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Introduction

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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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INTRODUCTION

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EDUCATION IN NEWFOUNDLAND has a long history; the first school was established at Bonavista in 1727, over a century before the island achieved Representative Government and formal colonial status in 1832. In the years subsequent to 1727 schooling developed slowly, but after the passing in 1836 of the first education act, which established a system of public elementary education, progress was more rapid, though subject to many difficulties and frustrations. The major events and turning points in this history cannot be covered within the compass of the six papers in this volume; the topics chosen, however, form a representative, if discrete, selection of current educational research.

A common element in the papers is a recognition that the process of schooling and also educational ideology and politics are shaped and conditioned by social forces. In any society there are certain contexts within which the educational system evolved, certain features — material and cultural — which determined many of the institutional characteristics of its educational history. The American sociologist and historian Neil Smelser has termed these aspects of society "primordial features" — fundamental socio-economic factors, cultural values and beliefs, which organise and legitimise institutional roles and behaviour and shape the contours of schooling.[1] Smelser draws his examples — hierarchy and social class, religious parties and national and ethnic groups — from the British experience; the concept of primordial features, however, can be usefully applied to Newfoundland to distinguish those aspects of its society which have had a defining and determining influence on the progress of schooling.

A major turning point in the island's history was the transition from the West Country transient fishery to an indigenous inshore operation during the period 1793-1815, largely consequent upon the great Irish and English immigrations of the period.[2] A settled population, the growth of civic institutions and the granting

of colonial status (with a resident governor, an appointed Council and an elected Assembly) paved the way for a system of public elementary education in 1836.

Newfoundland's position as a colony (latterly a Dominion) of the British Empire —generally, and at times enthusiastically, embraced by the populace — can be understood as a primordial dimension of the island's history and, directly and indirectly, as a governing element of its educational development. The late George Story has pointed out that "for more than two centuries the great effort of the Newfoundland authorities, of both church and state, had been bent on the provision in the Colony...of an educational system modelled...on that system familiar to them: that of the mother country."[3] The 1836 Act, in fact, introduced a plan of schooling very similar to that of the non-denominational Irish National System, imposed by the English on the Irish in 1831.[4]

Metropolitan influences continued to affect the structure and content of the colony's education. The successful overthrow of the non-denominational system of 1836 by militant Protestant forces was inspired by, and received moral support from, the virulently anti-Catholic "No Popery" crusade that swept Britain and its dominions in the late 1830s and early 1840s.[5] The concept of school inspection, added to the 1843 Education Act, was, as I show in my essay in this issue, borrowed from the practice of inspection then current in England, Ireland and Canada West; although inspection was temporarily abandoned in 1846, following a renewal of the denominational warfare of the "No Popery" period, it was revived in 1858 and became a prominent feature of bureaucratic control over elementary schools until recent times.

Another feature of the imperial connection was the importation of British teachers and educators, first by the independent British-based Newfoundland School Society (established in 1823),[6] later by all the major denominations. William Pilot, Church of England Superintendent (1874-1904), William Blackall, Principal of Bishop Feild College, who succeeded Pilot as Superintendent, and J.L. Paton, first President of Memorial University College (1925-1933), were among the most eminent. Perhaps the most brilliant teacher to come from the mother country was Robert Edwards Holloway, Principal of the Methodist College from 1874 to 1904. As Ruby L. Gough demonstrates in her account of his activities, Holloway not only lifted the College to a position of eminence and inaugurated progressive teaching methods in the sciences but also did innovative work with X-rays, the telephone, radio transmission and photography. Blackall and Paton, a generation later, played an important role in the adult education movement; throwing light on a hitherto neglected aspect of Newfoundland education, James Overton's essay describes how adult education was used as a vehicle for middle-class attempts to wean the working class and the poor from subversive ideologies.

The imperial situation involved the importation into Newfoundland of colonial policies and practices, and their practitioners were, in Story's words, more concerned with "questions of curriculum, uniformity, parity of standards, the intrica-

cies of examining systems and the administration of a dispersed population" than with fashioning an education system consonant with the culture and knowledge of the fishing communities; the educational system, Story continued, was "very largely a process by which economic and social differences were perpetuated...and cultural dualism maintained," as exemplified by the contrast between the large, stone-built St. John's colleges and the one-room wooden schools of the outports.[7]

The schools in the outports, of course, existed in a social environment dependent on and structured by the fishery, which can undoubtedly be considered as another primordial feature of Newfoundland society. The nature of the fishery — its seasonal work, the retirement of a large proportion of the population to the woods or a more hospitable bay in winter, periods of poverty consequent upon the vagaries of the catch, the persistence of child labour by children as young as six — presented formidable obstacles to regular, year-round attendance at school and a complete school life. In addition, the truck system, in which fishing families bartered the catch with merchants for winter supply of food and equipment, leaving them indebted to all-powerful merchants, resulted in a virtually cashless society which set limits to financial resources available for education both locally and centrally. As the main, almost the sole, source of government revenue was custom dues, the level of which depended on the purchasing power of fishery workers — never very great — it is hardly surprising that educational expenditures were comparatively low, and indeed decreased throughout the nineteenth century.[8]

The third important primordial grouping was that defined by religion, though in Newfoundland this took the form of two denominations, Protestant and Catholic, united only by their hostility to each other. Garfield Fizzard, in his reconstruction of the history of the Bonavista school, describes a curriculum permeated with Protestant theology centred on the maintenance of social order and stability; this situation continued in the missionary schools until the 1830s. Religion continued to play a central role in the curriculum of all schools in the colonial period, irrespective of their theological orientation, and religion, allied with ethnicity and politics (exemplified by a population divided largely between Protestant-English-Conservatives and Catholic-Irish-Liberals), dominated politics, including educational politics, from the 1830s to the 1870s and, in modified forms, to the present.

The break with tradition in 1836, when a secular adminstration established a non-denominational school system, was soon repaired by a Protestant coalition led by Evangelicals; as already noted, they overturned the provisions of the 1836 Act, on the grounds that they discriminated against the national religion. This success paved the way for the 1843 Education Act, which inaugurated the denominational system by dividing the education grant between Protestants and Catholics.[9] Further agitation by the Church of England resulted, in 1874, in the division of the grant among the Church of England, the Catholics and the Methodists, each taking a share according to their numbers in the population.[10] From then on, all change, reform or even fundamental discussion of education could be thwarted by the

invocation of the sacredness of the "denominational principle," as Robert Bond found when attempting to abolish the system in 1887.[11]

A further impediment to progress was the indifference to education of virtually all governments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a lack of concern which, because of its universality, perhaps qualifies it as another primordial feature. Administrations of the period, rather than heeding demands for reform of the system, in particular for the creation of a Department of Education and a Normal College (not, in fact, established until the 1920s), were content to cede the management of schooling to the churches. Under the provisions of the 1876 Education Act, passed during the ministry of F.B.T. Carter, supervision of the direction and day-to-day running of public elementary education was assigned to three denominational Superintendents.[12] The disinclination to employ financial resources for the creation of an efficient, centrally administered school system, appears to have been part of a policy of sacrificing regeneration of both education and the ailing fishery in favour of sinking capital into schemes for the modernisation and diversification of the economy, symbolised by plans for a cross-island railway initiated by the Carter government in 1874.[13]

The Superintendents of the Church of England, the Roman Catholics and the Methodists, although they were for the most part able and forward-looking educators, understood their primary responsibility to be the advancement of the educational interests of their own denomination. The ensuing sectarian competition had the effect of increasing the number of schools from 328 in 1876 to 1,058 in 1916; however, the result of spreading a decreasing proportion of government expenditure on education over an increasing number of schools was, as might be expected, a decline in the quality of education.[14] The domination of the church superintendents continued to be symbolic of the relative indifference of governments to educational administration until well into the twentieth century. These so-called Czars of education were so firmly entrenched that their control continued even after the belated creation of an Education Department and a Normal School in the early 1920s; they were still powerful figures after the establishment of the Commission of Government in 1934. J.A. Winter, Commissioner of Education, informed the Commission in 1938 that "there was not one but three Departments of Education, all receiving assistance from the Government, but over whom the Government had no control."[15]

Although the Commission more than restored the devastation of the educational system caused by the crash of the economy in 1932-33, the Confederation governments of the post-1949 period inherited a system not greatly different in many respects — particularly in the proportion of funding and the number of schools — from that of the First World War period.[16] But these governments had one inestimable advantage over all previous administrations: adequate financial funding for education, derived largely from transfer payments from the federal government. In the early years these amounted to between two-thirds and three-

quarters of total revenue.[17] With this aid Newfoundland was able to construct an educational system, extending from kindergarten to university, in most respects comparable to that of Canada. The system's relative underdevelopment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, has made it difficult to reach the Canadian average in certain areas; post-secondary enrolment and the percentage of the population with a university degree are at present below those of Canada, as are scores for Grades 4-8 in the Canadian Test of Basic Skills.[18]

* * *

The study of the past is necessarily based almost entirely upon documentary sources, manuscript or printed. For contemporary history, i.e., the last half-century or so, a further source exists: the oral testimony of living participants. The memories of individuals can be tapped in cases in which written or printed records are deficient or non-existent, and a reconstruction made of events that otherwise would be lost.

In few areas is oral history more important than in women's studies, the practitioners of which have rightly stressed that women's achievements have been "hidden from history" because of their failure to be entered in the printed record. This is generally true of women's contribution to education, despite the large number of women among teaching staffs, past and present, and is particularly true in the case of Newfoundland. The contribution by Alice Collins and Patricia Langlois is an example of what can be achieved by the employment of the interview technique. Tracing the history of women teachers, and showing that until very recently they received lower salaries than male colleagues for the same work (thus subsidising the educational system), the authors investigate the career options of a sample of contemporary women and show their largely favourable reactions to teaching as a career.

Another study making use of the oral technique, Dennis Mulcahy's exploration of schooling in Fair Haven, Placentia Bay, addresses the neglected topic of informal education. Throughout Newfoundland's history and indeed long before the first school, it is clear that skills and knowledge have been passed on from one generation to another, in the home, at work and on social occasions. Mulcahy shows, in interviews with inhabitants, how the youth of Fair Haven, outside the confines of formal schooling, were inducted into the life of the community, learnt its lore, culture and history and were taught the skills necessary for the prosecution of the fishery.

Mulcahy's study in particular brings into sharp focus the role of the school in society and the relationship between formal curricula and the life of the child outside the classroom. Although some sociologists have maintained that the school is a reflection of society, or even a society in miniature,[19] the spatial arrangements of the school building, the arbitrary division of the curriculum into watertight subjects, the division of time enforced by the clock, and the strictly-defined lengths

of the school day, term and year are all in contradiction to the fluid and multifarious social interests of the child. The dichotomy between school and society was sharper in Newfoundland than in more developed and industrialised societies. As noted earlier, the seasonal pattern of the fishery, winter migration, the organisation of work by the weather and the state of the catch, the measure of the working day from dawn until dusk were all opposed to the precise organisation, regularity, order and discipline of schooling. The conflict lasted well into the twentieth century, with organised schooling often succumbing to the demands of the fishery.

During the past decade, however, the situation has undergone an important change. The moratorium on the fishery, the growth of modern electronic technology, and the current policies of government raise questions about the very survival of the indigenous values and traditions of fishing communities. The curriculum in Newfoundland schools, from at least the middle of the nineteenth century, has been based upon what broadly may be called the liberal-humanist tradition, inherited from Britain, i.e. upon a view of the ideal education as achieving a balance between the arts and the sciences, with music, art, literature, languages and religious studies occupying an important place.[20] The general aim of this kind of curriculum, however imperfectly fulfilled at times, was to enable each person to achieve his or her fullest development, both as an individual and a member of society, by fostering intellectual, social-cultural, moral-religious and physical attributes; to help form, in Dr. Johnson's words, "a mind of large general powers accidentally determined to some particular direction."[21]

The mid-1980s, however, marked the beginning of a turning away from these ideals. In 1986, the Economic Recovery Commission published two large volumes, *Building on our Strengths* and *Education for Self-Reliance*, which unequivocally yoked education to the economy. Education based upon and serving computerisation, high technology and global communication was envisaged as transforming independent, subsistence-based fishing outports into vibrant units of a post-modern economy. These reports formed the ideological basis for the publication by the Wells government of *Change and Challenge: A Strategic Economic Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* (1992) and *Adjusting the Course* (Part I 1993; Part II 1994). Proclaiming that education was "the key to economic development," these policy statements advocated a curriculum focusing upon science and mathematics, business studies, computerisation and entrepreneurial principles. If implemented in full, these proposals — which envisage close ties between schools and business interests — would transform both the aims and content of education in the Province.

This volume is essentially a set of snapshots of aspects of schooling and education at various points in the last 170 years; it reflects the kind of research being undertaken within (and without) the Faculty of Education. Much, however, remains to be done if a comprehensive survey of education, past and present, in Newfoundland and Labrador, is to be achieved. More research is necessary to fill the obvious gaps in educational history (particularly in the areas of classroom

routines and the behaviour of both teachers and pupils) while maintaining a balance between celebrating the achievements of the past and adopting a perspective which allows for critical evaluation. It is hoped that the essays collected here will mark a modest beginning in this endeavour.

Notes

[1]N.J. Smelser, *Social Paralysis and Social Change: British Working-Class Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley 1991), pp. 39-63.

[2]S. Ryan, "Fishery to Colony: A Newfoundland Watershed, 1783-1815," *Acadiensis*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1983, pp. 34-52.

[3]G.M. Story, "Education's Future in Newfoundland," *The Book of Newfoundland*, Vol. v (St. John's 1975), p. 351.

[4]VI Wm. IV, cap. 13, An Act for the Encouragement of Education in this Colony (6 May 1836); D.H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment* (London 1970), pp. 107-22.

[5]P. McCann, "The 'No Popery' Crusade and the Newfoundland School System, 1836-1843," Canadian Catholic Historical Association, *Historical Studies*, No. 58, 1991, pp. 79-97.

[6]P. McCann, "The Newfoundland School Society 1823-55: Missionary Enterprise or Cultural Imperialism?" in J.A. Mangan (Ed.), *'Benefits Bestowed'? Education and British Imperialism* (Manchester 1988), pp. 94-112.

[7]Story, "Education's Future," *loc. cit.*, p. 351.

[8]P. McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society: Education and Economic Conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador 1836-1986* (Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland 1994) Companion Volume: Tables, Table II.65, p. 217.

[9]VI Vic., cap. 6, An Act for the Encouragement of Education in this Colony (22 May 1843).

[10]XXXVII Vic., cap. 5, An Act to Amend the Acts for the Encouragement of Education, and to provide for the Denominational Sub-division of the Monies appropriated for Protestant Educational Purposes (29 April 1874).

[11]*Evening Mercury* (St. John's), 26-30 March 1887.

[12]XXXIX Vic., cap. 3, An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Acts for the Encouragement of Education (26 April 1876).

[13]J.K. Hiller, *The Newfoundland Railway 1881-1949*, Newfoundland Historical Society Pamphlet Number 6 (1981), pp. 3-5; D. Alexander, "Development and Dependence in Newfoundland, 1880-1970," in E.W. Sager, L.R. Fischer and S.O. Pierson (Eds.), *Atlantic Canada and Confederation: Essays in Canadian Political Economy* (Toronto 1983), pp. 3-30.

[14]P. McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society: Education and Economic Conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador 1836-1986* (Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland 1994), pp. 54-6; pp. 135-36.

[15]Public Record Office (London), DO 737 N 131/9, Note of Discussion on Newfoundland Education Program, 30 May 1938.

[16]McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society*, Companion Volume: Tables, Table II.7, pp. 60-61; Table II.65, p. 217; Table III.7, p. 239; Table III.35, p. 267.

[17]*Ibid.*, Table IV.24, p. 300.

[18]McCann, *Schooling in a Fishing Society*, pp. 230-31.

[19]*E.g.*, Talcott Parsons, "The School Class as a Social System: Some of its Functions in American Society," in A.H. Halsey, J. Floud and C.A. Anderson (Eds.), *Education, Economy, and Society* (New York 1961), pp. 434-55.

[20]*Cf.* Improving the Quality of Education: Challenge and Opportunity. Final Report, Task Force on Education (St. John's 1979), pp. 24-36.

[21]Dr. Samuel Johnson, "Cowley," in J.P. Hardy (Ed.), *Johnson's Lives of the Poets: A Selection* (Oxford 1971), p. 1.