l'Estrie, Sherbrooke, 1974, p. 21. (Author's translation.)

[2]Yvon Paquin quoted in Mario Laliberté, "le bilan de ceux qui travaillent avec les parents," La Revue Scolaire, octobre, 1974, p. 10. (Author's translation.)

A school board official who was interviewed saw school committees as pressure groups. He stated that people were in it for personal reasons, either for what was good for their own child or for advancing themselves toward political office. He said that these committees filled a need on the part of the parents but not a need for the school.

Parents expressed varying reactions also. In an annual report from a large city this statement is found. "We must keep in mind that it is not our intention to either teach or run the school but simply to convey to the principals and the administrators THE WHAT and not THE HOW we want our children taught."[1] This committee saw this as being accomplished through the school committee structure.

Every parent interviewed stated that this was voluntary service. They were extremely proud to be a part of what they considered a worthwhile effort to improve the lives of their children at school.

Teachers agreed that school committees had only moderate influence. A former teacher, who was interviewed but not included as a participant in the survey, strengthened the impression of the writer that it has been difficult to develop school committees in some rural

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[1]Annual Report, Montreal Catholic School Commission, Region "A," 1975-1976, p. 3. (Mimeographed.)

areas. This man had spent the year of 1974-1975 teaching in a rural school about 250 miles north of Quebec City; he could not remember the existence of a school committee in his school.

The second question deals with the relationship between school committees and/or parents' committees and the school board. Because members of parents' committees are presidents of school committees, it is expected that they have leadership ability, and therefore, that they have developed an effective working relationship with the school board. On the other hand, because parents' committees have been established by law, some resistance to them by the school boards is to be expected.

Six out of twenty-nine respondents said that the parents were consulted on important issues. Ten said that they were occasionally consulted. Three said they were able to get the attention of the school board when the parents demanded it. Ten stated that parents were rarely consulted.

Within the group of parents, respondents were split, depending on the local situation. However, six of them (40%) said that parents were rarely consulted. Looking at the responses of the school board officials, it is noted that three stated that parents were consulted and six said that parents were occasionally consulted. None said that it only occurred when parents demanded it,

and only one felt that parents were rarely consulted. The teachers attached low importance to it; the only principal who responded said parents were rarely consulted.

These data demonstrate the fact that there is a difference in the perception of the parents' committee-school board relationship within the group of parents. The group of school board officials perceives it differently from the other three groups.

Typical parent comments included "The school board makes decisions and then tells the parents," "Parents who ask questions get answers, but they are not encouraged to ask," "The school board does not consult with parents enough; it could be terrific if it did," and "The school board likes to have the parents present if they approve of what it is doing."

"School committees, parents' committees, and school boards are becoming highly politicized." This was a common assertion. It was cited a number of times as a factor which prevented more honest consultation. Members of school committees and parents' committees were perceived as using this position as a springboard to higher office. It was felt that this prevented them from concentrating on what was best for the schools and the children.

One parents' committee president was determined to develop a consultative relationship with the school board. Therefore, she attended every school board meeting. After three months of sitting in silence, she was finally invited to speak. She took advantage of the opportunity by explaining the position of the parents' committee. A relationship began to develop, and the school board began to develop a policy of consultation with the parents.

Some parents perceived the relationship with the school board as truly consultative. They had met with success in working on the difficult problem of closing under-enrolled schools, in deciding which special programs should be offered in which secondary schools, and in developing projects to meet the needs of learning-disabled students in an inner-city school. Other successful projects centered on dropouts, absenteeism, parent-child difficulties, and report cards.

Another aspect of the successful functioning of these committees is that of obtaining adequate secretarial help. Because budgets are tight and there is some resistance to these committees, it is expected that there is some difficulty in obtaining supplies, getting reports typed, and having storage space.

Surprisingly, eighteen out of twenty-one respondents said that there was adequate secretarial help.

However, some of the respondents' comments modified their answers. It seems that in one school committee, little help is provided by the school. However, secretarial help is adequate because there are parents in the group who are trained and willing to do the work. In others, parents have no difficulty in having reports typed up by the school secretary, but the need for a filing cabinet for records has not been met. The larger urban school districts make the facilities of the school commission offices available to the parents' committees. Judging by the poor reproductive quality of reports from other areas, a problem exists there.

The last question in this group deals with the Provincial Federation of Parents' Committees. Because parents have expressed some dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of parent consultation with school boards, it is expected that they favor an organization that would provide them with a stronger voice. The question to obtain these data was a late addition, made after the discovery of the existence of this organization.

The fact that half of the respondents did not mention this group may be indicative of the low importance attached to it by some. Of the fifteen who responded to the question, no one perceived it as providing a strong voice for parents at present. Eight deemed it unnecessary, especially in urban areas. It was perceived as poorly

organized, funded by sources who had a vested interest, and did not ascertain parent opinion before making position statements. It was perceived as an organization which was more representative of the problems of rural areas and small towns than of problems existent in the large cities.

The other half of the respondents recognized the weaknesses of the organization. However, they were frustrated by the lack of response from the Ministry of Education to their concerns. Therefore, they wanted to have the Provincial Federation strengthened to provide a strong voice at that level.

Problems Affecting the Work of School Committees

The fourth and final set of data centers around problems identified by members of the educational community in Quebec which hinder the effectiveness of these committees. These problems have been identified and discussed in Chapter VI. It remains, in this chapter, to demonstrate which members of which groups perceive them as real problems and which solutions have been proposed by them.

Due to the fact that the school committee is not voluntary but has been legislated into existence in every school in the province, a certain amount of resistance is expected on the part of principals and

teachers. As for parents, considering the fact that they have never before been involved with the schools, it is expected that their efforts are hampered by feelings of uncertainty over the purpose of their mission and lack of training in various aspects of working as part of a group. Because the Ministry of Education did not consider the experience of parent groups already functioning when writing the law and the guidelines, some problems are expected with the function of the school committees.

After preliminary discussion with informed people in Quebec, five questions were selected to obtain data concerning these problems (see Table 4). The first question deals with the relationship of the principal with the school committee. Twelve out of twenty-eight respondents said that the principal facilitates the work of the school committee by providing necessary information on school problems and by generally encouraging parent participation. Nine stated that the principal provides the parents with only that information which he wants them to have and is lukewarm toward parent participation. Seven reported that the principal merely complies with the law and either does not encourage parent involvement or actually discourages it. Looking at the group of parents who responded, it is seen that seven (50%) perceive the principal as encouraging, four as lukewarm,

TABLE 4

PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE WORK OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Principal-School Committee Relations	Parent	Principal	Teacher	School Board	Total
Encourages	7	0	1	4	12
Lukewarm	4	1	1	3	9
Discourages	3	2	1	1	7
Teachers-School Committee					
Facilitate	3	0	1	0	4
Sometimes facilitate	4	1	2	5	12
Rarely facilitate	6	2	0	0	8
Training for Parents					
Professional meetings training work-shops	7	3	1	9	20
Training work-shops only	7	0	1	0	8
No training	1	0	0	0	1
Date of Election					
May	1	0	0	0	1
September	5	1	2	0	8
October	9	2	1	0	12
Proposed Date of Election					
May	6	0	0	3	9
September	5	0	1	0	6
October	4	3	2	0	9

and three as discouraging. This is explained by the fact that the school committee is a local phenomenon, and each parent responded according to the way in which he experienced it in his school. None of the principals questioned was enthusiastic about his school committee experience. One had made an effort to facilitate the establishment of the school committee but when faced with what she considered lack of competence on the part of the parents, she decided that the school committee work was too time consuming in the face of other priorities and became lukewarm. The other two principals merely complied with the law and said that they did not need parents in the school.

Each of the three teachers interviewed responded differently to the question. The responses reflect the experience each has had in the individual schools. On the other hand, half of the school board officials reported that principals were encouraging the work of school committees. This may be explained by the fact that these people spend much of their time working with school committees who are meeting with success in their efforts to establish a consultative relationship. They are aware that problems exist, but they did not exhibit a willingness to provide information on this problem.

The question on the relationship between teachers and school committees brought forth a mixed reaction.

However, twelve (50%) respondents said that teachers sometimes facilitate communication between the teaching staff and the parents. Five thought that the teacher worked well as a facilitator and eight reported that the teacher rarely facilitates communication. Interestingly enough, two of the teachers admitted that the teacher on the committee functions on a "sometimes" basis. Parents were split, as is to be expected, according to their own local experience. Principals did not see the teacher as an effective link. Only five of the school board officials responded to the question; they all perceived teachers as only "sometimes" providing effective communication.

The comments offered tended to qualify the responses somewhat. It was discovered that teachers participated when asked to explain methods and materials in their subject matter area. They also spoke to parents to present their side in the recent teacher-government negotiations. No one gave an example of a teacher engaged in productive communication at a school committee or staff meeting for any other reason. In fact, a few said that there was a different teacher at each monthly school committee meeting. This situation did not help in providing continuity. Considering the fact that teachers have had no training in parent-community relations, the reluctance of teachers to interact with

parents is not surprising. Due to the comments made qualifying the responses, it seems that the responses on the questionnaire overstate the degree of participation on the part of the teachers.

The question of providing adequate training for parents is one that has been discussed in a previous chapter. Looking at the data in Table 4, it is seen that twenty out of twenty-nine respondents felt that adequate opportunities were provided for parents to attend professional meetings as well as training workshops. Only one person, a parent, stated that no help was available. The other eight reported that training workshops had been held, although opportunities did not yet exist to attend professional meetings where educational issues might be discussed. None of the literature reported training workshops in rural areas. Some regions provided animators who would go out to help local school committees upon demand. Most of the parents were not aware of this service, and a Ministry official admitted that this was not well publicized.

The issue of elections has been discussed also. The data show that twelve out of twenty respondents reported that their election was held in October. Nine out of twenty-four expressed a desire to hold the election in May; six wished to hold it in September. It is significant that all three principals and two of

the teachers preferred to wait until October. Some of the parents wanted to hold the election earlier but were convinced that the law did not allow it and, therefore, wanted their answer recorded as October.

The persons interviewed were asked an open-end question to obtain data on recommendations they would make for improving the work of the committees. To summarize the responses, it may be stated that almost everyone was looking to the Ministry to propose changes in Law 27. Some wanted the role defined more precisely; some wanted more freedom in determining the date of the election. Almost everyone wanted to be able to elect school committee members to a two-year term, electing half of the committee each year.

It was suggested by at least six respondents that there be a way to circulate or exchange annual reports so that school committees and parents' committees could profit from each other's experiences. Some had begun to do this with neighboring districts.

The other recommendations had to do with local problems such as obtaining the agenda of school board meetings and establishing better communication with the principal.

Those parents who had experienced difficulty in this area wanted more honest communication with principals and teachers. Parents who had met with success looked

to the Ministry for decentralization so that they, the principal, and the school board would have more freedom to structure the school program according to what was best for their local community. All respondents expressed a need to develop and clarify the meaning of consultation.

Summary

The data demonstrate that differences exist in the perception of school committees and parents' committees by the various members of the educational community. This lack of uniformity in the responses is significant in that it provides evidence that school committees are basically a local phenomenon, functioning well in some localities and hardly at all in others.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The modern thirty-one story skyscraper which can be seen from most areas of Quebec City houses the offices of the Ministry of Education. From its windows on the higher floors, it is possible to have a magnificent view of the city, the St. Lawrence River, and the surrounding towns. Its domination of the skyline symbolizes the tremendous changes made in the lives of the people by its officials. It also symbolizes the extreme centralization of education in the province.

Quebeckers explained how necessary this centralization was. It was considered the only way to force the sweeping changes that had to be made in the educational system. Now, however, school administrators and other members of the educational community complain about how hemmed in they are by the rules and guidelines of the Ministry. They say there is little room for initiative or creativity. Administrators are merely puppets who administer the budget. They are hoping that the Ministry

will go ahead with the plans to decentralize that it has been talking about. The extreme centralization does not lend itself easily to democratic participation.

The Parent Report states that the new educational system must be based on democracy, participation, and humanism. In a democratic society, the power resides in the people; it is the will of the majority which becomes the law. In order for this system to be truly operative, there must be a broad base of participation on the part of the populace. Otherwise, there is a danger that the will of the majority is, in truth, the will of a vocal minority. In order for people to participate more fully, they need to adopt the new concept of humanism, to understand the contemporary world and to adapt to it. The structure established for school committees and parents' committees is one means of carrying out all three of the underlying concepts of the new philosophy of education.

Concluding Observations

As an outside observer, this writer finds the reforms in the educational system of Quebec to be tremendously impressive and far-reaching. Education is now accessible to all the residents of Quebec. Whether rich or poor, rural or urban, a Quebecker has the opportunity to obtain the education necessary to fulfill his aspirations within the limits of his capabilities and

motivation. The clerical domination of the Church and the elitist pattern of education have ended. The changes in philosophy, the restructuration of the school system, and most notably the addition of the CEGEP have supplied a fertile field for the growth of a new class of Quebeckers, capable of taking their place in any area of modern, technological society. Granted, there are problems which must be solved, but this is to be expected when so much is accomplished so quickly. Education is usually evolutionary as is the society of which it is a part. In Quebec, the changes had to be revolutionary. Now the resulting problems are being identified and solutions evolved.

Such is the case with school committees and parents' committees. Inviting parents to serve in an advisory capacity to the schools was a revolutionary concept. The fact that it was proposed at all is surprising; the fact that it was actually mandated and introduced into the school system is shocking.

It is generally accepted these days that, in democratic countries, the school is part of the community and that parents should have a voice in the education of their children. However, since Quebec parents have not had a tradition of involvement in school life, it should not be expected that one piece of legislation will result in the immediate participation of parents in the school

system. In fact, the most significant general conclusion which may be drawn from this research is that parent participation is in a state of evolution resulting in considerable variance throughout the province in the degree of participation, effectiveness of operation, and acceptance. This variance may be attributed to the history or lack of history of other parent groups in the area, the quality of the parents on the committees, and the help and encouragement provided or not provided by the Ministry of Education, the local school boards, and the school principals. School committees and parents' committees are indeed a local phenomenon.

This innovation was introduced in the fall of 1972. Now, some four and a half years later, the school committee is a body which is still in a state of evolution, which has not yet found its place in many communities, but which could be a vigorous force in bringing about change in the community. In some areas parents have developed the school committees and parents' committees to the degree that they are effective advisory bodies to the principals and to the school board. In these locations, they have made as much of an impact as is possible without some decentralization of the school system. In other areas, the committees are still operating at a level where they are continuing to become informed on school practices and school issues and

searching for effective means to share that information with the other members of the community. In yet other areas, the committees are barely functioning, if at all, and do not even publish an annual report.

The concept of the school as part of the community has not been accepted by all the partners in the educational system. There is a need for principals and teachers to study this concept and to obtain some training in parent-school-community relations. All partners do not yet understand what it means to be part of a collectivity and to work for the common good. All parents are not yet aware of the limits of their role as they express their concerns and offer advice to administrators. All principals and school boards are not yet exercising their responsibility to consider parent concerns seriously, to take action on them, or to provide a reasonable explanation for their lack of action.

Some positive results have occurred. More parents are interested in the schools and in the development of their children. Those parents who have become aware of the advantages of the new teaching methods and materials are more supportive of the schools. They are much less apt to criticize, although they do ask questions. Parents who have participated either in providing service to the school or by helping to give advisory opinions feel a sense of pride and well-being because

they are making a voluntary contribution. They have also benefited by discovering unknown capacities within themselves. Children who see their parents working in the school feel that school is more important. Some principals and teachers are able to provide more and better instructional activities due to parent help in classrooms, in libraries, and on field trips. Some are becoming aware of the value of the school as an integral part of the life of the community. Contacts with parents remind principals and teachers of the home situation of their students and the values which they have been taught in the home. There is even value in merely having the school committee structure even though some committees are not accomplishing much. It does provide an avenue for constructive communication between the parents and the schools who desire it.

On the negative side, it is unfortunate that the success or failure of the school committee may depend on the behavior of the principal. It is also unfortunate that some school boards have resisted the efforts of the parents' committee to serve as an advisory board. On the other hand, this is not surprising since the practice of electing school board members from the general population only began in 1972.

There are some important questions which may only be answered by future research. How many schools in the

province do not yet have school committees? How many parents do school committees actually represent? How do students perceive parent participation in the schools? How has parent participation affected Adult Education programs? Do school committees represent the majority? Or are they a minority of activists? How politicized are they? How much of an impact do they have on local school policy? How many use this as a springboard to the school board or other political office?

Sufficient evidence to respond authoritatively to the above questions is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, due to the concern expressed by a number of individuals in Quebec, it is important to offer a comment on the last question. It is impossible to assess people's motives in seeking election to the school committee. From conversations with parents, it may be reported that those who present themselves for election are genuinely interested in the education of their children, although a few do attend general meetings out of curiosity and find themselves nominated and elected due to sparse attendance or lack of interest on the part of others. After a parent has been involved in school committee work for some time and has become familiar with the operation of the schools, it seems to be a logical next step to run for election to the school board. Such a candidate is presumably more qualified than one who

has not had this close proximity to the schools. Persons interviewed who had followed this route had done so out of a desire to use their familiarity with school matters to help the community and also to attempt to improve relations between the school board and the parents' committee. In communities where school boards have several former school committee members on the board, a better working relationship has developed with the parents.

The innovation of school committees and parents' committees has not been successfully adopted on a province-wide basis by all the members of the educational community. In order to demonstrate why this lack of adoption occurred, the writer has evaluated this innovation in terms of Roger's perceived attributes of innovations.[1]

Rapid adoption of an innovation is more likely to occur when it is perceived as being superior to the idea which it replaces. Its relative advantage has more of an impact when it responds to a crisis situation. No such crisis existed in Quebec in 1972. The major structural changes in the educational system had already been implemented. In the progression of effecting the remaining changes, Law 27 was passed in 1971 to provide for the

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[1]Everett M. Rogers with F. Floyd Shoemaker, Communication of Innovations (New York: The Free Press, 1971), pp. 134-57.

election of school board members and to establish the participation of parents on school committees. The innovation of school committees was perceived as desirable by educational planners in the Ministry of Education and, as such, was passed through the Legislature after some debate. When the guidelines were distributed to the school boards and then to the school principals, no particular incentive such as additional money was offered. It was a matter of complying with yet another regulation to add to the many already in force. Many principals did not see any advantage to having parents in the schools. Neither did all teachers. They work under a contract which details how their time is spent. Principals and teachers, in general, perceived the innovation as an additional demand on their time and a usurpation of authority in their domain. There was no built-in motivation for them to adopt the innovation. School boards perceived it as having minimal importance. As for parents, some considered it an opportunity to begin or continue exerting influence in an area in which they felt they had a right to be heard. Others could not understand what advantage was offered by becoming involved with the schools. This lack of perception of the advantage of school committees provides one explanation for the relatively slow rate at which this is being accepted.

Another factor is that of compatibility. Quebeckers did not see this as consistent with their past tradition or experiences. It has already been noted that until the 1960s, democracy and participation were not part of the Quebeckers' tradition. They had been taught that their only duty was to get their children to school; what happened once the children entered the school was not their concern. By 1972, they had begun to become acquainted with the new philosophy, more so in urban than in rural areas, but they did not yet see how their participation was important.

If a potential adopter thinks he understands an innovation, he will adopt it more readily. It has been demonstrated that the role of the school committee has been vaguely defined and vaguely perceived by the members of the educational community. Parents are confused and uncertain of the expectations placed upon them. Thus, it is not surprising that this innovation has achieved only minimal success.

In the area of trialability, the Ministry of Education might have met with more success in implementing the innovation. Having in mind the fact that parent groups had been operating in certain cities in Quebec, the Ministry might have begun pilot programs in these cities. These could have served as demonstration projects for the rest of the province. In this way others

might have observed the degree of success and become motivated to adopt the innovation in their regions. This was not done. In fact, neighboring school committees and parents' committees are only now beginning to contact each other to seek advice and to exchange ideas.

Considering the above factors, the role of the change agent, which in this case is the Ministry of Education, is expected to be considerable. On the contrary, the Ministry did not clearly demonstrate a need other than to comply with the law. It did provide guidelines but it did not provide wide-scale help in establishing the committees. It has set up some service to these committees through the regional offices of the Ministry, but this help has not been widely publicized. It has not, in general, made a strong effort to ensure the success of the innovation. It did not identify and publicize possible difficulties which might be encountered. It did not establish a feedback mechanism to respond to difficulties and concerns as they were discovered and expressed. It did not deal with the resistance shown by principals and teachers other than to reiterate the law.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1--Throughout this study it has been noted that a need exists to define the role of the committees in such a way that parents can clearly understand what their function is in the schools. However, it does not seem advisable to define this role in a way which limits parents to certain activities, which stifles creativity, and which hinders responding to the needs of the community. By law parents serve in an advisory capacity, and they need to understand the limits of their role. The school board, the principal, and the past president of the committee have a responsibility to make parents aware of the progression of informing themselves, informing others, and then taking on the role of advisor. It is not realistic to expect parents with limited training to study a report or a list of recommendations and return with a number of ideas or with a clear concept of their role.

Therefore, it is recommended that a study be made of the concept of parent-school consultation to attempt to better define the role of these committees. The results of the study may be disseminated to principals and school boards to be shared with parents.

Some parents have been calling for the authority to engage in decision-making. This is one aspect of the role which seems to be clearly denied, and it is the

opinion of this writer that parents continue to serve on these committees in an advisory capacity only. If a parent wishes to serve in a decision-making capacity, he may take advantage of the structure provided for that purpose and run for election to the school board.

Recommendation 2--The lack of continuity on school committees from year to year has been identified as a pressing problem. It is therefore recommended that Bill 27 (1971) be amended to clearly allow the election of school committee members in May if desired by individual school committees. In such cases, provision may be made, if it seems necessary, to keep one or two posts open until fall to accommodate parents of children new to the school. In addition, it is recommended that the law allow a rotating system whereby members are elected to a two-year term, half of them to be elected each year.

This will allow the committees time to organize in the spring for the following year. It is important for them to identify topics for study at that time and to form the various sub-committees. Then, during the summer, a tentative schedule of meetings may be drawn up. Of course, consultations with the principal and other parents may be held to be sure that all important topics have been included. It has been shown that the

number of tangible results is directly related to the degree of planning and organization that exists within the committee.

It seems important to insert a mention here of the fact that some parents have called for an increase in the money allocated for the use of the committees. It is agreed that it is not democratic to restrict school committee participation to those parents who can afford to absorb the expense. On the other hand, it is unrealistic for school committees to expect an increase in their budget. Huge sums of money have been spent to reform the educational system. The province of Quebec is having important economic difficulties. The amount of money provided for education is decreasing. When budget cuts have to be made in the areas of programs, staff, instructional materials, and student services, it is not realistic to expect more money to be provided for school committees. Parents may have to rearrange their priorities for spending the money allowed and rely on fund-raising activities if more money is considered to be necessary.

Recommendation 3--It has been shown that a need exists to establish systematic communication between parent groups. It is recommended that school committees establish contact with other school committees inside and outside their district. In fact, the Provincial Federation of Parents' Committees might serve as a

clearinghouse for this type of information. Communication might also be established through the regional branches of the Ministry of Education.

Not only is it essential to exchange reports but also to make personal visits to school committee meetings in other areas. The two agencies mentioned above could be used to make arrangements for these visits.

Other than the above, the writer sees the Provincial Federation of Parents' Committees as having minimal importance. School committees and parents' committees are intended to be a local phenomenon addressing themselves to local needs. It seems clear that this is where the real benefits are to be derived. If the other recommendations are followed to the extent that they result in the improved functioning of the local committees, then this organization will not be necessary.

Recommendation 4--A concern has been expressed by members of the educational community in Quebec that the committees do not always represent the majority of the parents. To this end, it is recommended that school committees and parents' committees establish an effective communication network with those parents who are not committee members. To have validity as an advisory group, it is important that the committees ascertain the opinions of as many parents as possible before adopting an official position on any issue.

Recommendation 5--Because of the fact that the behavior of the principal often determines the effectiveness of the school committee, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and the teacher training institutions provide in-service training for principals and teachers in the concept of the school as part of the community and in parent-community relations. Until this has been accomplished, it seems futile to expect improvement in the function of school committees in the many areas where this has been identified as a problem.

Once the parents have established an effective organization and principals and teachers have accepted their part of the responsibility to make it work, open and honest communication between the home and the school will be effected. On the next level, that of parents' committees and school boards, communication will continue to improve as parents function more effectively and as school board members become more competent and more confident in their ability to do their job. The growing number of former school committee members who are elected to school boards is becoming a tremendous help to improved communication, also.

Recommendation 6--School committees and parents' committees have been established to provide an effective local voice for the schools. However, now that some parents' groups have shown themselves to be truly ready

to serve in an advisory capacity to these schools, it has been demonstrated that local school boards and administrators do not have the necessary autonomy to make those decisions which seem desirable for the well-being of the children and the adults in the community. Therefore, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education effect some decentralization of the educational system to provide for more effective interaction between the home and the school on the local level. Administrators need the power to make those changes which will enable the school to function as a true segment of the community which it serves.

Recommendation 7--One final recommendation is left to be made. A question exists as to whether or not it is important to continue to legislate the presence of school committees and parents' committees. The practice of inviting parents to work in close cooperation with the school and to serve in an advisory capacity has been established. At the present time, if this democratic practice is to continue, there is a need for a legal structure for assuring this participation. Once the concept of the school as part of the community has been firmly established and accepted by principals and teachers, and the fact of parent involvement has become a part of the tradition, then it is recommended that the law be changed or repealed to make this particular form

of parent participation voluntary. In this way, the structure may be used only in those communities where it fulfills a perceived need. In other communities, schools may consult with parents or parents may express their concerns in other ways.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Part 1

Role

1. The role of the school committee has been described in the following ways. Which one most accurately describes your perception of it?
   a. Fund-raising and providing service
   b. Consulting with the principal on all matters pertaining to the school
   c. Both of the above

2. Which of the following statements best describes your perception of the importance of school committees and parents' committees?
   a. They have a genuine role to play in the educational system.
   b. They are a facade to make parents think they are participating.

Participation

1. Which figure best represents the number of parents in your area who attend the general meetings?
   a. 10% or less
   b. 11% to 20%
   c. 21% to 50%
   d. more than 50%

2. What is the relationship between other parents and members of the school committee?
   a. Parents are interested in school committee activities and provide information and/or help when requested to do so.
   b. Parents sometimes provide information and/or help for school committee activities when requested to do so.
   c. Parents rarely or never help in school committee activities.

3. Do the members of the school committee adequately reflect the socio/economic levels of the members of the community?
   a. Yes
   b. All levels represented but a high proportion of professional people
   c. No

Function

1. How great a voice do you think your school committee and parents' committee have?
   a. Much influence on many issues and problems
   b. Moderate influence
   c. Little or no influence

2. How do you perceive the relationship between your school board and the parents' committee?
   a. School board consults parents on important issues.
   b. School board occasionally consults with parents.
   c. School board rarely consults with parents.

3. Is adequate secretarial help provided for the school committee and parents' committee?
   a. Yes
   b. Sometimes
   c. No

4. Which statement best describes your perception of the Provincial Federation of Parents' Committees?
   a. It provides a strong voice for presenting parent concerns at the Ministry level.
   b. It is needed to provide a strong voice for parents but is not functioning well.
   c. It is unnecessary.

Problems

1. What is your perception of the relationship of the principal with your school committee?
   a. He facilitates the work of the committee by providing information on school needs and problems and generally encourages parent participation.

b. He provides parents with only that information which he wishes them to have and is lukewarm toward parent participation.
c. He goes through the motions to comply with the law and either does not encourage parent participation or appears to discourage it.

2. How do you perceive the relationship between teachers and the school committee?
   a. Teacher facilitates communication between teachers and parents.
   b. Teacher sometimes facilitates communication.
   c. Teacher attends meetings to comply with the law but rarely facilitates communication.

3. What training has been provided for parents in your area to facilitate their functioning competently as members of school committees and parents' committees?
   a. Professional meetings to discuss current issues and workshops on how to serve as president, secretary, member of a team.
   b. Workshops on functioning as president, secretary, member of a team.
   c. No training

4. When do you hold your election of school committee members?
   a. May
   b. September
   c. October

5. When would you like to hold this election?
   a. May
   b. September
   c. October

Part 2

1. Discuss the work of your school committee. Give examples of real consultation or evidence of occasions when parents were responsible for obtaining needed improvements in the school system. Evidence that parents were ignored?

2. What recommendations would you make for improving the function of these committees?

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