Introduction

In this paper, we will examine the education policies of Canadian provinces and territories from the perspective of governance and its evolution. The principal questions that interest us are the following: How is power in education exercised in the different provinces and territories within the legislative and regulatory framework? How do we characterize it? Has it changed during the 1990s?

Are we able to identify common trends in the policies studied? Is there even something that could be called “a Canadian trend”? Or is it preferable to identify distinctive evolutions, be they specific to various provinces and territories or to subgroups of these entities, stemming from the general, political or education culture of each province and territory? In the latter case, is the idea of “path dependency” useful?

This text is a start towards answering these questions. In the first section, we discuss the concept of governance. In the second section, we present the principal elements of the structural

1 The empirical data for the analysis presented in this paper are a set of twenty-five to sixty page narratives of educational policy change at the government level, one for each of the 13 provinces and territories that comprise Canada. The policy narratives cover the period 1990 to 2003 for each jurisdiction (see references below). The investigation was undertaken as Sub-Project 2 of a longitudinal study of policies and conditions affecting the lives of school personnel across Canada. The overall study, entitled “The Evolution of Teaching Personnel in Canada” (“Évolution actuelle du personnel scolaire de l’enseignement primaire et secondaire au Canada”) is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through its Major Collaborative Research Initiatives program. The policy narratives were constructed by research teams representing universities from different regions of the country, with each team taking responsibility for different provinces or territories. The policy narratives were developed primarily from current and historical documentary data available through archives and websites of ministries of education and related government education units, provincial professional organizations and public interest groups (teacher federations, trustee associations), academic research in universities, and the news media. In this paper we take a pan-Canadian look at policy trends associated with governance, using the original policy narratives as our data-base. Governance was one of ten pan-Canadian policy themes identified in an initial analysis of common focuses of policy debate and change over the time period covered (Chan et al., Preliminary Synthesis of Trends in Education Policy in Canada, octobre 29, 2003, manuscript. Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training (CHET). Methodologically, we undertook the following steps. First we reviewed all of the original policy narratives to get a
framework from which we will establish comparisons between the governance systems in basic education in the provinces and territories of Canada. This framework, coming from Weber’s ideal type, is perhaps somewhat Quebec-centric in the sense that it is drawn from the system which we know best, namely Quebec’s. However, we suggest that this framework can illuminate the stable elements in Canada’s education governance, notably a three-layered structure and the institutionalization of a democratic, community-based participation. These two characteristics, which we call the vertical and horizontal axes of governance, seem to us as constituting Canada’s institutional heritage, “the traces of our origins,” to borrow an expression from Merrien (1990) and the starting point for a comparative study of the evolution of governance.

It seems important to point out from the beginning that Canadian education is itself embedded in a number of institutions, policies and ways of thinking about problems inherited from the past and this restrains the possible political options or the application of decisions made in these areas. This is what drives the notion of “path dependency” which comes from economics. This notion was developed to take into account the stability of institutions and resistance to change. The notion sheds light on the workings of auto-reinforcement as a choice, a way of doing something, or a system of thinking long-term. Although coming from economics, this notion has been adopted by and adapted to political science. (Palier, Bonoli, 1999; Merrien, 2000). Path dependency accords primacy to the institutional political variables and the weight of political legacy.

In the third section, we identify and describe the principal trends in education governance. In the last section, we analyze the meaning of these trends.

Goverance

The term “governance” is very much in fashion and is becoming ever more natural and present in everyday language. But it is not an innocent or unequivocal term. Nor is the movement, both in everyday language and in more specialized contexts, from the expression “government” to “governance.” If the notion of government refers back to the action of governing—to make decisions that engage a collectivity, to determine and then to share the orientations and to move them towards actualization—exercised by an identifiable person or group with legitimate sense of the whole. From that initial review we then identified six major policy trends within the theme of governance across the country: 1) the mergers of school boards; 2) in Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, the deconfessionalization of school structures; 3) a mixture of decentralisation and centralisation relative to curriculum and evaluation, finance and various school level responsibilities related to accountability; 4) a greater place for parents in the governance of schools through school councils; 5) various forms of desectorization of education, increasing school choice as well as offering parents alternative forms of education (charter schools, private schools, home schooling); 6) a willingness to build partnerships with government, municipal and community organizations in order to maximize the integration in the school context of the services needed to support at-risk populations. We also explored the possibility of a seventh trend, described as a “pan-canadian strategy” of governance. We then tried to pull things together within the conceptual framework put forward in the first section of the paper. In this paper we highlight key findings from our analysis of each of the seven areas listed above and provide a discussion of the overall picture of governance in canadian education.
authority in a given public arena, the more recent idea of “governance” has multiple meanings, both descriptive, analytical and prescriptive. This makes understanding the idea more difficult.

It is impossible to build a consensus around one single meaning of governance. However, we find in it the central idea that the governments of the northern and southern states do not or no longer have the monopoly on legitimate power and that other bodies may contribute to the maintenance of order and may participate in economic and social regulation. In this sense, governance is related to the capacity to coordinate interdependent activities and/or to realize change without the legal authority to order it. While government in its strict sense concerns elected officials or legitimate representatives, governance enlarges the decision-making circle to other actors, sectors or organizations, in such a way as to give the impression of legitimacy to decisions and an efficacy and efficiency in the application of these decisions. Governance is, in a way, a means of conceiving the building of politics based on a network of organizations and actors who move into various political arenas, be they local, central or intermediate. In this political vision, the State is a partner associated with other actors in order to bring about an action, for which they all share responsibility, authority, risks and an investment of resources. The State thus becomes more strategic.

If we try to move from government to governance, there is a problem, or, if you prefer, some people believe that the State, incarnation of the public sphere, is “in crisis.” Recall that the trilateral commission in 1975, in its report entitled “Governality of Democracies,” indicated that the crisis of the State stemmed from the split between ever increasing social demands and the lack of resources by the State. To come out of this crisis which makes democracies “ungovernable”, it is important—if we follow this point of view—to transform the State. We move from a State that redistributes to a State that favours liberalization, the deregulation of markets and the privatization of the public sector. We note that, from the beginning, the idea of a crisis in governance is mark of liberal theses. (Saldomando, 2000 :3).

Governance, as Van Haecht (2004) underscores, would cover on the descriptive level a group of phenomena revealing the loss of legitimacy and centrality of the public sphere and the least effective and efficient public action. Thus, in terms of prescription, “good” governance shows a way out of the crisis for the Welfare State, thereafter seen as “ungovernable.” This good governance would have the State give up a part of its competencies to other actors, to work as a mediator and as part of a network. As well, according to Merrien (1998 :63), “the new ‘good’ governance is characterized by the movement from guardianship to contracts, from centralisation to decentralisation, from the State as redistributor to the State as regulator, from the management of public service to management according to market principles, from public ‘guidance’ to cooperation between the public and private actors, etc.”

For Van Haecht, in the analytic realm, the notion of governance raises questions of the relative weight of convergence factors associated with globalization in terms of the societies’ institutional heritage and their political systems. Are we facing an inevitable evolution, with the same orientations, that will be imposed on all States in the same manner? Is it possible for States to continue to develop from their own characteristics, anchored in their history and making certain options possible or impossible? In the latter case, is it possible that the idea of governance is used in a more or less rhetorical way, that doesn’t always succeed in overcoming the resistance of the old notion of “public service” in education?
The concept of governance thus leads to multiple uses, because it both describes and analyzes phenomena, while turning into prescription and solution, as much for the countries of the North as the South. In this latter case, good governance has in fact become a condition for international aid. Effectively, for large international agencies and sponsors, such as the United Nations Development Program, good governance is synonymous with the healthy management of public affairs, democratic participation, transparency, efficacy, equality and the legality of the mechanisms, processes and institutions from which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and their responsibilities and regulate their differences.

Following Gilbert (2003), we recall that governance gains its legitimacy from two principle sources: liberal democracy and participatory democracy. In the first case, more than for the second, is the current neo-liberalism that contributes the most. Following this idea of democracy, contemporary States, committed to the well-being of their citizens, should become competitive on an international scale and their national economies, to be competitive with other economies, should work to attract foreign capital and encourage technological innovation. To become competitive, the State must put in place modes of governance that bring together competition and accountability: quasi-marketplaces for providing services, the accountability of the actors involved, contractual relationships between the actors and others—performance contracts—decentralisation, extending the possibility of choice for users of public services with the goal of assuring a client-centred approach in the public sector, etc. In this vision founded on liberalism, the governance of the State has as a goal to manage and optimize the economic and social resources, adjust the economy and the society to the new global realities and to enhance institutional efficacy, notably that of state organizations.

As well, the market and the democratic state support each other, the first providing the second the means to produce the necessary political results.

However, according to Gilbert (2003) and Saldomando (2003), we can imagine democratic governance that focuses on making democracy and the marketplace evolve more positively towards equity and social justice. Following this point of view, which is wrapped up with worries about basic democracy and social solidarity, governance should correct the weakness of participatory democracy, which is linked to social injustice. In this frame, “good” governance redistributes power and integrates excluded groups; it also helps empower various actors and increases the institutional and political power. This form of governance enhances the building of compromises and local consensus. In this vision, decentralisation appears as a tool for taking local control and as the enlarging of democratic power close to the actors and their preoccupations.

As we see, the theme of governance concerns structuring the market, the State and the “community” (or the civil society). It is, in its actual development, strongly embedded in ideologies and dictates. We must be careful in our use of it. We will hold onto the notion that governance concerns the capacity of the State to coordinate interdependent activities and to make change without the legal authority to order the change, while seeking to increase the decision-making circle to include other actors, sectors or organizations in order to increase the legitimacy of decisions and the efficacy and efficiency involved in applying those decisions. As we will see in the section which follows, the Canadian institutional heritage in education governance includes a strong element of local participatory community-based democracy.
Education Governance in Canada: the essential elements

It is important to recognize from the beginning that in Canada, education is a provincial and territorial responsibility and does not fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government. Even if the latter substantially funds post-secondary education and intervenes thanks to specific funding programs which it directs—Millennium Scholarships for students, Canadian Research Chairs, organizations receiving funding for fundamental research, the Canadian Council on Learning—the federal government has no authority over primary and secondary school teaching. There is not a Canadian policy concerning the obligation to educate, even if certain federal mandarins have dreamt for decades of putting one in place, for the sake of developing the workforce and the globalization of the economy—these being responsibilities that belong to the federal government.

Education then remains with the provinces and territories². We will see if there is, in these jurisdictions, a structural framework in terms of responsibilities and powers.

A Three Level Structure for Responsibilities and Power

Historically, the governance of the education system by the public authorities has been exercised on three levels: the provincial authorities, the intermediate authority--called a school board or a school district and which may be local or regional--and the school.

The central authority is, depending on the case, either the provincial Parliament, be it the government, the Ministry of Education or the Minister. In general it resides with the central authority to define the orientations and the priorities of the system, as well as the education services that people have the right to demand. This authority creates, grants powers and material and financial resources and regulates the intermediate and local levels. Even if the schools are creatures of the school board, the central authority determines their institutional status and affects their functioning in multiple ways, for example, by promulgating norms concerning the training and granting of tenure for school personnel. Historically, in terms of curriculum, the involvement of the central authority has varied but at a minimum, we can see that the authority has a tendency to outline the overall goals and objectives for the curriculum, to formulate norms for student progress and to establish the means for assessing students and approving their studies. In certain cases, the provincial authorities have gone further, producing uniform programs for all school boards. In general, the central authority also establishes the policies and norms for other education services offered to students, notably specialized services for students with specific needs and providing approval for their studies, as well as their organization. All these norms are to be found in various official documents, which, in Quebec, includes the law, the curriculum, yearly instruction, teaching programs and all kinds of rules. In most cases, the central authority exerts an a posteriori control by requiring exams in certain areas, obligatory for all students, and for which passing them becomes one of the conditions necessary (but not completely sufficient) for certification. As we will see in the next section, the dominant trend is to reinforce the central authority in these matters, and not to let them flow to the intermediate or local authorities.

The School Board (or District), the intermediate authority, is an entity to whom judicial status is given but who, in many provinces, is a decentralized entity. The School Board is administered by a council of commissioners elected by the population of the territory and it exercises powers given to it by law. The school board has the power to deliberate and make decisions, and until

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² In addition to the provinces, Canada also includes territories that have quasi-provincial status. For the rest of the text, we will be discussing mainly the provinces.
recently in all cases, the board had the ability to tax. The school board exercises its responsibilities in a given territory. One of these primary responsibilities is to ensure that all students in its jurisdiction receive the services to which they have the right, in conformity with the orientations, the prescriptions and the frameworks defined and imposed by the central authority.

**The school**, be it a primary or secondary school, an adult learning centre or a centre for professional training—these are the different terms used in Quebec to identify the various types of establishments involved in basic education—has as its mission to provide the required education services to the persons having a right to them. The school is a creation of the school board and must work under the framework of the school board. One can imagine readily that the relationships between the schools and the school boards are marked by the dialectic of support and control.

This tri-level structural framework of governance is found in all the Canadian provinces. It is, if you will, organic, with the historical evolution unfurling the characteristics of each level and the conjuncture influencing their relative importance and the various cycles of centralisation and decentralisation. The provinces show variations in the dynamics in the relationships between the levels and their respective weight, but we are always in a three-way political game, sometimes a zero-sum game, sometimes with possibilities of expansion. In Canada, when it is a question of centralizing or decentralizing, one must always be clear about the levels and the type of political game involved: for example, do we decentralize the central authority towards the school board or the school board authority towards the school? Do we centralize certain powers with the central authority, while decentralizing others from the school boards to the schools? Do we increase one level’s responsibilities without changing those of the others? The answers to these questions allow us to describe more precisely the particular configuration of education governance.

It seems useful to distinguish between two types of questions or issues that give birth to the particular evolution of the relationships between the three levels in the system, of the centralisation and decentralisation and the type of control. These two types of questions concern the curriculum and financing.

In terms of **curriculum**, we have mentioned the key role of the central authority in defining the goals and objectives of the curriculum and its a posteriori control.

In terms of **financing**, we see that for at least the past fifty years, in each province, financing has been largely centralized. The spending credits for the education system are voted on annually by the provincial Parliament. If earlier an important part of the financing came from the school board, bringing with it real inequities among their respective jurisdictions, the second half of the 20th century has been characterized by a progressive taking control of the financing by the provincial government, in order to ensure a certain social equity as well as to control rising costs. Our study of this question suggests that the education budget is in general given to each school board (not to the schools) according to norms established by law and by an annual ruling of the government.

The school boards have the right to levy taxes. Historically, this power has been extremely important, because it put the heaviest financial burden for education financing on the shoulders of local property owners (the school tax is a property tax). Over time, the central authority assumed an ever larger portion of this burden, but it also limited the taxing power of the school boards in
certain provinces by establishing the level of taxation and the various spending categories that the taxes could cover. In principle, the school board has a certain room to manoeuvre in terms of its use and allocation of its financing which comes both from the government and the taxes. However, the school board must respect all national limits as well as all pertinent laws and rules, so its manoeuvring room isn’t large. There are also situations where the central authority gives out budgetary amounts reserved specifically for implementing a policy, buying equipment or for a certain type of student. In this case, the school board cannot allocate that money for other expenses.

In some provinces, including Quebec, schools may now have their own funds coming from the financial contribution of those to whom the school provides education services according to certain dispositions. As well, the school can solicit volunteer contributions from people or organizations which wish to support it financially.

**A structure characterized by participatory democracy**

The preceding section might leave the impression that there has been a strong vertical regulation of the education system in the various provinces and territories of Canada. As we will see in the sections that follow, there is certainly a tendency that way, but the “original footprints” (from Merrien’s words, 1990, 2000) and the historical heritage are not clearly and exclusively bureaucratic and centralized. In fact, each level in the governance structure has always been conceived of as a place for democratic participation, and in the case of the school board and the school, as being places of regional or local community participation. The provincial Parliament and the commissioners who administer the intermediate level are also elected and thus hold a democratic legitimacy (even if the rates of participation for school elections are higher or lower, depending on the school board or district). Meetings of the school boards are public. When participation exists on the school level, it is either in terms of consultation, recommendation or decision-making, depending on the case. In Canada, for the last twenty or thirty years, the dominant idea behind the conception of the school is drawn from a community ideology: the school must be community-based in the sense that it must work as an education community. But the school must also be community-based in the sense that it should establishing links with and to the community it serves, notably by the participation of parents, but as well by other exchanges between the school, the community and specific community organizations.

Education governance in Canada thus has characteristics that for many come from its long history: its rests on a tri-level structure and the responsibilities delegated to the intermediate and local levels must conform to rules set by the central level. Governance is exercised by the creation of norms (control being both a priori and a posteriori) by the central authority and the school board and by a system of democratic and community participation that traditionally and ideologically is very important.

What part of this framework is a remnant of the past history? In what ways is education governance evolving? We will examine these questions in the next section.
The Principal Trends in Education Governance

A fourth level and a “basic Pan-Canadian strategy” based on mandatory results and accountability?

Created by the provinces and territories in 1967 in order to be the spokesperson for Canadian education and to facilitate the inter-provincial coordination as well as exchanges between the federal government and pan-Canadian education organizations, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) reveals a common desire to make education in each province and territory show results, formulated in terms of indicators and performance standards, and with an emphasis on numerical results or at least a move towards these kinds of results.

The working of the CMEC can be analyzed in various ways: from one point of view, it can be seen as the expression of a great desire by each province to protect its complete autonomy in matters of education while at the same time joining forces with the other provinces to ward off any intrusion by the federal government. If we follow this vision, the only common interest between the provinces in terms of education is to keep the federal government out and to ensure the provinces have sole jurisdiction in education matters. However there is a second point of view that sees the CMEC as a place for exchanges and a convergence of Canadian education policies. These two points of view are not incompatible as one can see that even if each province wishes to preserve its authority in education, the fact that the “conversation” on education policies happens in one specific place leads to the parties sharing a common language, to see problems in a similar way and to contract areas of inter-provincial collaboration, notably in terms of curriculum and learning assessment, all of which translates into a kind of convergence. We might also add a third vision of the CMEC: one in which the Canadian provinces play an international role in education matters and are able to take advantage of the globalization and the marketing of education.

In the Victoria declaration (1999), the education ministers of the provinces and territories agreed on the following priority actions:

- **Priority given to education results**
- **Information exchange about best practices**
- **Collaboration on curricula**
  - Promoting research on policies
  - Strengthening postsecondary activities and improved access to them
  - Support for international activities
  - Promoting mobility
  - Strengthening the role of the CMEC as a forum for establishing useful and effective collaborations with the federal government.

Among these, the first three show a desire to strengthen and harmonize in Canadian education a governance based on results and accountability. The Victoria declaration is explicit about this in its ordering of the following five goals: “accountability, quality of education, accessibility, mobility and responding to the needs of learners.” (CMEC, 1999).

The priorities translate into the following actions, what the CMEC calls the “basic pan-Canadian strategy”:  

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- The School Achievement Indicators Program that assesses the performance of 13 and 16-year-olds in mathematics, reading, writing and science;
- Statistical Data Collection on education system outputs;
- Initiatives in the elementary-secondary sector: exchange of information which covers a certain number of areas including information technologies, open learning and copyright, as well as research and development in education;
- Producing reports and publications on various aspects of education in Canada; and
- Increasing mobility of post-secondary students through provincial and territorial agreements on the knowledge acquired.

In the same vein, several provinces and territories have created consortia, notably for curriculum matters. This is the case of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation that brings together the education authorities of the four Atlantic provinces to elaborate, implement and follow-up on an outcome-based curriculum. As well, the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) was recently created. The western provinces and territories make up the Western Canadian Protocol Project, which is working towards the implementation across western Canada of a common, outcome based curriculum for primary and secondary teaching.

The CMEC also manages Canadian participation in SAIP, the program for international student assessment. This is the way Canadian education is measured against international standards and is seen as a way to achieve “world-class” status. We should note that if education in Canada is of a world-class level, it would be easy to export to different areas of the world, most notably in Asia and Latin America. Governance based on results and accountability, assessment according to international standards, a focus on international education and the commoditisation of teaching are interrelated phenomena and it would be naïve to think that the CMEC is not aware of this.

To these developments must be added a recent initiative by the federal government: the creation of the Canadian Council on Learning with a budget of $100 million over five years. This council, whose founding executive director, P. Cappon, was previously the executive director of the CMEC, will serve “as the Canadian Pacific Railway connected a nation stretching from sea to sea and forged new links between regions, CCL will build a Canadian knowledge railway, linking people to knowledge through a vibrant, east-west learning architecture, from one end of the country to the other.” (www.ccl-cca.ca). In the years to come, the Council will act according to two main principles: the progress of learning in Canada, which involves building or using existing pan-Canadian indicators that are integrated into a composite index that allows comparisons of progress in lifelong learning, and putting in place six “knowledge centres.” These centres for obtaining and sharing learning information will be located in six different regions of the country and will focus on the following themes: Work and Learning, Early Childhood Learning, Adult Learning, Aboriginal Learning, Health and Learning, Structured Learning. This organization, with its budget coming from the federal government, is an important tool for structuring the political discourse of education in Canada as well as the research being done in this area.

These four developments—the CMEC’s giving priority to academic results, the outcome-based curriculum consortia, Canada’s participation in the SAIP program and the creation by the federal government of the Canadian Council on Learning—all attest to the importance being given by some for obligatory results in education, with these being measured and expressed in figures
related to standards or explicit norms. The relative position of the provinces, one against the other or in terms of a Canadian average or against the other countries of the OECD thus becomes an important element in public discussion about education. Drawing from the top of its educational pyramid, Canada joins the ranks of globalization (or perhaps is ensnared by it), and is being penetrated by its performance and efficiency ethic.

The developments point to a pan-Canadian convergence in education policies among the provinces and territories, particularly in the areas of curriculum and assessment. One could say that the CMEC and, in the future, the Canadian Council on Learning, may well contribute to a regulation and pan-Canadian coordination of a kind that the federal government has dreamed of for decades.

The governance associated with this pan-Canadian strategy externalizes education in a way and limits teachers’ control over their practice in that the process of education must henceforth meet certain norms defined outside of the teaching context and created by those who are removed from the actual practice of teaching. However, it is not clear if all Canadian teachers find this evolution difficult: some, along with their schools, will emerge victorious and others feel that what is expected of them and the social contract linking the society, the parents and the teacher is clearer and more precise, especially in terms of the curriculum. Following this point of view, it seems as if a loss of traditional autonomy will be made up for by less uncertainty in terms of goals and methods of working. However, this is only a hypothesis that must be verified empirically for all of Canada.

Education researchers are contributing to these developments through their expertise in assessments and by their research, especially in terms of effective schools. It will be interesting to study how the body of knowledge produced by education researchers will be transformed by the political world, how it will be used to back a “cause,” how it will be turned into an ideology and used to legitimize the desire for convergence, harmonization and integration in a globalized world. However, that discussion extends beyond the limits of this paper.

Governance based on results, as embodied in various pan-Canadian organizations, reinforces (at the same time as it expresses) similar orientations among the education systems of the different provinces and territories.

A change in the relationship between the three traditional levels of education governance

The second trend concerns the relationships between the different layers of the education systems in the provinces and territories and between the internal and external actors. It is not easy to give a name to this trend. Rather, we will describe it as new way of regulating education, a hybrid in that it combines several different elements.

There are several interrelated phenomena at work here and to understand the dynamic, we must take them one by one. The principal ones are: 1) the mergers of school boards and their taking charge of ever larger and more vast territories, thus calling into question the place of an intermediate level in the school pyramid as well as the idea of “local democratic government”; 2) in Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, the deconformation of school structures, reaffirming the importance of a common education for all as a element of social cohesion; 3) a mixture of decentralisation and centralisation with the goal of making the schools responsible for the success of their students in the context of a “structured autonomy” for the schools and the teachers and staff who work there. This autonomy is structured around a centralized curriculum supported by standardized assessments that are made public; 4) a greater place accorded to the
parents in the governance of schools through the school councils; 5) various forms of desectorization of education, increasing school choice as well as offering parents alternative forms of education (charter schools, private schools, home schooling); 6) a desire to build partnerships with government, municipal and community organizations in order to maximize the integration in the school context of the services needed to support at-risk populations.

We will analyze each element in turn.

The first important phenomenon is the cuts to the intermediate level of governance, namely the school boards. This phenomenon is important because, as noted in the preceding section, historically the school boards served as a form of local democratic government and they embodied the community values in education. In certain cases and for certain subjects, the school boards were also able to provide a counter-weight (relative, given their growing financial dependence) to the provincial authority. The reduction and regrouping of the school boards raises the question of what will henceforth be “local”, as well as about the democratic legitimacy of authorities further and further removed from the schools and the parents of students.

Table 1 presents the evolution of the intermediate level during the 1990s in the 10 Canadian provinces. We can see that the number of school boards has been significantly reduced or that they have been regrouped into entities covering ever-larger territories. There also appears to be a movement away from the smaller school boards which, in previous times, managed a few schools and where the relationships between the players appeared highly personal and there was a shared pedagogical and education culture.

### Table 1 : Amalgamation of school boards and number of school boards/districts by province (Numbers include francophone school boards).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Date implemented</th>
<th>Legislation and background documents</th>
<th>Reduction</th>
<th>Current number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>75 to 59</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>1994,1995</td>
<td></td>
<td>141 to 71</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>1998, 2004</td>
<td></td>
<td>119 to 100</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Bill 104 : Fewer School Boards Act</td>
<td>129 to 72</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Québec</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Bill 109</td>
<td>160 to 72</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>1992,1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>42 to 0</td>
<td>14 district councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEI</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 to 3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland &amp; Labrador</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Bill 8 (Royal Commission 1992)</td>
<td>27 to 11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is interesting to note that, even after the mergers done in 1998, Saskatchewan whose population is not even one million, has the greatest number of school boards. From all evidence, this has nothing to do with population, but with a strong belief in community participation in the local management of education. Saskatchewan along with Manitoba is the only province where the mergers were done on a voluntary basis—at least in the beginning and generally in most cases—while in other provinces, it was the provincial government who insisted on the mergers.

The move towards the amalgamation of school boards is hardly recent. Throughout the last century, depending on demographic evolutions and population movements (urbanization, rural exodus), most provincial authorities at some point tried various administrative restructurings in order to respond to the education needs of the population, wherever it might be congregating. These adjustments are also apparent in the evolution of the size of schools, notably for high schools. The merger of school boards appears as a long-term trend. It did not emerge overnight, although the most recent mergers have brought out new dimensions specific to the context of the 1990s.

If demographics are an important factor, they are not the only one, particularly during the 1990s. All the provinces were looking to reduce their budget deficits and undertook huge budgetary cuts in education. When these cuts took place in the context of a questioning of the public sector’s traditional administrative models, there was great questioning of the “bureaucratization” of education and the efficiency and efficacy of the intermediate level and the people working there. It’s possible that education imported in a sense a questioning that was prevalent in the private sector about the role of “middle management.” The result was that when the school boards merged, there was a significant reduction in the bureaucracy or at least an attempt to reduce it.

Mergers were justified by the idea of reducing costs and saving money. However, this is possibly erroneous as it is unclear if savings were realized everywhere or reached the promised levels. We don’t know of any pan-Canadian studies that would allow us to verify if the school board mergers lead to substantial savings.

There is not just an economic dimension to the phenomenon of mergers. There is also a political aspect that may have consequences for the medium-term. Reducing the number of school boards also involves a reduction in the number of school board commissioners. This means that in the political structure of education, the merged school boards and their commissioners, as well as the intermediate political actors, lose some of their political clout. Sometimes, as is the case in Ontario, the mergers become an opportunity to reduce the number of commissioners elected to each district. In Toronto, there is now only one commissioner elected for each 300,000 students. Nova Scotia has a pilot project that, in terms of the democratic legitimacy of the intermediate level, goes beyond Ontario. Nova Scotia has created a centralized administrative structure and two education sub-units which are integrated into the single administrative structure. Nova Scotia’s decision makers concluded that the school board mergers had been a success except for the Southwest Regional Board (SWRSB), where the pilot project was being carried out. This new structure is managed by administrators named by the Minister of Education and are not commissioners elected by the local populace. Here we are in a “deconcentrated” administrative structure and not in an education system that includes various decentralized layers, each one with
representative democracy. Recall that New Brunswick, during the 1990s, under the McKenna administration, abolished the school boards as an intermediate political authority and moved to an intermediate authority that reported directly to the Minister of Education, but then the boards were recreated under the Lord administration.

Finally, we should underline that the mergers had significant effects on employer-employee relations: union mergers, harmonization between collective agreements, etc. This did not happen without some tension and conflicts between the teachers and their employers.

The second phenomenon concerns the **deconfessionalization** of schools. In two provinces, Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec, the mergers gave rise to a restructuring of the intermediate level on the basis of something other than religion. In Newfoundland and Labrador, two referendums were needed to modify article 17 of the agreement that led to Newfoundland and Labrador’s joining the Canadian confederation. Strong resistance from the Catholic and Protestant churches coloured the process of deconfessionalization. In Quebec, the deconfessionalization of the school boards and the education system in general and its rebuilding along linguistic lines was done without major difficulties or systematic obstruction by the Catholic and Protestant churches. It was if, in Quebec, the political parties and a significant portion of the public (at the very least, those living in large, multi-ethnic urban centres) recognized that managing religious pluralism in schools, in the context of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, made it imperative to end the use of the not-withstanding clause. The argument for social cohesion at the heart of a civil society growing evermore pluralist and diverse appeared to be well-founded and coherent. In Newfoundland and Labrador, demographic constraints and the desire to maintain the offer of public education across the territory weighed heavily on the deconfessionalization process. In these two provinces, one could say that the debate on this question in some ways reactivated the idea of public service associated to public education for all under the responsibility of the province and the school boards.

In the literature, the relationship between the intermediate level and the schools is often discussed in terms of the concepts of support and control. However, the evolution of the relationships between the school board and the schools cannot be understood unless we bring in a second set of concepts, namely centralisation and decentralisation.

**Centralisation and decentralisation** make an inseparable couple, as the second needs the first in order to be used and because in most education systems, we observe both processes but in different dimensions. We also see in many Canadian provinces, **centralized funding** for schools, as well as centralized curricula and assessments. For example, Alberta has created the Alberta School Foundation Fund, controlled by the government. The school boards must go before this organization in order to obtain the funding necessary to carry out their mandate. Alberta school boards may no longer levy taxes on the people they serve. This significant change has been upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada. In the same vein, with Bill 160, the Harris government centralized education financing in Ontario: all school taxes (personal or commercial) amassed will henceforth be managed by the government who will oversee their distribution. One could conclude that this is a move that will contribute to a greater social equity and a diminution of financial differences between school boards. In reality, it is neither of these things. In both cases, this centralisation of school financing has been a tool for significant budget cuts in education in the two provinces. This centralisation also reduced considerably school boards’ room to manoeuvre in their negotiations with the teachers’ unions.
In Quebec, during the period studied, the characteristic of a centralized education financing did not change. In this province, most of the education financing is centralized and has been since the 1960s.

To arrive at the same endpoint—budget cuts—the liberal government of British Columbia modified the formula for financing school boards. The government moved several important budget items into supplementary categories of which the management is left to the discretion of the school boards. Justified in the name of flexible management, this arrangement places in peril certain education services (ESL, geographic equity, special needs students, Native students). The reform in British Columbia opens the door to entrepreneurship at the school board level or partnerships with businesses in order to generate additional revenues. On cannot infer from these developments that British Columbia is “centralizing” its education financing like Ontario and Alberta. However, like these two provinces, British Columbia is seeking to better control the financial spigot and to reduce the amount flowing towards the school boards. In 2002-2003, Manitoba began a new form of financing (Funding of Schools Program, FSP), supposedly simpler and clearer but also better targeting certain equity priorities. However, we cannot detect a greater centralisation of financing than in the past.

If among some important provinces (Alberta, Ontario, Quebec), education financing has been or will henceforth be centralized and while other provinces are seeking ways to limit education costs by transferring certain charges to the intermediate level, it appears that the centralisation of the curriculum and standardized assessments are a general trend, from which no province or territory has escaped.

This strong trend is characteristic of governance based on results, analyzed in the beginning of the section dealing with the CMEC, inter-provincial curriculum consortia and programs for international assessment of school achievement results such as the SAIP. The move towards centralized curricula, including in Saskatchewan, is much further along in English Canada than in Quebec, for the simple reason that Quebec, since the Quiet Revolution and especially since the reform in the 1980s, is already strongly centralized when it comes to the curriculum. On the other hand, the notion of governance based on results is as new for Quebec as it is for the rest of Canada.

As for decentralisation, it is not always easy to tease out the general trends. Are we talking about decentralisation of the Ministry towards the school boards or the schools boards toward the schools or both at the same time? For example, British Columbia seems to have delegated powers in human resource management and labour relations to the school board, in the name of flexible management. However, in the 1980s, Alberta implemented a real decentralisation of the Edmonton school board’s powers towards the schools for which it was responsible, a fact made clear when considering that hence force 75% of the budgets for schools are allocated and managed directly by the schools. In Quebec, the school councils are not only consultative; they have decision making power over important subjects: the school’s success plan, its budget, time allocated for various subjects in the curriculum, self-financing and local partnerships, etc.

If the school boards are becoming political and administrative entities that are further and further removed from the “local” milieu, it seems functionally appropriate to create and strengthen mechanisms for parental participation in the management of schools. And this is what the provinces and territories have done during the 1990s. Table 2 presents the relevant information concerning school councils across Canada.
Table 2: School Councils in Canada by province and territories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province Name of Council</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Legislation and background documents</th>
<th>Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BC School Planning Councils</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Bill 34 School Board Flexibility Bill</td>
<td>3 parents, 1 teacher, the principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta School Councils</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>School Act; revised Policy 1.8.3 (2003)</td>
<td>1 principal, 1 or more teachers, 1 student, parents of students in the school, another parent or community member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba Advisory Councils for School Leadership</td>
<td>1995, 1996</td>
<td>Education Administration Act</td>
<td>7 members with 2/3 parents and 1/3 non parents including community members. Teachers and staff may be elected but cannot comprise more than the membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario School Councils</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122</td>
<td>The principal, 1 teacher, parent representatives, non-parent community members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Québec School councils</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Bill 180 (1997)</td>
<td>Students, parents, teachers, staff and community representatives. Principal ex-officio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia School Advisory Councils</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>Students, parents, teachers, staff and community representatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEI School Councils</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Section 66 of the School Act</td>
<td>Parents, teachers and the principal. Students may also be represented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland and Labrador School Councils</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Royal Commission (1992); Bill 48, Section 26 of the Education Act</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon School Councils</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Education Act</td>
<td>Parent and community members. First Nations representation is guaranteed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunavut Northwest Territories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As with mergers, we cannot say that parental and local community participation is new. Before the 1990s, the schools had tried to establish good channels of communication with parents, taking into account their values and expectations, and to obtain parental support and engagement, either in informal ways or by consultative committees or parent assemblies. The tradition in North
America conceives of the school as a community institution, becoming a reflector of the surrounding values. This gives the parents the right to speak out.

The new dimension in the 1990s was not a renewed attempt to engage parents in their children’s schooling. It lay elsewhere: in the idea of inspiring parents to improve their schools and the students’ academic results and to make the school and its actors more formally accountable to an outside group, namely the parents. Certainly, there are degrees to this inspiration and to this calling to account of the school, but everywhere, the school seems imbued with a managerial logic inspired by “new public management.”

We can represent this evolution along a continuum with one end being the school as a community of practice, rich in its endogenous education culture and the other end the school as a managerial entity keenly aware of efficacy and efficiency and the following of external norms. We can see that the observed reality is a hybrid: the trend in education policies, to the extent that they are inspired by “new public management,” is to push the school towards the managerial end.

The development of school councils raises many questions. Firstly, is this a strategy to limit the power and influence of the internal education actors—the teachers and principals—for the profit of the users and parent consumers of education services? Where the decision-making powers were attributed to the school council, thereby diffusing and fragmenting the powers of the school boards, could this be seen as a step—or an unintentional but nonetheless objective effect—towards reducing the power of the teachers’ unions? Does the long fight carried out during the ‘80s and ‘90s by the Quebec’s teachers’ union, la Centrale des syndicats d’enseignants, against all forms of decentralisation of the school board powers—the local bargaining unit—support this interpretation?

Secondly doesn’t the request, made just about everywhere, that school councils create success plans that take into account quantitative parameters set by the provincial government, make these boards a tool for central administration seeking to “align” the various levels of the education system under external norms of results and effectiveness? What room to manoeuvre—or real power—do the school councils have in relationship to the school boards and the ministerial authorities? In the end, is the role of the school council to adapt the school board’s directives and the policies of the provincial government to the actual context of a particular school? Everything suggests that, with few exceptions, the school councils are not real counter-balances and do not have strong autonomous political powers in relationship to the school boards and the provincial government. At least, they do not for the moment.

Thirdly, in the context of budget restrictions, do the school councils constitute a tool for making the local actors responsible for searching out additional funds? Or, as H. Weiner (2003) suggests, is this a symptom of a furtive privatization of public education financing?

Fourthly, were the relationships between the school boards and the schools under their jurisdiction fundamentally transformed by the creation of the school councils? Did the school, thanks to these school councils, “win” real room to manoeuvre and a certain degree of liberty from the school boards? It is difficult to answer these questions for all of Canada. However, it seems possible that the dynamic between the intermediate level—the school boards—and the

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3 The teachers’ unions have expressed opposition to decentralisation, seeing in it a return to the arbitrary local boss, now being disguised in the modern costume of “flexibility.” They also see in decentralisation a risk of dismantling the “national” education service and the specter of privatization.
schools is changing, and for many reasons, some which are not related to the development of the school councils. For example, it is evident that the advent of site-based management in Alberta (Edmonton) is transforming the relationships between the school boards and the schools: as part of the model, the schools define their priorities and their needs and the school boards provide the necessary support. It is the schools that take charge of and assume responsibility for their results with the school board, in theory, ensuring the means and supervising the use of the means. As well, the decision-making powers entrusted to Quebec’s school councils have had as a consequence in some places to shake up the traditional hierarchical relationship between the school board’s administrative centre and the schools: henceforth, the school boards and the centralized services must operate on a client-centred basis and show the necessity and value of the services they intend to provide to the schools. Finally, there where the government has insisted on reducing the intermediate “bureaucracy” and taken steps to ensure that most of the budget is allocated to front-line education services, the school board has been obligated to refocus on common or transversal services to the schools, such as services for special education students.

These three questions can be summarized as one: does decentralisation—or structured autonomy—for schools increase local powers or does it paradoxically strengthen the central power, especially in the context of a strong movement towards common curricula and assessments?

If the school boards must increasingly adopt a client-centred approach in their relationships with the school, it is the same for the schools in their exchanges with parents. Without doubt, one of the net gains in power for parents is the increase in school choice. On this question, Alberta has been the lead province. In 1996, Alberta eliminated all boundaries for school jurisdictions. Thanks to the removal of specific school districts or sectors, Alberta parents may register their child where they desire or where there is space available. Also in 1994, the government offered parents the chance to put into place charter schools—private schools within the public system—and thus gave parents the real means to exercise their right to choice in education. To date, there are about a dozen charter schools in Alberta.

In British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec, the government finances private education at a rate of 50%. These independent or private schools vary from one to another: some are religion-based, others centre on a particularly philosophy or pedagogy, some focus on “cramming” while other work with the elite.

Ontario does not finance private schools directly, but thanks to Bill 45, “Equity in Education Tax Credit,” voted in 2001, parents who enroll their children in a private school may deduct from their annual taxes school fees up to $3,500 for each child. Since 1986, Ontario has completely financed the Catholic sector (elementary and secondary). The tax credit of 2001 allows parents from other religious groups to share a comparable right.

During the last electoral campaign in Quebec (2003), school choice emerged as a central or at least important issue. However, school choice is already largely facilitated by current policies: the Quebec government finances the private school network at a rate of 50%. This network is important, particularly at the secondary level where it attracts 20% of students. At the school board level, school choice exists as long as there are places available. At many school boards where there is a drop in the number of students, there has been increasing competition for these students, a situation that was once quite rare. It is also possible to register one’s child in a school managed by a different school board in order to obtain specific services as long as spaces are
available. In Quebec, as no doubt elsewhere, a well-informed parent who knows of the existing possibilities and plays out the proper strategies, can choose his or her child’s school. By moving his or her child, the parents is, in a sense, “punishing” a school he or she judges to be poor quality. The success of the secondary school rankings, initiated in several provinces by the Fraser Institute or a branch of it—the Economic Institute of Montreal—shows that a large number of parents behave as consumers in terms of education and are ready to exert pressure to exercise, at any cost or at a reasonable cost, their freedom to choose.

As well, at the beginning of the millennium, Manitoba also increased parent choice in schools.

To this picture, we must add the home schooling movement and, following a 1990 judgement by the Supreme Court, the obligation of provinces to ensure that their linguistic minorities have governance of their schools. If the first development remains marginal, it still represents an additional choice offered to parent users of the education system. As for the second, it has since 1995 been behind signed agreements between the federal government—the source of the financing—and all the provinces and territories of Canada. These agreements have led to the creation of francophone school boards, where the need existed.

It appears clear then that the recent education policies attempted to give to parents more school choice and the means to truly exercise that choice. These policies have strengthened parents’ power in terms of the orientation and functioning of the schools. The policies have created a sort of competition between schools, obliging them to position themselves on quasi “school markets” and to adapt the pertinent strategies.

In many ways, school choice by parents is not a new reality. For some time, middle class parents have decided on a place of residence taking into account the reputation of the schools in that area. For an even longer time, well-educated parents who knew how the school system worked have intervened on behalf of their child (for choice of a school, a teacher, a course, etc.) But in general, and up until recently, the ministerial authorities, in the name of social equity and the integrity of the public school system, have not encouraged, or at least encouraged very little, this type of behaviour. It is not the behaviour of the parents that is new, but its encouragement by the public powers and the use of parental choice by these same powers to change the school: we know the refrain—competition is good, the client is king or queen, the players in the system will act when they realize that dissatisfaction will leave the school, there is no other education strategy as effective as that which rests on pressure exerted by parent consumers, etc.

However, we should not overestimate the importance of this phenomenon. Effectively, we can consider school choice as a phenomenon specific to large urban centres. For most of Canada, the priority is not to facilitate parents’ choice in schools but rather to ensure that everyone is offered basic education, as close to the family as possible and at a reasonable cost. In less populated or rural areas, choice is a luxury that cannot be paid for. The situation is such that the talk is of mergers of services rather than expansion.

Be that as it may, the expansion of school choice by parents destabilizes the public school offerings and submits them to the law of the “market”. And that constitutes an important change in the regulation of the system.

There is a final phenomenon associated with the relationships between the players in the system, namely the encouraging of partnerships with the private sector as well as community organizations and public institutions in other fields—health, management of delinquency, municipalities, etc.) In using this vocabulary of “partnership”, which is quite popular, several
dimensions have been mixed up, making the term itself more and more ambiguous. Firstly, there is the directive given to players in the school system to stop working just within their circle and to move out of their “little world” and to share their power and influence with others, notably those in the community. There is also the idea of turning over to the private sector certain tasks in order to be more efficient and effective. In this case, moving closer to the private sector touches both the management of the schools and certain programs offered by those schools, such as professional training. Some might see in this last case the first step towards a privatization of the system and its bowing to the work world.

These two meanings of the concept of partnership are quite different. The first meaning is based on the idea of enlarging the democratic participation of the community, a sense that we find in Saskatchewan, in the territories and in several school boards in Canadian urban centres where there is a great deal of poverty. In the latter case, the push towards partnership takes the form of “integration of services”—a similar concept to what the Americans call “full service schools”—that include roundtables examining the education of young people and their integration into the community at large. If we follow this approach, we move away from the “silo” model of distribution of public services and we emphasize their integration. We should also mention here that the Manitoba School Improvement Program, directed by a non-governmental, independent non-profit organization, brings together various internal and external education partners.

As for the second sense, its is close to the conception of liberal democracy and free enterprise and seeks to have the school submit to performance norms approved by the private sector. Nova Scotia, with its project “Knowledge House” and the “Public-Private Partnership” (or “Triple P”) follows this sense. The “Knowledge House” is a private company specialized in electronic learning and whose services were taken on by the Nova Scotia government. The company was dismantled in September 2001 after a memorable failure. It was the same for the “Triple P”: the idea was to construct high-tech schools by private entrepreneurs and then rent the schools to the government. This idea fizzled out, after the election of J. Hamm.

Despite the rhetoric for or against the privatization of the education systems of Canada’s provinces and territories, or at the very least partnerships between the public and private sector in education matters, we see the short life span and little generalization possible from these partnerships. We are thus a long way away from a privatization of education.

Significance of the trends observed

Recall that the Canadian heritage in governance can be understood by referring to two axes: one vertical and one horizontal. Together, the phenomena described in the preceding pages contribute to a double reinforcement of these two axes and by the same token, an intensification in the regulation of education. Regulation, or vertical governance, frames in a systematic and systemic way the actions of the system’s agents who paradoxically are given powers to initiate, notably in the school councils. However, this initiative must develop within a corridor defined by a superior power. Then, horizontal governance ensures the adjustment of diverse logics among the school actors, parental demands and the principles of the “market” and school choice.

The reinforcing of the **vertical axis of governance** is linked to actual control as well as quality control gained by the central authority, through the initiation of a centralized curriculum and the demand for results imposed by policies on all levels of the system and made operational by the top of the bureaucratic pyramid of the education system. Also contributing to this reinforcement
is the CEMC and its basic pan-Canadian strategy, soon the Canadian Council on Learning, the performance indicators, the centralisation of financing and the mergers of the schools boards.

The intensification of the horizontal axis happens through a mobilization of various school actors (internal and external) in the context of different forms of site-based management, an increased participation by parents and the community, success plans created and realized by the schools and including local community partners. It is also linked to greater local or regional competition for the student clientele, which may be exacerbated by the school rankings. On this second axis, several significant developments have taken place: the reinforcement of parental participation, local tools for accountability, the doing away with demographic sectors of school recruitment, and the development of quasi educational markets.

Is this truly a new way of regulating education? Yes and no. Yes, given the growing and generalized importance being given to results, performance indicators, school choice and the competition between schools, and the practices related to New Public Management. As well, because the current education policies, even if they don’t eliminate the intermediate level, seem to weaken this level in terms of its place in the community and make it vulnerable in terms of political legitimacy. The current education policies have not increased their room to manoeuvre, particularly not in terms of curriculum and financing. It is possible to think that if these new dimensions in education regulation grow stronger, for example those concerning quasi education-markets—it may become a radical transformation of governance. The structural heritage of three levels and a system of participatory, community-based democracy may be lost.

The totality of Canada’s provinces and territories, although to differing degrees and at different times, seem to be evolving as a result of the strengthening of the two axes and the intensification and diversification of regulation. However, even if we can see common tendencies in terms of education policies, it is important to recognize that when it comes to education, the provinces and territories have political trajectories and historical pathways that are different: they do not start from the same point, nor do the travel at the same speed along the same road.

Here we observe the phenomenon of “path dependency” (Palier, Bonoli, 1999) that creates, for example, a Saskatchewan and not an Alberta! It was Alberta that opened the way for the new governance with the Common Sense Revolution of the Klein government in 1992, followed in 1996 by the Harris government in Ontario, then by British Columbia since the arrival in power of the Liberals in 2001. At the other end of the continuum, we must put Saskatchewan who despite being subjected to the same neo-liberal winds, seems to have resisted and kept in the education sector an approach marked by a greater concern for social equity and a participatory community-based democracy. Quebec, during the first half of the 1990s, seemed to want to “re-establish the principle of equal opportunity” (as put forward by the Estates General on Education of 1996); however in the decade following and up until today, things seem to be caught up in the neo-liberal currents, notably starting with the adoption of a law on modernizing the State in 2000 and the arrival in power of the Charest government (2003). We are putting forth the table below as a hypothesis and a point for discussion. The table shows the various positions of the provinces and territories:

Table 3

Education governance and liberal democracy based on the market and free enterprise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province/Territory</th>
<th>Education Governance Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>Market and Free Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>Market and Free Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>Market and Free Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>Market and Free Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>Market and Free Enterprise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alberta
Ontario
British Columbia

Nova Scotia
Manitoba

Newfoundland and Labrador
New Brunswick

Prince Edward Island

Quebec

Northwest Territories
Yukon
Nunavut

Saskatchewan

Education governance and participatory community-based democracy

We present this table heuristically. Except for the provinces located at either end, the positions of the others appear debatable. However, there are things here to be appreciated. Especially as it is not always easy to discern the elements of political rhetoric, the real evolution of the systems and the social relationships between the actors. As well, the history and reality of Canada are such that the neo-liberal rhetoric has come up against some walls and significant counterbalances: the Official Languages Act and multiculturalism, Native issues, the geographic dispersion of a small population over an immense territory and demographic evolutions have all imposed various constraints on models of education governance, whatever the political rhetoric being used by the decision-makers.

We should note the provinces situated on the two extremes of the continuum have adopted radically different strategies with one group focusing on confrontation, notably with the internal players in the education system, and the other group continuing to use collaboration and consensus building. In the former, we are working in the strict confines of representative democracy, in the latter, we emphasize the system of participatory community-based democracy that is a heritage of the past.

A third dimension should be incorporated into this table, namely the role of the central State because the two ends of the continuum in Table 3 show opposing forms of local governance, one regulated by the market and free choice of schools by the parent-consumers of education services (Alberta), the other driven by local communities sharing civic values and an idea of the local good (Saskatchewan). As we have noted in preceding sections, in several provinces (Ontario, the Atlantic provinces, APEF, etc.) the last decade has been marked by diverse forms of
centralisation, especially in terms of curricula and assessments, to such a degree that to better reflect the evolution of the 1990s, our table should include a third dimension, that of the increasing role of the central State. This is not easy to accomplish because there are several dimensions to this centralisation: curriculum and assessment but also financing and the framework covering the norms regulating the use of resources given to the school boards and schools (labour agreements, norms for managing equipment, etc.)

Notwithstanding these difficulties and for hypothetical purposes only, Table 4 shows the intersections of the centralisation/decentralisation dimension (in financing, curriculum, and learning assessments) with the two kinds of governance identified. If a pan-Canadian trend can be teased out, it would reveal itself as a double movement going clearly upwards (i.e. centralisation) and towards the right (i.e. a neo-liberal type of governance) in Table 4, which is where we find the richest Canadian provinces (Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia) and where Quebec may end up if the direction taken by the current government is not halted by the civil society, traditionally more social-democratic.

**Table 4**

Types of governance and the centralisation/decentralisation of education in Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governance and participatory community-based democracy</th>
<th>Governance and liberal democracy (free markets and free enterprise)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centralisation</td>
<td>Quebec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of financing, curriculum and assessments</td>
<td>Alberta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>Newfound land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralisation</td>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of financing, curriculum and assessments</td>
<td>Northwest Territories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yukon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nunavut</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

In terms of this analysis, certain implications should be underscored:

a) The importance of the government in the imposition of standards (defined at the top of the education pyramid in relation to international authorities), the centralisation of the curriculum and assessments clearly seen in an ever larger number of provinces and
territories, the desire to give greater place and power to parents, by increasing school choice and encouraging those at the heart of school councils to contribute to the school’s contract through success or performance plans, all these point to what we could call the “externalizing” of education. By this we mean the process by which a relatively autonomous field of activity sees itself penetrated and transformed by an exterior logic. Governance based on liberal democracy follows this policy of externalizing education and is gradually transforming education into a marketable product.

b) It is clear that this process trims away from the internal actors a part of their professional autonomy and subjects them to external performance criteria. It is as if the elements of vertical regulation—centralisation of the curriculum, standardization of external evaluation, success plans or school improvement—combined with the elements of horizontal regulation—greater place for parents in the school councils, increasing school choice, school rankings, partnerships and integration of services—forces the actors in the education system to evolve their practices in alignment with the central policies and under external pressure. It cannot be denied that the 1990s will have been a decade in which the changes to the power relationships between the internal and external actors in the education system better served the latter rather than the former. There is there a never-ending power struggle.

c) In the current education governance, one of the valued strengths is the amalgamation of ideological references, namely liberal democracy and participatory community-based democracy. By joining the two, one gives the impression that school choice is an important democratic gain—while it reduces the parent to the status of a consumer of marketable education goods; or, the inverse, that the increase in parent participation on the school councils constitutes a substantial advance in terms of participatory community-based democracy, while in many places, the real objective is to make parents shareholders in an education business that must meet government norms and results or it makes the parents into the bosses of the teachers rather than encouraging their role as education partners. The borders between dimensions are not always easy to delineate, and often, in a pragmatic culture such as in North America where results count for everything, it may seem very theoretical. We acknowledge that but also recognize that what is at play here is the articulation between the marketplace, the State as responsible for the public good and the community with an identity and social and cultural values distinct from those of the marketplace.

d) Paradoxically, even if the actual governance seeks to strengthen the power of external actors to the detriment of the power of internal actors, it also seeks to make the internal actors in education more “responsible”. The discourse on the professionalization of teaching, seen in the policies of Canada’s provinces and territories, tries to legitimize this making of teachers and heads of schools more responsible, both individually and collectively. This move towards responsibility can be ambiguous: it is often associated with a strong “externalizing” force in education. The unions have understood this evolution: their worry about defending the integrity of public education constitutes a somewhat appropriate ideological response. Effectively, we can see in this a certain acceptance of the limits on the professional autonomy of teachers, as much as these limits are fixed by the democratic debate on education, in the context of their elaboration in the political system for a national education project, under the responsibility of the State. By
defending the public school system, the teachers are defending the relative professional autonomy associated with that system, and they are seeking to protect it against the unknowns of the education marketplace and the preferences of the school’s consumers.

e) It is difficult to grasp clearly the evolution of teaching in such a context, but it is perhaps heuristic to think that the teachers are neither docile conformists nor fossilized dinosaurs when it comes to this evolution. Recent studies done in other contexts—Australia (Seddon, 1999) and Great Britain (Osborn et al., 2000) seem to indicate that teachers are capable of “creative mediation”, which is to say capable of using perspectives, strategies and practices that allow them to draw from the constraints imposed and the opportunities offered by the current governance in such a way as to adapt and save some fundamental education orientations and convictions. Only studies done at Canadian schools will allow us to document comparable behaviour in teachers from the various provinces and territories of Canada.

References

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