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Canadian High Schools in the 1920's and 1930's: The Social Challenge to the Academic Tradition

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Article abstract

L'auteur traite d'abord de l'augmentation assez spectaculaire du nombre d'élèves dans les écoles secondaires pendant les décennies 1919-1939 pour ensuite s'interroger sur les causes et effets de cet état de chose. Deux provinces, l'Ontario et l'Alberta, lui servent de points d'observation, l'une représentant la société déjà industrialisée de l'est, l'autre, celle plus jeune et plus rurale de l'ouest.

Comment donc s'explique cette forte montée de la population étudiante? Deux facteurs se distinguent comme étant nettement plus importants : celui du progrès technique qui réduit de beaucoup le besoin d'une main d'oeuvre non-spécialisée d'une part, et, d'autre part, celui du fait que la société semble de plus en plus consciente du rôle de surveillance et de direction que l'école peut assumer dans la vie de l'étudiant.

Les effets sont tout aussi marquants. Durant les années vingt, on voit se multiplier les écoles de métiers ainsi que les écoles techniques et commerciales. De même, les activités parascolaires se diversifient et il y a peu d'écoles qui n'ait son conseil étudiant, son journal, son annuaire, ou encore, ses compétitions sportives. Cependant, il n'en demeure pas moins que, dans la majorité des écoles, le programme académique change peu et qu'il est toujours dressé en fonction du petit nombre d'élèves qui se dirige vers l'université. Ces changements s'observent tant en Ontario qu'en Alberta bien qu'ils s'effectuent plus lentement dans cette dernière.

Pendant les années trente, le nombre toujours grandissant d'étudiants amène des changements plus radicaux. Dans l'ouest du pays, on adopte bientôt une nouvelle formule où les septième, huitième et neuvième années sont considérées comme un tout servant d'intermédiaire entre l'école élémentaire et l'école secondaire. Cette formule ne sera pas acceptée en Ontario; on optera plutôt pour de plus nombreuses options de cours au niveau de la neuvième année. Autres changements : on se ralliera à une école qui abrite tous les secteurs sous le même toit, et de plus, on abolira les examens dits "d'entrée" pour se tourner du côté du système des "recommandations". En somme, l'école secondaire de 1939 est différente de celle de 1919 tant au qualitatif qu'au quantitatif.

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Canadian High Schools in the 1920's and 1930's: The Social Challenge to the Academic Tradition

ROBERT M. STAMP

Was there trouble at Ottawa Collegiate? Loose behaviour and immoral conduct? Readers of the Ottawa *Journal* and the Ottawa *Citizen* might have reached these conclusions in the autumn of 1927 had they been reading a series of interviews with Rev. E.B. Wyllie of Erskine Presbyterian Church. During the month of October, Wyllie filled the columns of the city's two English-language daily newspapers with a steady stream of allegations. The collegiate was a veritable cesspool of sin—characterized by unsupervised dances, disrespect for teachers, moral impropriety, the acquisition of undesirable habits, hip-flask drinking at student parties, and wild escapades in automobiles. Wyllie demanded a crack-down by school authorities.[1] Pressed by editorials in both the *Journal* and the *Citizen*, the Ottawa Collegiate Institute Board called on the provincial government to establish a commission of inquiry. Premier G. Howard Ferguson responded by naming Mr. Justice R.A. Orde of the Provincial Supreme Court as a one-man commission.

Wyllie provided Orde with additional allegations at a public hearing on November 9. Lavatory walls were covered with grafitti and "obscene pictures." There were dances where "conditions would make even the most worldly hesitate to have their children go, especially young girls." There had been a sleigh ride party across the river to Hull where "a good deal of roughness and drinking took place."[2] But Wyllie would provide no specific evidence and refused to reveal his sources, both in public and private sittings of the commission. Other witnesses were unable to corroborate his charges. Justice Orde quickly concluded that Wyllie's charges were unfounded, and he rapped the clergyman's knuckles severely. "Any one with experience of school life," Orde reported, "knows that there have always been instances of insubordination, and of immoral or improper conduct" when teenagers gather. But "as long as human nature is as it is, these things will continue." These habits, he concluded, "are quite independent of any system of schooling" and were no more prevelant in the Ottawa Collegiate Institute than in any other school.[3]

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1. Provincial Archives of Ontario (PAO), RG 18, Ottawa Collegiate Institute Inquiry, 1927, "Report," pp. 1-5.
2. *Ibid.*, "Evidence," pp. 6-30.
3. *Ibid.*, "Report," pp. 18-9.

The significance of this 1927 controversy lies neither in Wyllie's charges nor in Orde's dismissal of them. What the controversy reveals is the growing public interest in the high school years in English-Canadian society in the period following the First World War. For the first time the majority of English-Canadian teenagers were attending high school. Much more than in the pre-war period, the high school student body was now drawn from wider ranges of social-class and achievement-level backgrounds. The students' occupational and vocational demands were also more diverse. And this all occurred in the post-war decade of the 1920's when, in the words of Philip Ariès, "awareness of youth became a general phenomenon."[4] What economic and social factors caused such a dramatic increase in high school enrolments during the two decades between 1919 and 1939? What effects did these quantitative and qualitative changes in the student population have on high school curricular and extra-curricular programs? An examination of the high school in two provinces—Ontario, in the older, more industrialized East, and Alberta, in the newer, more agrarian West—may provide some tentative answers to these questions.

I

The Orde Commission dramatized the problem of rising enrolments. At Ottawa Collegiate, Principal A.H. McDougall was ultimately responsible for the academic performance and out-of-class behaviour of more than 2000 students. Four years earlier the school had been split into two campuses; by 1927 there were 881 pupils in the old building (soon to be re-named Lisgar Collegiate) and 1187 students in a new location several blocks away (the future Glebe Collegiate). It was the same in Toronto. Riverdale Collegiate in the city's east end jumped from 448 students in 1918 to 1180 ten years later, despite the channelling of hundreds more students into the newly-opened Danforth Technical School and the Eastern High School of Commerce. Such enrolment increases were not confined to Ontario's larger urban centres. One-room country schools added "Fifth Book" classes for those students continuing on to Grades 9 and 10. Villages sprouted continuation schools; towns up-graded their continuation schools to high school status. September, 1921, saw a province-wide increase of 23 per cent in high school enrolments. While Ontario's population rose by 17 per cent during the decade of the 1920's, secondary school enrolment quadrupled. When Toronto high school inspector William Michell was asked in 1928 how to halt the trend, his only suggestion was to "kill the stork."[5]

Alberta's increases paralleled those of Ontario. Whereas one public high school had comfortably housed Calgary's 600 pupils in 1914, four were in operation ten years later to serve 1800 students. High school grades were rapidly added to one-room schools throughout rural Alberta, while provincial officials planned district school boards, school dormitories, and correspondence courses to reach teenagers in sparsely populated rural areas. Provincial statistics showed a 33 per

4. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York, 1962), p. 30.
5. *Canadian School Journal*, January 1929, p. 3.

cent increase in high school enrolments between 1920 and 1921, and a 410 per cent increase in the two decades between 1916 and 1936. A national survey in 1923 estimated that 34 per cent of all fifteen-to-seventeen year old English-Canadian youth were attending high school. "The high school population . . . now includes a proportion of the available youth which is unprecedented except in the United States."[6] Alberta's chief inspector of schools reported in 1924 that "the demand for secondary education is everywhere, and all the time on the increase." To G.W. Gorman, this was "but a further evidence of advancement and progress in the world."[7]

Why did English-Canadian teenagers attend high school in ever-increasing numbers and remain longer than their fathers and mothers? Principal McDougall of Ottawa cited four factors before the Orde Commission: enactment of compulsory attendance legislation, abolition of fees, vanishing employment opportunities for early school leavers, and the intangible "desire on the part of more parents of secondary education for their children."[8] Yet McDougall's first two points were more symptomatic of change than causal factors in themselves. Ontario's Adolescent School Attendance Act, which raised the school leaving age to sixteen years, took effect in September, 1921. But "the movement had started before the war," concluded one principal. "The real effort of the war was to check the rising tendency to attend secondary schools. When the damming back was removed by the termination of the war, we had the sudden great rise in attendance."[9] Alberta's extensions of the minimum school leaving age to fifteen years in 1918 and to sixteen years in 1925 produced no noticeable bulges in the upward growth of enrolment; indeed the largest single year percentage increase in that province occurred in 1921. Nor could the explanation be found solely in the question of tuition fees. The final abolition of token fees might have had some effect for the 50 per cent of Ontario high schools still charging them in 1920, but enrolment jumps in these schools the following year were not significantly greater than in schools which had voluntarily abolished tuition fees years earlier. And Alberta's public high schools had dispensed with tuition fees long before the First World War.

More satisfactory explanations of the growth in attendance are to be found in the economic and social climates of the post-war period. Technological advances in business and industry were rapidly reducing the need for unskilled labour. "A generation ago," remarked Inspector Gorman of Alberta in 1924, "a public school education was considered adequate for all except those who proposed to enter upon the learned professions. But new standards have been set up for admission to the professions, business and the skilled trades. At least partial high school training is essential to-day to success in any occupation."[10] As

6. W.F. Dyde, *Public Secondary Education in Canada* (New York, 1929), pp. 67-70.
7. Alberta Department of Education (ADE), *Annual Report, 1924,* p. 70.
8. PAO, RG 18, Ottawa Collegiate Institute Inquiry, "Evidence," p. 60.
9. P.F. Gavin, "Some Tendencies in Secondary Education," *Proceedings of the Ontario Educational Association, 1927,* (Proc. OEA), p. 278.
10. ADE, *Annual Report, 1924,* p. 70.

another school promoter put it, a high school education "is becoming more and more an essential part of a youth's equipment for life's battles, and that the unprepared will be obliged to fall to the rear in the competition for place and position." Formerly, the question asked by a businessman of the applicant for a position was "Have you passed the Entrance Exam?" But by the 1920's, the question most commonly asked was "Have you got your Matric?" or "How many years have you attended a High School?"[11] *Maclean's Magazine* summed it up in blatant monetary terms, "Each day in High School adds $25.00 to his life's earnings."[12]

But increased high school attendance promised more than economic benefits. Many parents were concerned about the social and moral temptations confronting their offspring during the 1920's and, thus, tacitly supported the supervised atmosphere and the socialization role promised by the high school. Schoolmen throughout English-Canada spoke frequently of this "character building" and "citizenship training" mission. In broader terms, it was a growing custodial role, as the high school assumed many of the attributes of the nineteenth-century elementary school and became an institution of child custodianship. Of course students could and did view it in completely different terms. With its diverse curriculum, its lavish physical facilities, its extra-curricular activities and its opportunities for peer group contact, the high school offered an exciting interlude between the carefree days of childhood and the responsibilities of adulthood.

These pupils, who streamed out of the elementary schools and into the high schools in increasing numbers during the 1920's, came from a wider socio-economic background than ever before. "The High School is now a common meeting ground for the children of all the classes," wrote one inspector in 1920. "Here the sons and daughters of the tradesman, the mechanic, the labouring man, the professional man . . . mingle together and work together in the spirit of amity and equality, regardless of distinctions of class."[13] While egalitarians could still complain of the under-representation of children from unskilled labouring backgrounds, nevertheless the character of the student population had shifted from the more elitist orientation of the pre-war years. "Many of the pupils no longer belong to those social levels in the community for whose children a complete high school education and subsequent entrance upon the university is regarded as a social and professional necessity," concluded a national study in 1929. Such a phenomenon had definite implications for the curriculum. "Such pupils may enter high school and then drop out again if their education does not appear to be satisfying any strong and rather immediate need."[14]

These students were part of the new youth culture of the 1920's. Increases in productivity, affluence and leisure time all contributed to making what came to be called the flapper age or the jazz age. Large numbers of youths who were brought up in comparative affluence, free of concerns about involvement in production, began to develop a different style of life around the new technology of

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11. Toronto Board of Education (TBE), *Annual Report, 1922,* p. 49.
12. *Maclean's Magazine,* September 8, 1925, p. 3.
13. Ontario Department of Education (ODE), *Annual Report, 1920,* p. 56.
14. Dyde, *Public Secondary Education in Canada,* p. 67.

the twentieth century. More rapidly than their parents, they embraced the automobile, the movie theatre, the radio, new styles of dress and dance. "For the girls, there was the freedom of daringly short skirts, bobbed and marcelled hair, cosmetics openly applied, and the boyish silhouette," recalled a student of Ottawa's Glebe Collegiate. "For the men, escape from the tyranny of hard collars, the ever-present coat and stovepipe pants to the ease of soft collars, rainbow-hued sweaters and bell-bottom trousers." These daring dress styles were enough of a threat to the older generation; worse still were the behavioural traits that seemed to accompany such changes. "To complete the picture, add the Charleston, the college boy's coon coat, loud-checked plus-fours, and a tin lizzy bedizened with a smart remark for every rattle."[15] To many veteran school personnel and other upholders of traditional moral values, all this seemed to be leading youth straight down the path to hell.

This sometimes flippant, sometimes irreverent spirit of post-war youth created a new set of problems for school authorities, as the Orde Commission so dramatically revealed in Ottawa. Principal McDougall had acquainted the Commission with the facts of teenage school life. Boys and girls met in the corridors and talked freely on their way to class; the students' council did most of the planning for school dances; there were class gatherings in private homes and rented halls over which the school had no control.[16] Toronto trustees complained that "boys are too frequently seen escorting the girls to and from school," but could find no legal means of stopping it. Ottawa trustees were similarly unable to prohibit students from driving their cars to school and parking them on neighbouring streets.[17] By the 1930's, students at Western Canada High School in Calgary were rejecting traditional, staff-supervised, extra-curricular activities in favour of unofficial, underground fraternities and sororities. Most of these Greek-letter groups attempted to portray a favourable image of wholesomeness and charitable work, except for the Zeta Kappa Rho Fraternity which "was formed for the amusement and social entertainment of its members."[18]

Principals and senior officials of the departments of education realized that the challenge of the inter-war decades could only be met by expanding the social role of the Canadian school. The underlying question of this twenty year period was whether this extended role could and should be realized through expanded curricular offerings or through extra-curricular activities. The pattern of the 1920's was to hold firm to a traditional academic curriculum for the vast majority of students, while attempting to serve the social needs of young people through a variety of extra-curricular activities, guidance and counselling services, and segregated vocational and business education programs for the non-academically gifted. The following decade, however, with its severe economic dislocations and attractive philosophies of "progressive" education, brought a change in strategy. By the end of the 1930's, high school systems in English-speaking Canada were

15. Elizabeth Serson, *Glebe: The First Twenty-Five Years* (Ottawa, 1947), p. 8.
16. PAO, RG 18, Ottawa Collegiate Institute Inquiry, "Evidence," pp. 33-70.
17. Toronto *Mail and Empire*, September 30, 1925; Ottawa *Journal*, November 25, 1930.
18. Western Canada Composite High School, *The ACATEC, 1938-39*, p. 68.

moving rapidly to incorporate new social and economic goals into the heart of the academic program for all students.

II

By 1920, Canadian schoolmen seemed to agree that expanded enrolments, together with changing social and economic conditions, necessitated fundamental changes in the high school program. "My own conviction," wrote A.M. Scott, superintendent of schools in Calgary, "is that the present course of study is too bookish and academic." The curriculum must be made "a training for life and all occupations, rather than a training ground for the teaching profession and the university."[19] Principal W.N. Bell of Paris High School in Ontario called for "a curriculum suited to the needs of the student who enters upon his life's work from the doors of the high school." J.C. Miller, then with the Ontario department of education after a number of years in Alberta, warned that such students moving directly into employment "will have to meet, not more student tests in higher years, but the practical tests of everyday employment in their selected occupations." F.W. Merchant, Ontario's director of technical education, saw social as well as vocational obligations towards this expanded student body. He spoke of "the development of character, social efficiency, preparation for citizenship," all summed up in the word "service" which was fast becoming the catchword of socially-oriented American schoolmen in the post-war years.[20]

Vocational education programs in the trades and business subjects were viewed as an important curricular response to the changing economic needs of the 1920's. Non-university bound students, instead of being early drop-outs from an academic program, could now be channelled into specialized technical or commercial programs, equipped with social and vocational life-skills, and funnelled into the market place. By 1928, some twenty-one thousand pupils—more than one-quarter of all Ontario high school students—were enrolled in full-time vocational programs in forty-two schools. Before the First World War, vocational education had been confined to the larger urban centres; during the 1920's it spread to the medium- and smaller-sized cities from one end of the province to the other. Some of these schools were closely linked with local employment needs, such as Sudbury's Mining and Technical School and Ottawa's High School of Commerce. Development was slower in Alberta, due to the slower pace of industrialization and urbanization, but by the end of the 1920's the Calgary public school system could boast both a Commercial High School and a Technical High School as well as a Pre-Vocational School for non-academically inclined adolescent students.

Vocational education was justified on both economic and social grounds. Henry Cody of Ontario sounded more like an apologist for the National Policy than a minister of education when he declared in 1918 that "Canada has been thrown into the mid-stream of world life and the manufacturers of Canada will

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19. *The School,* October 1914, p. 121.
20. *Proc. OEA, 1919,* pp. 140-54, 392-409, 479-91.

compete against the manufacturers of the world. You cannot do everything by tariff, which will never take the place of the good article. To get the good article we must have skilled workmen, and to get good workmen, we must get the education."[21] F.W. Merchant's annual report for that year echoed the call for the "organization of education to provide better trained workers for these industries and trades."[22] Whether the results lived up to the initial hopes is difficult to document. Merchant's successor as director of technical education admitted in 1927 that "some schools are unable as yet to furnish concrete evidence that the purpose is being attained." The only example that D.A. Campbell could cite was the Ford Motor Company's policy of accepting into its tool-making department only graduates of Windsor-Walkerville Technical School.[23] Tom Moore, president of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, questioned how far vocational education really assisted boys and girls to find the occupation for which they were best suited. He also feared that "a slight knowledge of a trade might be disappointing and frustrating when its real or more advanced practice was entered upon." But like most supporters of the movement, Moore was convinced of one thing—that "technical education as a whole filled the void left by the passing of the old apprenticeship."[24]

Vocational schooling was also justified in terms of "making useful citizens." Occasionally this was argued on the specific grounds of industrial harmony as business and government sought ways of riding out the period of post-war labour unrest. "Instructors may do much for students in giving them the proper attitude towards work, towards their job, towards their employer," advocated the principal of London Technical High School. "Instructors may do a service of national importance by becoming ambassadors of a better understanding between labour and capital."[25] More often, educators employed a much broader definition of "good citizenship" as they argued their case for vocational education. Merchant linked "specialized training in the subjects and operations which are fundamental to trades and industries" with "the essentials of a general education as a basis for citizenship." Cody believed "that such institutions should teach good citizenship as well as good workmanship."[26]

The supposedly closer relationship between high school vocational programs and employment gave birth to the guidance or counselling movement during the 1920's. High school principals had always advised students about courses and post-school opportunities. But what had generally been done in an informal way prior to the war now became formalized during the 1920's. The larger proportion of adolescents in attendance, the impersonal atmosphere of the large schools, the troublesome social and moral trends of the decade—all combined to launch the guidance movement. "High school courses are hampered by a lack of opportu-

21. PAO, Henry J. Cody Papers, Scrapbook, Vol. III, November 18, 1918.
22. ODE, *Annual Report, 1918,* p. 22.
23. D.A. Campbell, "Cultural Vocational Schools," *Proc. OEA, 1927,* pp. 354-5.
24. Tom Moore, "Attitude of Organized Labour towards Technical Education," *Ibid., 1928,* pp. 131-4.
25. H.B. Beal, "President's Address," *Ibid., 1928,* pp. 125-6.
26. ODE, *Annual Report, 1914,* p. 11; *1918,* p. 10.

nity for the teacher to take personal interest and have personal contact with the student and his individual problems," charged C.L. Burton of the Robert Simpson Company. "Our high school boys should find themselves in a way that is not characteristic of them to-day."[27] But by the end of the decade, general or personal guidance had lost out to the more specific form of vocational guidance. The vocational schools needed to justify their existence and keep the support of manufacturers and labour groups. Thus vocational guidance and job placement became high priorities. London, Ontario, had one of the most comprehensive programs in the country, beginning with a survey to determine the job aspirations of elementary school graduates, followed by school pressure "if the student is contemplating an occupation for which he is manifestly not suited." This was followed by pre-registration in either an academic or vocational secondary school program, individual and group guidance during the first two years of high school, and job placement and follow-up by school guidance officials.[28]

Even more than vocational education programs and guidance services, extra-curricular activities were seen as answering many of the social needs of the 1920's. The changing times naturally affected the popularity of certain activities; while sports programs held their own through the inter-war period, literary societies and debating clubs gradually gave way to orchestras and students' councils, even to fraternities and sororities. Progressive principals saw properly-supervised, extra-curricular activities as important in the process of socialization, in the growth towards adult responsibilities, and in the fostering of social efficiency. "Through these activities the proper kind of school spirit will be developed," argued Alberta high school inspector, J.A. Smith. "These agencies have a place and an influence in the formation of character no less important than the formal exercises in the classroom."[29] Thus extra-curricular activities came to be regarded as more than mere adjuncts to the academic program; they could furnish teen-agers with actual laboratory training in many of the important experiences they would have in later life.

Virtually every school-sponsored activity was justified in this manner. The student newspaper could "cultivate alertness, accuracy and co-operative work habits."[30] The annual yearbook provided "enormous practical experience . . . [in] mechanics of writing, economy of space, business procedure."[31] Student governments, with carefully curtailed powers, could engage in group planning activities. At Toronto's Northern Vocational School, the student council planned and managed social and athletic events, conducted opening exercises in the auditorium, and looked after "such disciplinary problems as smoking, bad language, and unbecoming conduct in halls and washrooms."[32] School athletics promised

27. C.L. Burton, "Radical Reforms Needed in Our Educational System," *Canadian School Board Journal*, February 1926, p. 17.
28. H.B. Beal, "Vocational and Industrial Classes," *Proc. OEA, 1924,* pp. 294-5.
29. ADE, *Annual Report, 1919,* p. 17.
30. G.M. Jones, "Student Newspapers," *The School,* September 1922, pp. 35-7.
31. Walter P. Percival, *Life in School: An Explanation of the Protestant School System of the Province of Quebec* (Montreal, 1940), p. 68.
32. C.E. Phillips, *The Development of Education in Canada* (Toronto, 1957), p. 540.

"the cultivation of the virtues of courage, endurance, persistency, self-control, of patience and good humour in adversity, and of temperance and modesty in triumph."[33] Like other extra-curricular activities of the 1920's, school sports—if kept in proper perspective—provided a "wholesome" outlet for adolescent energies and kept teenagers in school.

High school principals considered auditorium programs most important in citizenship training. At Patterson Collegiate in Windsor, they were judged to foster "a healthy school spirit, to train the pupils in public speaking, in self-control, in orderly habits, in consideration for others and in respect for authority."[34] Principal W.R. Saunders of Toronto's Northern Vocational School was even more explicit about the rationale for his hour-long morning auditorium program. "We use it as the centre of our persistent and continuous propaganda, a propaganda that points to the ideal that each student should conduct herself or himself as a lady or gentleman." Each morning students would enter the auditorium to the music of the school orchestra, sing a hymn, repeat the Lord's Prayer, and listen to the principal discuss school problems and announce activities. "The auditorium," declared Saunders, "would appear to be the most valuable space within the four walls of the school building."[35]

With parties and dances arranged by the school, with a dazzling variety of school clubs to engage his interests, with the inspiration offered by assemblies, with weekly football or basketball games, the Canadian high school student of the 1920's might be thought of as fortunate indeed. Yet student populations lived under tight control. There were regulations on attendance and lateness, student dress and hair styles, completion of homework assignments and obedience to school rules—all in the name of character development. In some cases the rules and regulations were more strict than in previous decades, for the high schools of the 1920's were dealing with a much less selective student group than that of the past, and also reacting to a stereotype of "flaming youth" engaged in flouting pre-war norms and conventions. Almost without exception, provincial inspectors drew a close connection between discipline and control on the one hand, and the ability of the high school to measure up to its academic and moral purposes. Although they praised the contributions of a school's extra-curricular program in character training and citizenship development, they left no doubt that such activities were clearly subordinate to the academic role of the high school. Inspector R.B. Anglin, for example, saw much value in the morning assemblies at Ontario's Shelburne High School in fostering "the good spirit that is evident in the school." But the essence of his annual report was contained in one short sentence. "The main attention of the school," he concluded, "is rightly focused on the regular studies of each day."[36]

Despite promising beginnings in both Ontario and Alberta, the "regular

33. A.W. Burt, "School Sports," *The School,* May 1914, p. 565.
34. ODE, *Annual Report, 1929,* p. 15.
35. W.R. Saunders, "The Use of the Auditorium in a Secondary School," *The School,* February 1937, pp. 474-5.
36. PAO, RG 2, Inspector's Report on Shelburne High School, October 22, 1929.

studies of each day" changed little for the vast majority of teenagers enrolled in academic or general programs during the 1920's. Both provinces opened the decade by establishing high school curriculum review committees. The Ontario report of 1921 reflected the realities of the day in its recommendations for the elimination of tuition fees and the reduction of the high school course from six to five years. But its recommendations for the academic program were minor: a somewhat lighter course load, more options suited to local needs, and a slight easing of examination pressures. The committee of principals, inspectors and university representatives was not prepared to follow the lead of its American counterpart, a committee of the National Education Association which recommended a social service orientation in its 1918 report, *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education.* It did not translate the ideas of F.W. Merchant into recommendations for new courses bearing on education for leisure, for home-life, and for citizenship. Rather, the Ontario committee continued to put its faith in the traditional academic subjects as the best preparation for adult life.

The Alberta curriculum committee of 1922 appeared more promising. The inclusion of representatives from farm, women, labour and business groups suggested that the realities of the contemporary economic and social world would be addressed. The committee's report listed three general aims for the modern high school: to prepare the individual for efficient participation in the duties of social, civic, political and family life; to prepare the student to become an efficient economic member of society; and to further his personal development and happiness. And it proposed six fairly well-defined programs, each leading to a high school graduation diploma: university matriculation, normal school entrance, agricultural, commercial, technical and general. Each program would be characterized by generous options, ease of transfer, and promotion by subject rather than by grade. But statistics for 1922 to 1935 showed that 93 per cent of all diplomas granted were in the matriculation and normal entrance programs.[37] These were the only routes available in most schools. Where others were offered, there were few clients. The general course was not accepted as an alternative, while graduates of the technical course were not equipped to compete for the few available jobs.

As a result, the 1920's proved no different than earlier periods; despite the alarming drop-out rates, most pupils—backed up by their parents—pinned their hopes on university matriculation. The result was an academic program mainly determined in the interests of the approximately 15 per cent of students who did proceed to some form of higher education—either university or normal school. This situation could have been justified if the matriculation courses were also those which served as "preparation for life." The academicians argued that they were; the critics charged that "the predominantly formal trend of high school studies as they at present exist would seem to make this position untenable."[38]

This "formal trend" manifested itself through the subjects of study, the methodology employed in the classroom, the prescribed textbooks, and the

37. Bernal E. Walker, "Public Secondary Education in Alberta. 1889-1951" (Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1955), p. 149.

38. Dyde, *Public Secondary Education in Canada*, p. 124.

domination of final examinations. Students endured daily doses of English and history, ancient and modern languages, mathematics and science. There was no place for the new social science disciplines, little opportunity to study the contemporary worlds of business or labour or to examine the changing role of women in society. A few gifted teachers might use the traditional subjects to focus on these emerging concerns, but most used a deductive rather than an inductive approach, starting with a prescribed body of knowledge that must be "mastered" rather than with the immediate interests of the students. The rationale continued to be based in part on the mental discipline argument of the 1880's. Mathematics, for example, was justified on the basis of its "training in quick, logical thinking." There was also the strongly held belief that a fairly well-defined body of literary knowledge comprised the essential content of a liberal or general education. English and other languages, for instance, promised the student a "broadening, cultural value . . . [which was] a real asset to him in whatever business he may become engaged."[39]

American educators had responded to the social challenges of the 1920's by altering both the curricular and extra-curricular components of the high school program—through courses in social studies and life-adjustment as well as through student councils, athletics and the assembly hall. While Canadian schoolmen were prepared to accept vocational guidance and a rich smorgasbord of extra-curricular activities, they held the line at the door of the academic classroom. "With us the objectives of our high school course might be termed scholarship and character; in the American school their great objective might be stated as citizenship," a Toronto principal remarked in 1922. "Our objective seems to be largely individual, while theirs seems to be a social objective."[40] The survival of this difference was evident at the end of the decade to Fred Clarke, a British educator with experience in both Canada and South Africa. Clarke believed that the Canadian high school had "avoided the two main dangers that were set for it . . . the English one of class privilege . . . also the other one of too easy diversion from the high road of tradition in pursuit of the gaudy attractions of the up-to-date, or the values of the immediately vocational."[41] Clarke was gratified that Canadian high schools had generally avoided, "the excesses of countless electives, of freak units, and of sentimental pandering to immature impulse and sheer whims among pupils, such as have marred high school work in the United States."[42]

III

High school attendance rose during the troubled 1930's just as it had done through the more buoyant years of the previous decade. Ontario statistics for September, 1932, showed a 10.6 per cent enrolment gain over the previous year, a

39. TBE, *Annual Report, 1930,* p. 18.
40. E.A. Hardy, "Some Impressions of American High Schools," *Proc. OEA, 1922,* pp. 112-22.
41. Fred Clarke, "Some Issues of Modern Secondary Education," *Ibid., 1931,* p. 35.
42. Fred Clarke, "Secondary Education in Canada: Past and Present," in E. Percy, ed., *The Year Book of Education, 1934* (London, 1934), p. 569.

rate of increase sustained throughout the decade; Alberta enrolments jumped by almost 50 per cent between 1930 and 1934. Some schoolmen claimed that increased enrolment had little or nothing to do with the depression,but was due to higher university admission requirements or was "but a trend of the times." Others argued that more pupils were kept out of school to supplement family earnings than were kept in school because there were no jobs for them.[43] Yet the majority of senior administrators, who had to provide the pupil places, and school trustees, responsible for raising the bulk of the money, saw a relationship between economic conditions and school attendance. Because of the depression, noted the Alberta high school inspectors in their 1932 report, "many young people are out of work and are returning to school, increasing enrolments at the Grade 11 and 12 levels."[44]

Out of the depression came a restatement by educators of the importance of social goals in the high school. What had seemed somewhat idealistic in the individualistic 1920's now seemed eminently practical in the depths of the depression. "While this period is a time of storm and stress for all youth, it is also a seed-time of ideals," declared Leo Simpson, Ontario minister of education from 1934 to 1940. "These ideals depend largely upon the influence of the environment, and the environment of the school room forms one of the most important factors of such influence."[45] The chairwoman of the Toronto Board of Education concurred. "The secondary schools," declared Adelaide Plumptree in 1934, "have at the present time a unique opportunity for influencing thought and character in a very large number of students—and that during adolescence, the most plastic period of educational life."[46]

Rather than dissipating in the grim economic climate of the 1930's, the problem of "adolescent restlessness" only increased with each passing year. Gradually, school officials realized that their problem rested in the "changing character of the High School student body."[47] The Winnipeg School Division's annual report for 1934 addressed this problem and suggested a solution. "The removal of the adolescent population from the labour market will force us to abandon the principle of selection and substitute the principle of differentiation. . . . Instead of demanding that students adjust themselves to us we shall have to adjust our institutions to them."[48]

One of the more significant institutional adjustments of the 1930's came at the Grade 9 level, traditionally the first year of high school in most provinces. Winnipeg in 1919 and Penticton, British Columbia, in 1926 were two Canadian cities that had earlier adopted the junior high school concept to house Grade 7-9

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43. F.P. Gavin, "President's Address," *Proc. OEA, 1935,* p. 11.
44. ADE, *Annual Report, 1932,* p. 38.
45. Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) *Bulletin,* June 1936, p. 216.
46. *Ibid.,* February 1934, p. 16.
47. Glenbow-Alberta Institute Archives (GAIA), Calgary Public School Board Records, T.E.A. Stanley to D.C. Bayne, March 5, 1935.
48. J.W. Chafe, *An Apple for the Teacher: A Centennial History of the Winnipeg School Division* (Winnipeg, 1967), p. 122.

pupils. In September, 1933, trustee R.T. Alderman convinced the Calgary Public School Board to establish a committee "to study the junior high school picture." Alderman listed several advantages of the junior high school: it would bridge the gap between elementary and high school by introducing some optional subjects and some departmentalization of instruction; it would broaden the curriculum for pupils not enamoured with the current academic emphasis during those years; and it would hold more pupils in school.[49] Calgary established its first two junior high schools the following year and completed its grade re-organization by the end of the decade. All students took a compulsory core of English, mathematics, science, social studies, health and physical education, supplemented by a variety of electives. The rapidity of Calgary's move caught provincial officials unprepared. "Educationalists are apparently not entirely agreed as to the superiority of this type of organization," remarked Education Minister Perren Baker.[50] Yet in 1935 the provincial department of education adopted the junior high school and the 6-3-3 grade structure for the entire province.

A concept so easily introduced in Manitoba, British Columbia and Alberta ran into more determined opposition in Ontario. All the same arguments were advanced, with perhaps the social purposes receiving the most attention. The Toronto *Globe* viewed the junior high—or intermediate school as it was more commonly called in Ontario—as directing pupils "while they are finding themselves, and while their future most suitable form of education is being determined." Such a school would serve as "the laboratory in which the mentality and taste of boys and girls would be tested and their future career be settled, with a minimum loss of time and effort to the pupil and to the community."[51] In dozens of speeches and articles, George Rogers, Ontario's chief director of education, sang the praises of this "educational clearing house or distributing station." As a bridge between the elementary school and the high school, it would sort for occupational purposes as well as "open up possibilities in moral and in social training."[52] Yet Ontario authorities had to contend with two factors missing in the western provinces. First, the province's elementary and secondary school teachers were split into rival and often antagonistic federations; second, the precise limit of Roman Catholic separate school jurisdiction was an explosive political issue.

The designation of the intermediate school in Ontario as a branch of elementary rather than secondary education did not automatically win the support of the province's elementary teachers. Many feared that eight years' work would now have to be covered in six years. In addition, the removal of the two upper grades would deprive the elementary schools of "the senior pupils who are leaders in school organizations, sports and all those things which are essential to a good

49. Calgary Public School Board, "Minutes," September 12, 1933.

50. GAIA, Calgary Public School Board Records, Perren Baker to D.C. Bayne, November 18, 1933.

51. Toronto *Globe*, May 23, 1932.

52. George Rogers, "Intermediate Schools," *Proc. OEA, 1934*, pp. 101-5; "The Intermediate School," *The School*, April 1932, pp. 104-6.

working school unit." Gone as well would be most of the male teachers, for as one Toronto trustee explained, "our experience shows that the men will not compete for positions in the junior grades."[53] However, the elementary teachers' federations ultimately gave their support to the proposal, once the government made clear that an intermediate school "will not be required to limit its staff to teachers with secondary school teachers' qualifications."[54] But it was precisely that point that antagonized the high school teachers; indeed, they feared that their lower-salaried elementary colleagues would caputre all the places in the new intermediate schools as they had in the old Fifth Book classes. The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation devoted much of its Easter 1934 provincial council meeting to the intermediate school question. With George Rogers of the department of education as a captive listener, speaker after speaker tore into the government's plan. Intermediate schools were attacked on pedagogical, psychological and economic grounds. The real issue was one of jurisdiction: which federation would control the intermediate school teachers?

But it was the century-old separate school problem that ultimately defeated Ontario's intermediate school proposal of the mid-1930's. With money scarce during the depression, any extension of separate school work beyond Grade 8 into the lower high school years would mean less tax money available for public school efforts. Judge J.H. Scott of Perth painted a vivid scenario of separate school expansion throughout the entire high school grades—and consequent Protestant unrest. Scott warned Premier George Henry that the intermediate school bill, by opening the door to both public and separate school boards, "will precipitate a peck of trouble for the Government."[55] With an election approaching, Henry faced the prospect of Protestant antagonism if he pushed through the intermediate school bill in its existing form, and Catholic opposition if the legislation were amended to exclude the separate schools. Henry took the easy way out and withdrew the bill in March, 1934. Two years later the successor Liberal government of Mitchell Hepburn also withdrew an intermediate school bill, again because of the separate school question.

Defeated on the junior or intermediate school concept, Ontario officials quickly changed their tactics while remaining true to their declared strategy of a more flexible Grade 9 year. If Grade 9 had to remain in the high schools, why could it not be "a common first year," permitting wide choice of options, and delaying for one more year the traumatic decision on the part of each student as to the choice of a matriculation, technical or commercial program? The curriculum for such a year, proposed by a departmental committee in early 1937, included English, social studies, health, mathematics, science or agriculture, French, home economics or general shop, music or art, and business practice. The elimination of Latin caused consternation among classicists and supporters of the classical tradition. But Deputy Minister Duncan McArthur saw the elimination of Latin as the only way to ensure that Grade 9 could be "a year of

53. PAO, George Henry Papers, Loftus Reid to George Henry, March 10, 1934.
54. *Ibid.*, George Henry to C.G. Mikel, copy, July 24, 1933.
55. *Ibid.*, J.H. Scott to George Henry, December 10, 1932.

testing, a year in which the boy can try himself out along different lines under the guidance and direction of teachers, that he might reach conclusions regarding his particular capabilities and aptitudes."[56] The new subjects were not intended to train for direct employment, wrote chief director of education J.G. Althouse eight years later, "but would provide an opportunity for practical vocational guidance, and at the same time offer an activity programme which would be attractive to youth and probably have the effect of holding their interest longer in school."[57]

Additional high school changes carried this new philosophy beyond the Grade 9 level. George Rogers spoke of the reforms as "making our academic schools less academic and our vocational schools less vocational, in other words to provide in all secondary schools a kind of general education which will fit our adolescents for life—as individuals, as citizens, and as workers."[58] A partial common core of subjects continued into Grade 10 with all students taking English, social studies and health, plus optional subjects from one of four programs: general, industrial arts, household arts, or commercial. Successful completion of these first two years earned an Intermediate Diploma; thus the student who progressed no further would leave with a sense of accomplishment. The programs for the higher grades saw more options, fewer departmental examinations, and more promotion by recommendation. The old junior and senior *matriculation* certificates were replaced by secondary school and honour *graduation* diplomas to emphasize the idea that the high school's *raison d'être* was not primarily preparation for university.

While Ontario maintained a certain division between matriculation and non-matriculation programs after the common Grade 9 year, Alberta and British Columbia moved in 1935 towards common programs to the end of high school. That year Alberta scrapped its six-track system and replaced it with a single curriculum for Grades 10 to 12 that included a required core of English, social studies and physical education, with a wide variety of electives accounting for about two-thirds of a student's time. Completion of one hundred credits earned a common graduation diploma at the end of Grade 12. Changes in British Columbia in 1929 and 1935 produced the same results. The stated objectives were "to make the school system meet the needs of a rapidly changing world" and "to make future British Columbians more socially minded, more cooperative in their attitude to society as a whole" and "better equipped for using their leisure."[59]

The gradual merging of high school programs led in turn to the amalgamation of high school facilities. Separate technical and commercial high schools, so popular during the first quarter of the century, gave way to the idea of the "composite" high school, one that would house both university and non-university bound students. The composite high school offered a greater possibility for

56. *Canadian School Journal,* April 1937, p. 126.
57. PAO, RG 3, George Drew Files, J.G. Althouse to George Drew, March 27, 1945.
58. *Canadian School Journal,* June 1937, p. 235.
59. F.H. Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1964), p. 113.

attracting more pupils into vocational courses than did the lower-status technical school. In cities with segregated facilities, all too many elementary school graduates were seen as "simply drifting—going in crowds to the collegiate because their chums are going." But with the composite school, argued a Sarnia, Ontario, administrator, "the principal meets all the students" and "he has that one advantage—he will actually come in contact with them, and give them advice about courses."[60] In addition, the composite high school might better cater to the social needs of students by mixing them together in classes and extra-curricular activities. Superintendent Frank Buchanan of Calgary saw it as providing "greater opportunities for the development of play and physical education interests and for the cultivation of social attitudes and practices," all promoting "the all-round development of its students."[61]

Western Canada Composite High School in Calgary was a deliberate attempt to operationalize this idea. In 1935, the fence separating the Technical High School and the formerly all-academic Western Canada High School was removed. The two institutions were administratively united under one principal and physically joined by a building link. The school yearbook took the name "ACATEC" to symbolize the union of academic and technical students. All students were required to take at least one "shop" course. Every subject listed in the Alberta course of studies was offered. The provincial inspectors called it "the outstanding composite high school in the province."[62] City superintendent Frank Buchanan went even further. He proudly boasted that it "provides educational, vocational and social opportunities for young people unexcelled in the western provinces."[63]

Program changes were paralleled by a relaxation of external examinations. For as long as most teachers could remember, "departmental" examinations—set and marked by department of education personnel in the provincial capital—had provided hurdles over which pupils had to jump as they moved up through the grades. "Without doubt we are the most examined people in Canada and perhaps in the world," complained Perren Baker, Alberta's minister of education in 1929.[64] These external examinations were vociferously defended, however, by teachers, administrators, and the public. They were justified on grounds of preserving standards, establishing incentives, measuring objectives, and providing the best indicator of success on the next rung of the educational ladder. But the pressure of numbers and the gradual acceptance of pupil-centred pedagogical ideas challenged the concept of external examinations.

First to crumble was the notorious "entrance" examination for Grade 8 pupils seeking admission to the high schools. During the early 1920's, Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario permitted elementary school principals to

60. "The Composite High School," *The School*, June 1923, pp. 726-32.
61. Western Canada Composite High School, *The ACATEC, 1938-39*, p. 13.
62. Alberta Department of Education Archives, Calgary Public School Board File, Report of Inspectors of High Schools, January 26-February 1, 1939.
63. Western Canada Composite High School, *The ACATEC, 1938-39*, p. 13.
64. Edmonton *Journal*, February 27, 1929.

recommend individual students for standing. Thereafter, only the weakest students were compelled to write the dreaded "departmentals". Finally, Alberta in 1930, British Columbia in 1938, and Ontario in 1949 substituted principals' recommendations for departmental examinations for all Grade 8 students. During the 1930's, the recommendation system was gradually extended to departmental examinations at the end of various high school grades. The boldest moves of all came in the second half of the decade, when both British Columbia and Ontario experimented with matriculation examinations at the end of high school. This was done by reform-minded provincial administrations despite objections from the universities, who had traditionally relied on these departmental matriculation examinations to determine admission. British Columbia adopted the principle of accreditation in 1937, by which certain superior high schools could grant students matriculation standing in individual subjects; within a year, forty-nine of the province's 109 high schools had earned accreditation privileges. Ontario extended the recommendation system to all high schools in 1935.

IV

The Canadian high school of 1939 was quantitatively and qualitatively different from its 1919 counterpart. Student enrolments had increased faster than the nation's population during these two inter-war decades, thus bringing a higher proportion of Canadian teenagers under the jurisdiction of the school. The changing character of this student population, together with the changing social and economic demands of the period, posed a challenge for educators. Unquestionably, the school had a responsibility to prepare this broader group of young people for the social as well as the academic and vocational demands of adult life. But how was this to be accomplished? Throughout the 1920's the social purposes had permeated the extra-curricular program, as principals saw the character and citizenship-building potential of the guidance movement, inter-school athletics, student clubs, and school assemblies. But social purposes had not penetrated the classroom, as university, department of education, and school personnel rejected the "life adjustment" syndrome of the United States high school curriculum. For students in academic or matriculation programs—and that included the vast majority—classroom life continued to be circumscribed by a proscribed curriculum of traditional subjects, authorized textbooks, deductive teaching, and external examinations.

But educators were forced to revise their strategy during the 1930's. American ideas on a socially-oriented curriculum now appeared more attractive, as the dislocations of the depression cast doubts on the effectiveness of traditional programs. So Canadian educators responded by introducing the junior high school, the common Grade 9, and the composite high school, where diversified curricula were offered to heterogeneous student populations. History and geography became social studies; newer subjects like business practice, home economics, and industrial arts became integral parts of academic programs. More flexible promotion standards also demonstrated the increased emphasis on the high school's social rather than its traditional academic role.

In the short-term, this new social orientation of the Canadian high school was checked, and in some cases reversed, by the conservative trend arising out of the Second World War and the Cold War. Many students of the 1950's found their high school environment more like that of the 1920's than the 1930's. Yet in the long-term, the adjustments of the 1930's provided the groundwork for the generation of reforms that—for good or ill—swept through the Canadian high schools in the 1960's.

Résumé

L'auteur traite d'abord de l'augmentation assez spectaculaire du nombre d'élèves dans les écoles secondaires pendant les décennies 1919-1939 pour ensuite s'interroger sur les causes et effets de cet état de chose. Deux provinces, l'Ontario et l'Alberta, lui servent de points d'observation, l'une représentant la société déjà industrialisée de l'est, l'autre, celle plus jeune et plus rurale de l'ouest.

Comment donc s'explique cette forte montée de la population étudiante? Deux facteurs se distinguent comme étant nettement plus importants: celui du progrès technique qui réduit de beaucoup le besoin d'une main d'oeuvre non-spécialisée d'une part, et, d'autre part, celui du fait que la société semble de plus en plus consciente du rôle de surveillance et de direction que l'école peut assumer dans la vie de l'étudiant.

Les effets sont tout aussi marquants. Durant les années vingt, on voit se multiplier les écoles de métiers ainsi que les écoles techniques et commerciales. De même, les activités parascolaires se diversifient et il y a peu d'écoles qui n'ait son conseil étudiant, son journal, son annuaire, ou encore, ses compétitions sportives. Cependant, il n'en demeure pas moins que, dans la majorité des écoles, le programme académique change peu et qu'il est toujours dressé en fonction du petit nombre d'élèves qui se dirige vers l'université. Ces changements s'observent tant en Ontario qu'en Alberta bien qu'ils s'effectuent plus lentement dans cette dernière.

Pendant les années trente, le nombre toujours grandissant d'étudiants amène des changements plus radicaux. Dans l'ouest du pays, on adopte bientôt une nouvelle formule où les septième, huitième et neuvième années sont considérées comme un tout servant d'intermédiaire entre l'école élémentaire et l'école secondaire. Cette formule ne sera pas acceptée en Ontario; on optera plutôt pour de plus nombreuses options de cours au niveau de la neuvième année. Autres changements: on se ralliera à une école qui abrite tous les secteurs sous le même toit, et de plus, on abolira les examens dits "d'entrée" pour se tourner du côté du système des "recommandations". En somme, l'école secondaire de 1939 est différente de celle de 1919 tant au qualitatif qu'au quantitatif.