

A COMMON COUNTENANCE?

PART V

“Curriculum discourse and revision were quiescent in Ontario for much of the inter-war period,” Tomkins tells us, “and there was less apparent systematic adumbration of theory and less conscious planning or proselytizing than took place in Alberta.”¹ At least not in the Department of Education, he continues, but elsewhere - in Ontario teachers’ organizations. In 1932, the Ontario Public School Men Teachers’ Federation conducted a survey which, in co-operation with other groups and with the encouragement of the Department, led to a report released three years later that recommended “far-reaching curriculum revision.”² Appointed in 1934 as Deputy Minister while Chair of the History Department at Queen’s University, Duncan McArthur “criticized a curriculum that aimed solely at imparting information, while neglecting creative work and the development of a social consciousness.”³ This apparently progressive agenda came not from the United States – at the time a hotbed of progressive curriculum experimentation epitomized by the Eight-Year Study⁴ – but from Britain, indicated by the establishment of chapters of the New Education Fellowship (NEF), the British version of America’s Progressive Education Association (PEA). The NEF had been founded in Great Britain in 1921 by theosophist progressives led by Beatrice Ensor; it soon became an international organization that held a series of conferences during the inter-war years.⁵ In 1938, the NEF and PEA held a large international conference in Windsor, Ontario, featuring as keynote speakers leading American progressives, including Carleton Washburne and Harold Rugg.⁶ The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) broadcast Rugg⁷; imagine an education professor being so featured today.

Tomkins tells us that “Alberta ideas were influential in the Ontario revision,” even to the point of plagiarism.⁸ Like Alberta, Ontario used British not American concepts, specifically recommending the organization of “enterprises.”⁹ By the school year 1937-38, C. C. Goldring, superintendent of Toronto schools, was claiming that “at least 85 percent of the 2200 public school teachers in Toronto encouraged their classes to undertake enterprises”; he cautioned against its “excessive use.”¹⁰ Tomkins judges Goldring’s cautionary note unneeded, as he reports that “the evidence is that teachers formalized the enterprise, causing it to fall into disrepute. An overemphasis on tangible results in the form of elaborate projects was a related weakness.”¹¹ An emphasis on outputs – especially quantified outputs like standardized scores – can doom any progressive curriculum reform, evidenced for instance in China.¹² Tomkins appears to blame the emphasis less on outputs than he does Ontario teachers who, he reports, “were unable to abandon the patterns by which they themselves had been taught. They could not easily shift from textbook dominance, dictated notes, formal testing,

competition, and enforced classroom silence to the use of varied reference materials, continuous assessment, cooperative attitudes the noisy chatter of enterprise work.”¹³

Progressive curriculum reform may have in fact been more a chimera than a reality; Tomkins tells us that during the 1930s “the rhetoric and reality of change were far apart.”¹⁴ Progressive concepts permeated the official Canadian curriculum literature, but “actual implementation of them was selective,” allowing the extent of progressive influence to be exaggerated, in large part “due to the proselytizing language used by reformers, and to the popular criticism voiced by such later critics as Hilda Neatby in the early 1950s.”¹⁵ When (especially American) “progressive ideas were imported into Canada during the 1930s, criticism of those same ideas flowed across the border through the mass media,”¹⁶ and by the conclusion of World War II a conservative repudiation of Progressivism was underway.¹⁷

Then Tomkins returns to the interwar period, noting that in Alberta, in 1930, more than 75 percent of all high schools were one- or two-room institutions.¹⁸ Other statistical glimpses follow: although Canada had a lower ratio of secondary attendance than the U.S., the ratio was “significantly greater” than anywhere in Europe.¹⁹ In 1923, the sixth most studied subject was Latin, and the second was Algebra.²⁰ Those who found the value of such subjects for their presumed mental discipline affirmed their popularity, as did those “favoring high selectivity in the secondary school, because they saw such schooling as the privilege of the few rather than the right of the many.”²¹ Those who favoured selectivity were chagrined to see secondary enrolments increase during the interwar period, as “no longer was the high school restricted to the children of the elite, even though such students were still overrepresented.”²² Tomkins also locates the increasing incidence of the “human capital” argument, reducing education to its economic value or cost, during the interwar period.²³

Regulating education to its economic value was not yet complete then – it is now²⁴ – and the social role of the school expanded, allowing extra-curricular activities to become more than mere adjuncts to the academic program.²⁵ The idea was that encouraging democratic socialization, including such extra-curricular activities such as “student newspapers, government assemblies and sports[,] enabled students to assume quasi-adult responsibilities and provided real-life training situations” – as well as providing “a means of maintaining control over unruly adolescents that was all the more effective if it could appear to be exerted by the students themselves.”²⁶ Despite “an expanding social role, the high school remained a “pre-eminently academic institution,” as “Canadian curricula still exalted ‘scholarship and character’ as their main aims in contrast to the emphasis on citizenship south of the border.”²⁷

Institutional reorganization, initially in the form of the junior high school (Grades 7, 8, and 9), was, Tomkins judges, “an attempt to both encourage and accommodate curricular change,” intended “to bridge the gap between the elementary and the traditional high school, and thereby to break down the distinction between the two levels by providing a more continuous curricular experience.”²⁸ Partially adopted

in Nova Scotia during the 1930s, the junior high school appeared only sporadically elsewhere in eastern Canada.²⁹ A second significant organizational change was the establishment of the composite high school which, like the junior high school, also first occurred in western Canada, a concept designed to diminish the disparity in status and prestige between vocational and academic programs, thought to be a consequence of their segregation in separate buildings.³⁰ The idea caught on across the country, but Tomkins tells us “there is little evidence that even in the progressive western provinces they either reduced the disparity of esteem between academic and vocational programs, or between the students enrolled in each type.”³¹

Tomkins summarizes the interwar period as one of “progressive conservative change in Canadian curricula at both the elementary and secondary levels,” the mixed modifier (progressive-conservative) denoting the amalgamation of progressive efforts to reform the curriculum met by conservative efforts to keep it unchanged.³² To glimpse how this turbulence was experienced by students, Tomkins points to autobiographical accounts of writers who were students at the time. “Two things are striking about these accounts,” he reports: “Despite drab school environments and meager resources, the curriculum provided a rich experience which pupils enjoyed. Secondly, that experience was remarkably similar in rural environments as widely separated as Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan.”³³ One homogenizing element was the “dreaded” provincial examination; another was the “monstrous ordeal” of the inspector’s annual visit,” this from Ernest Buckler’s account, confirming the continuing “mental discipline role of the school and the absence of the New Education in rural Nova Scotia.”³⁴ For Fredelle Maynard, a Jewish immigrant girl, the various Prairie schools she attended during the 1920s “all seemed alike,” as each emphasized “drill and memory work,” memorization inculcating “a respect for facts.”³⁵

One wonders where exactly the “progressive” part enters the picture when reading Tomkins’ corroboration of Maynard’s account: “School routines within and without the classroom were strictly regimented and minutely regulated by systems of buzzers, bells and often terrifying verbal commands,” augmented by the use of “sanctions such as standing in the corner, writing lines, doing endless arithmetic computations, and ... [even] corporal punishment.”³⁶ Moreover, “teaching methods were remarkably consistent from teacher to teacher and subject to subject and, as suggested, were rigidly formal,” overall a “system that discouraged independent thought and provided no opportunity to be creative.”³⁷ Despite this “drabness, severity and intellectual torpor,” Tomkins assures us that children still enjoyed their school experience, that, he speculates, due to “the lack of competing sources of knowledge in an information-poor pre-mass media social milieu, during a period when the curriculum was still defined in terms of traditional lore embodied in textbooks and readers.”³⁸ Not only enjoyment, but even something akin to liberation occurred – at least Tomkins thinks so - at least for a few.

Tomkins' mixed picture of the Canadian curriculum during the interwar period becomes even more mixed when he reports that – despite the apparent triumph of traditional education that he has just chronicled – that “none of the new subjects of the New Education was new,” adding that “sewing, bookkeeping, agriculture and ‘physical culture’ had all had at least a marginal place in the nineteenth century curriculum.”³⁹ “What made them new,” he tells us, “were the new forms they assumed, the new methods by which they were taught, and the new prominence they gained in the curriculum after 1892.”⁴⁰ Acknowledging that the K-12 school subjects and the university academic disciplines “are not necessarily the same thing and may be viewed very differently by teachers, university academics and researchers,” Tomkins tells us that during “the period under discussion here, however, when university dominance of the curriculum was powerful, the approximation between the two was high.”⁴¹

That said, we learn that “social studies began to come into use as a term in the western provinces about 1920, to describe history, geography and civics at the elementary level.”⁴² In this internally variegated school subject the “approximation” between school subjects and university disciplines seems not so high. And the “outcome of the ‘Latin debate’ in that province [Ontario] was indicated by the fact that nearly 80 percent of all Ontario high school pupils were still taking Latin in 1923.”⁴³ Perhaps one point of approximation among elementary, secondary and tertiary institutions was their book-centeredness, as “Canadian schools remained textbook schools through the 1940s.”⁴⁴ Like other school subjects, “writing was thought to promote moral and physical discipline.”⁴⁵ What was read – studied – was apparently not primarily Canadian, as Tomkins reports that “in 1927, John W. Garvin, an Ontario educator, complained that, apart from an occasional selection, the work of Canadian authors was generally neglected in school readers.”⁴⁶ Garvin proposed that “25 percent of the space in Ontario readers be devoted to Canadian authors.”⁴⁷

Canadian authors were important in Quebec, as long as they were French-speaking. French was the first language in Quebec, while in the other provinces French and Latin were favorite second choices in language instruction.⁴⁸ Nearly one-sixth of Ontario high school students had been studying German before 1914, but anti-German sentiment arising during World War I precipitated a decline in interest afterward.⁴⁹ Tomkins reiterates that “Latin retained a dominant position, particularly in Ontario.”⁵⁰ Skipping ahead, Tomkins tells us that after World War II contemporary languages gained status, and, moreover, teaching methods were modernized, often emphasizing an “audio-lingual method of teaching,”⁵¹ a method, he thinks, that positioned “the student an active, rather than a passive, learner.”⁵² Perhaps it did in Canada, but not so much in the United States, at least not where (in central Ohio) and when (the 1950s and 1960s) I studied Spanish. Certainly listening to native speakers on audio tape helped with pronunciation, but imitating others is not what I have in mind when reading the adjective “active.”

“Under the influence of progressive education,” Tomkins tells us, traditional school subjects – he names arithmetic as his example – were given “greater social and personal relevance,” incorporating them into topical courses like “Joe Wilson Learns How to Make a Model Glider.”⁵³ Apparently these are either localized or transitory, as Tomkins also tells us that “during the inter-war years, classical mathematics retained its dominance.”⁵⁴ After World War II, the “reaction against progressivism led to a new emphasis on arithmetic.”⁵⁵ The Canadian Mathematics Congress was established in 1945.⁵⁶ Similar waves of progressive and reactionary reform rippled through the science curriculum. In progressive formulations of the curriculum, science was threaded through “nature study” or “rural science,” and “some science was taught in connection with agriculture, health (physiology and hygiene) and temperance.”⁵⁷ The concept of “skills” appeared; Tomkins quotes “Alexander MacKay’s view that the aim of science teaching was not the amassing of facts, but the cultivation of a disposition ‘to inquire at first hand a habit of caution in forming judgments about things’.”⁵⁸ In science, too, progressive conceptions of curriculum that threaded science through other more socially or personally relevant topics were either localized or transitory as Tomkins tells us: “Physics and chemistry remained dominant and general science was slow to take hold.”⁵⁹

Perhaps because success was spotty, Progressives focused on social studies, in the elementary-school curriculum conceived of “as the integrating core subject of the progressive curriculum, lending itself particularly to the use of project and enterprise methods.”⁶⁰ Evidently even “biography began to find a place in the Ontario curriculum after 1905,” as the “correlation of history with literature, composition, Bible stories, stories of ‘primitive peoples’ and child life in other lands, together with accounts of famous persons were advocated.”⁶¹ Pushback didn’t wait until the end of World War II, however; Tomkins reports: “In 1919, renewed emphasis was given to history *per se* and it was reinstated as a high school entrance examination subject in that year.”⁶² To H. J. Cody, who became Ontario’s minister of education in 1918, history was “the great vehicle of patriotic instruction,” requiring curriculum that to be Protestant and Christian, politically conservative, and asserting Anglo-Saxon racial superiority.⁶³ Progressives may have retreated but apparently they found other ways to fiddle with any completely conservative curriculum, for instance the strictly chronological organization of the history curriculum, as by 1915 “teaching methods stressed comparative, ‘regressive,’ (working from the present backwards), and concentric approaches.”⁶⁴ The “concentric approach” anticipated what would later be termed a “spiral curriculum,” depicted as a method of dealing ‘in ever widening circles with the same topic or event,’⁶⁵ such as the life of Champlain.”⁶⁶

Progressives considered “current events” as “motiv[at]ing historical study and [as serving] as the basis for teaching civics.”⁶⁷ But by 1923, university historians pushed back; that year’s report on the teaching of history and civics in Canadian schools prepared for the National Council of Education was written by members of the

University of Toronto history department; they insisted on less topical and interdisciplinary treatment and “a more objective treatment of their discipline.”⁶⁸ The historians’ report caused “dismay in the ranks of the Council,” as not only interdisciplinary curriculum organizations were rejected, so were efforts to derive moral lessons from history.⁶⁹ Moral lessons, the historians felt sure, were “the proper province of literature and civics rather than history.”⁷⁰ Nor, they added, should history be used to teach “patriotism or internationalism.”⁷¹ That consensus splintered slightly during the interwar years, when academic historians did not just issue reports; they also wrote textbooks for schools. In 1934, Queens University historian Duncan McArthur was appointed Ontario’s deputy minister of education, a post from where “he presented the unusual spectacle of a history professor who espoused a progressivist social studies viewpoint,”⁷² in sync, Tomkins tells us, “with most provincial policy-makers when he declared that the school should counter unrestrained individualism and ‘create and promote right social attitudes.’”⁷³ Promoting “right” social attitudes certainly seems “moral” to me; his fellow historians must have been horrified.

Tomkins mentions other social-studies subjects, geography for one, which, he reports, “much more than history, remained an elementary school subject after 1892, and was little taught at the high school level” – until after 1950, when “geography slowly revived as a high school subject.”⁷⁴ Its understated status in the curriculum Tomkins speculates might be due to its non-universal acceptance as a crucial university discipline.⁷⁵ Perhaps that status means it was open to extra-disciplinary influences, the very ones historians disavowed? For example, Tomkins tells us that geographical studies of the British Empire displayed not only maps, but conveyed “standard patriotic sentiments of the day, reflecting a jingoism that Canadians have usually ascribed to American textbooks.”⁷⁶

University control of the secondary-school curriculum had not been as complete during the nineteenth century. Nor had Ministry control been as comprehensive as it would become in the twentieth century. Tomkins attributes these facts to “limited bureaucracies and the importunities of localism [that] made direct supervision and control of the curriculum difficult.”⁷⁷ That changed as “indirectly, centralized control and uniformity were gradually promoted through textbooks, examinations and teacher training policies.”⁷⁸ He cites 1892 as a pivot point, when curricular control was “refined and extended” and curriculum “implementation made more efficient, with the result that, despite the absence of strong central administrative apparatus, curricular uniformity across each province and among all provinces was considerably enhanced.”⁷⁹ E. T. White’s 1922 study of Ontario textbooks had revealed that regulations governing textbooks in that province resembled those in most other provinces.⁸⁰ In Ontario, George Ross and his successors had extended and enforced Ryerson’s policies, instituting “regulations governing the writing, publishing, pricing, evaluation, selection and distribution of textbooks,” regulations copied by “other provinces and still form the basis of much contemporary policy.”⁸¹ Control was

complete, or meant to be, as bureaucrats announced that “the use of unauthorized textbooks by a teacher could result in suspension and in the withholding by the inspector of the legislative grant to the school board.”⁸² And school trustees and teachers had nothing to say concerning textbook selection; Ross considered them “incompetent.”⁸³ By 1934 Fred Clarke could comment: “A ... feature of the common countenance of Canadian education is found in the minute prescription of courses of study and textbooks and the meticulous detail of official regulations.”⁸⁴ All this, Tomkins comments, reflects “the Canadian passion for uniformity.”⁸⁵

One way to ensure uniformity is to tether the curriculum to standardized examinations. As early as 1918, Peter Sandiford complained that Canadian high schools were “examination-ridden.”⁸⁶ H. T. J. Coleman judged the “formal (and formidable) high school entrance examination”⁸⁷ as “the greatest evil in our Ontario education.”⁸⁸ Then Tomkins cites a 1922 Carnegie Foundation study of education in the Maritime provinces, one which “denounced the dominance of examinations and the resulting merciless selection of pupils.”⁸⁹ Apparently bending under the pressure, Ontario began to allow “high school entrance by recommendations, but did not finally abolish the entrance examination until 1949.”⁹⁰ Standardized examinations were not the only culprit: “Throughout the period, the universities continued to serve as major determinants of school curricula and standards.”⁹¹ There was pushback on this front too. Tomkins tells us that “many Ontario farm parents and pupils, like their counterparts elsewhere in Canada, viewed the schools as a means of escape from limited rural employment opportunities. Urban dwellers also refused to be weaned away from the traditional university dominated curriculum and to see their children deprived of opportunities for upward mobility.”⁹² Apparently that failed, at least for those seeking upward mobility through the University of Toronto, as, after 1930, the University required “senior matriculation (Grade 13) for entrance, a move which created a five-year high school program and greatly increased university dominance of the high schools.”⁹³ Despite “a growing interest in objective testing,” Tomkins reports that “most provinces proceeded cautiously and Canada was relatively free of the testing mania that had developed in the United States.”⁹⁴ Why? For an explanation Tomkins suggests that “more uniform curricula, more conservative attitudes, centralized textbook policies and province-wide examinations probably qualified the Canadian response to the movement.”⁹⁵ In other words, the deed had been done: uniformity had been ensured.

The so-called “New Education” that was Progressivism in Canada had shifted schools’ emphasis from subject matter to teaching method.⁹⁶ As early as 1898, Thomas Kirkland, the principal of the Toronto Normal School, had expressed appreciation that knowledge of a subject was not the only prerequisite to teach, but he also worried that the educational pendulum had swung “too far from the side of no methods at all to nothing but methods.”⁹⁷ Indeed: he noticed that inadequate subject matter knowledge was “painfully evident” among teachers.⁹⁸ Three years later, John Squair concurred,

complaining that there was “too much pedagogy and too little education in the training of teachers.”⁹⁹ That was, Tomkins adds, “a standard complaint about teaching teacher training that has been heard ever since.”¹⁰⁰

Before 1920, Tomkins points out, teacher training was often conducted in union schools or in country model schools; the high school also served as a teacher training institution, especially in western Canada.¹⁰¹ When conducted in so-called normal schools, “despite overcrowding and the severe limitation of facilities and resources,” Tomkins reports that “there is evidence that the normal schools were more effective than the critics allowed in preparing their charges to function in schools systems that were often even more deprived than the training institutions.”¹⁰² Tomkins continues: “The normal school influenced the curriculum in various ways. They were a prime means of introducing the new subjects.... [They] introduced students to the new science of education through acquaintance with the works of McMurry, Thorndike and Dewey.”¹⁰³

Evidently intellectually engaging teacher education courses could not change inadequate working conditions; during this period the annual turnover among (for example) Nova Scotia’s rural teachers reached 50 percent.¹⁰⁴ Coextensive with the inconstancy of the faculty was its “continuing feminization of the teaching force.”¹⁰⁵ In 1915, Tomkins reports, only 256 of Nova Scotia’s 2945 teachers were men, a fact he attributes to “an expanding economy,” rendering “teaching became less attractive to young men, especially if it demanded higher qualification.”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps this very phenomenon of feminization functioned to discourage men from entering the profession, a speculation supported, it would seem, by a comment Tomkins quotes of J. H. Putman who, in 1913, noticed the feminization of the U.S. teaching force, promptly Putman to proudly claim that, under his leadership, the Ottawa school system enjoyed a higher proportion of well qualified male teachers on its staff than any on the continent, although he agreed with his American hosts that, although a more even balance between the men and women was healthier, it was preferable to have “a capable womanly woman” in every classroom instead of an unmanly male weakling attracted by low pay!¹⁰⁷

Tomkins does not discuss the gender of school inspectors, but one wouldn’t be surprised to see the above gendered ratios reversed. He does point out that in 1890, Ontario employed a staff of 82 school inspectors to supervise 9201 teachers, or roughly 113 teachers per inspector; thirty years later, 125 inspectors supervised 15,331 or about 122 teachers each.¹⁰⁸ In 1913, J. C. Miller found that similar ratios obtained in most other provinces.¹⁰⁹ Miller, Tomkins notes, “was in the vanguard of the first generation of educators – G. Fred McNally and H. C. Newland were others – who introduced American scientific management ideas into Canadian school administration.”¹¹⁰ Apparently suffering no cognitive dissonance, Miller’s study was, Tomkins reports, “resolutely national,” the “first comprehensive survey of the inspection and supervision needs of Canadian rural schools.”¹¹¹ Miller’s endorsement of “strong central authority”

did conflict, Tomkins adds, “with the concomitant need to adapt the curriculum to local conditions,”¹¹² although conceivably such “strong central authority” could ensure that the curriculum did not adapt. Miller also surveyed school inspectors’ “reading habits,” noting and what “literature available to them,” finding, “unsurprisingly . . . how little time most had for reading,”¹¹³ surely the case for teachers too. Like Miller himself, most read American educational literature; indeed Miller noted an “almost complete absence of Canadian educational literature.”¹¹⁴ This made Canadian educators almost entirely dependent on American references, a fact that was both a “credit and a matter of regret.”¹¹⁵ Despite his preferences and practices, Miller thought that “there was a serious need for Canadian intellectual leadership in education.”¹¹⁶

Tomkins tells us that “it has become fashionable to condemn modern central and local bureaucracies as a dead hand on school system,” but, citing Sutherland, the fact is “that bureaucracy was probably the only way in which a gradual improvement in the quality of Canadian rural schooling could have been effected before the 1950s,” adding that “in our own day of better trained teachers, more sophisticated and demanding parents and more self-confident students, close bureaucratic supervision may be less necessary.”¹¹⁷ Perhaps teachers’ unions provided a counter-weight to government bureaucracy. Tomkins asserts that “nothing is more in the Canadian educational tradition (or more in contrast with that of the U.S.) than the teachers’ federation, with its compulsory or “automatic” membership based on provincial legislation, often skillfully engineered by the educational bureaucracy itself.”¹¹⁸ Did more extensive bureaucratization in Canada produce schools superior to those in the U.S.? A doctoral graduate of the University of Chicago who studied with Bobbitt and Judd, W. L. Richardson found that “as compared with Ontario’s centralized system, was that some American schools were much better than those of Canada, but a great many were worse.”¹¹⁹ One suspects that could be the case today.

How did Canadian schools compare with British ones? John Adams and A. F. B. Hepburn, like Fred Clarke, were British observers, “visitors from a nation to which Canadian educators looked for a model of rigorous academic schooling.”¹²⁰ Tomkins finds an “unconscious irony in their criticism of the excessive academicism and formalism of the Canadian curriculum, with its overemphasis on Latin and neglect of subjects like music and art.”¹²¹ Clarke, whom Tomkins considers “probably the most astute of all external observers during the period, was particularly critical of the excessive centralization of Canadian schooling, the rigidity of the grade system, the depreciation of teaching,”¹²² what Clarke called the “standard of the average” and the “ritualization of the school.”¹²³ Despite these concerns, Clarke “concluded that history, the sciences and mathematics were all well taught in the best schools.”¹²⁴

That acknowledged, Clarke judged that “pupils still suffered under a regime of too much sheer laboriousness, which seriously detracted from genuine intellectual effort,” thereby identifying “a problem that Canadian educators ignored in their zeal to curb the excesses of progressivism. While all could agree that intellectual effort entailed

hard work, many tended to equate hard work with intellectual effort,”¹²⁵ a conflation that has not disappeared in schools or universities. Clarke did observe “virtues in Canadian schooling, which marked it off from that of the United States, despite outward resemblances.”¹²⁶ In contrast to the American school curriculum, Canadian curriculum was standardized, what Clarke praised as “a stable scheme of basic studies.”¹²⁷ Clarke suspected that “getting by” wasn’t so easy in Canada’s curriculum, which had not yet succumbed to concepts of “credits” and “units”¹²⁸ that would have undermined the “sound liberal arts tradition on which the Canadian curriculum still rested.”¹²⁹ Clarke thought Canada had not departed as far as the U.S. in “breaking up and diluting the great intellectual tradition of western civilization.”¹³⁰

American observers of Canadian curriculum saw a curriculum “less elaborate and the pupils less spontaneous than in the U.S.”¹³¹ In 1935, William C. Bagley, the prominent American critic of Progressivism, criticized the “shocking inefficiency”¹³² of American schools and suggested that Canadian, like Scottish children, were so much more ably prepared in the elementary school subjects that American achievement tests were easy for them.¹³³ Also buoyed by Fred Clarke’s characterization of the Canadian curriculum’s “prosaic sanity,”¹³⁴ Canadian educators concurred, reinforcing “the smug complacency of Canadian educators, obscuring for them the likelihood that the best America high schools and elite private college provided an academic experience qualitatively superior to any available in Canada.”¹³⁵ Tomkins concludes:

On balance it would be said that if the centralization, uniformity and formalism of the Canadian curriculum led to narrowness and mediocrity at the same it ensured a limited measure of solid academic achievement, the bewildering variety of the American curriculum resulted in greater extremes of both weakness and excellence.¹³⁶

This observation would not be mistaken were Tomkins made it today.

Peter Sandiford, the “leading inter-war Canadian educational theorist,” Tomkins considers “probably the best example of an educator who combined a traditionalist moralistic stance with a progressive scientific pedagogy,” blending “both perspectives” to serve “a highly structured curriculum in a centralized system that the new methods would render more efficient.”¹³⁷ Such curricular stability was in sharp contrast to the situation in the United States, where Columbia University’s Teachers College registered 30,000 curriculum revisions in America’s schools. While Tomkins judges Canada as “fortunate to have been spared so many frequent upheavals,” he allows that in the “worship [of] the past,” it “failed to prepare pupils for a rapidly changing world.”¹³⁸ “Our education,” Sandiford himself had concluded, “is retrospective, not prospective.”¹³⁹

Such criticism was not, of course, universally shared. Carleton Stanley, the president of Dalhousie University, criticized Canadians for being “too prone to accept American fads,” for being “seduced by materialism,” a kind of cultural if not national disloyalty that showed up in the curriculum with its “emphasis on the new social

sciences, on citizenship and on technical education,” and its “abandon[ment of] the humanities.” In fact, Stanley snorted, in parts of Canada one would fail “to find any real content in the whole high school curriculum.”¹⁴⁰ Tomkins judges Sandiford’s assessment, “while useful ... far too sanguine, while those of Stanley and other moralist-humanists were serious distortions of what was actually happening in Canadian classrooms.”¹⁴¹ I wonder why Tomkins could be confident he knew what “was actually happening in Canadian classrooms.”

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ENDNOTES

¹1986, 197.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Pinar 2010.

⁵ 1986, 197.

⁶ 1986, 198. See Rugg 1926, 1963; Schwartz 1979; Washburne 1926.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Pinar 2014.

¹³ 1986, 198.

¹⁴ 1986, 199.

¹⁵ 1986, 199. See Neatby 1953. Likewise, in America the late twentieth-century Cold War aggravated the reactionary response to progressive experimentation: Pinar 2019, 54-55.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 1986, 200.

¹⁸ 1986, 201.

¹⁹ Ibid. In a study of educational attainment in Canada 1911-1961 conducted decades later, the Economic Council concluded that a lower rate of economic growth and productivity in the Canadian economy was closely related to less educational attainment than the U.S. Less educational attainment overall perhaps, but attainment more equitably distributed: Tomkins (1986, 277) reports that Michael Katz, a 1960s radical American school critic, identified as “the most striking feature of Ontario education” was “the relative lack of wide discrepancies between schools and suburb” as compared with the U.S.

²⁰ 1986, 202. See the table on this page for the complete listing. Later, Tomkins (1986, 246) reports that in Ontario, “Latin lost ground when it was abolished as a prerequisite for public school teaching in 1904.”

²¹ 1986, 203.

²² 1986, 204.

²³ Ibid. See Moghtader 2021.

²⁴ See, for instance, Williamson 2013.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ 1986, 205.

²⁹ 1986, 206.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² 1986, 207.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ 1986, 208.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ 1986, 209.

³⁷ 1986, 210.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ 1986, 214.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ 1986, 215.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ 1986, 217.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

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- ⁴⁶ 1986, 218.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ 1986, 219.
- ⁴⁹ 1986, 220.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ 1986, 221.
- ⁵² 1986, 222.
- ⁵³ 1986, 223.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ 1986, 224.
- ⁵⁸ Quoted in 1986, 224.
- ⁵⁹ 1986, 224.
- ⁶⁰ 1986, 225.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² 225-226.
- ⁶³ Quoted in 1986, 226.
- ⁶⁴ 1986, 226.
- ⁶⁵ Quoted in 1986, 226.
- ⁶⁶ 1986, 226. Champlain's life contests any simplistic condemnation of all settlers as genocidal: see Fischer 2009.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ 1986, 226.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² 1986, 227.
- ⁷³ Quoted in 1986, 227.
- ⁷⁴ 1986, 227.
- ⁷⁵ 1986, 228.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ 1986, 234.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid. While uniformity was probably a good thing then – certainly Tomkins appears to endorse it – in the U.S. at least, I think it's gone a little far. Except in Florida, where the right-wing has intruded outrageously: Goldstein 2022.
- ⁸⁰ 1986, 236.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² Ibid.
- ⁸³ Ibid.
- ⁸⁴ 1986, 234.
- ⁸⁵ 1986, 237.
- ⁸⁶ Quoted in 1986, 238.
- ⁸⁷ 1986, 238.
- ⁸⁸ Quoted in 1986, 238.
- ⁸⁹ 1986, 238.
- ⁹⁰ 1986, 239.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² 1986, 240.
- ⁹³ Ibid.
- ⁹⁴ 1986, 242.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Quoted in 1986, 242. Tomkins (1986, 246) reported that “only a miniscule number of Canadian teachers, even at the high school level, were university graduates. In 1921, only 59 of Nova Scotia's teachers held degrees,” despite the fact that after 1898, “universities undertook teacher preparation.” By 1940, Tomkins (1986, 247) continues, “Canadian teachers at all levels were receiving longer, more systematic training in institutions with higher admission standards than before. Even so, ... standards were still low in comparison with those of other western countries.”
- ⁹⁹ Quoted in 1986, 243.

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- ¹⁰⁰ 1986, 243. In the 1980s, in the United States, efforts were made to strengthen prospective teachers' knowledge of subjective matter: <https://findingaids.lib.msu.edu/repositories/2/resources/585> At Louisiana State University (LSU), as Head of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, I promoted the abolishment of undergraduate degrees in education, requiring the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree before being considered for admission to teacher education, a tradition in Canada but still not universally accepted in the United States. The Holmes Group's recommendation guided our actions at LSU as undergraduate degrees in education were indeed abolished.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰² 1986, 245.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁴ 1986, 243.
- ¹⁰⁵ 1986, 244.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁷ Quoted in 1986, 244. The same gendered nonsense occurs in the United States as well; see Pinar 2019, 58, 68.
- ¹⁰⁸ 1986, 247.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹¹² Ibid.
- ¹¹³ 1986, 248.
- ¹¹⁴ Quoted in 1986, 248.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁶ 1986, 248.
- ¹¹⁷ 1986, 249.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁹ 1986, 250.
- ¹²⁰ 1986, 253.
- ¹²¹ Ibid.
- ¹²² Ibid.
- ¹²³ Quoted in 1986, 253.
- ¹²⁴ 1986, 253-254.
- ¹²⁵ 1986, 254.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid.
- ¹²⁷ Quoted in 1986, 254.
- ¹²⁸ Quoted in 1986, 254.
- ¹²⁹ 1986, 254.
- ¹³⁰ Quoted in 1986, 254.
- ¹³¹ 1986, 255.
- ¹³² Quoted in 1986, 256.
- ¹³³ 1986, 256.
- ¹³⁴ Quoted in 1986, 256.
- ¹³⁵ 1986, 256.
- ¹³⁶ Ibid.
- ¹³⁷ 1986, 257.
- ¹³⁸ Ibid.
- ¹³⁹ Quoted in 1986, 257.
- ¹⁴⁰ Quoted in 1986, 258.
- ¹⁴¹ 1986, 258.