

A COMMON COUNTENANCE?¹

PART I

“[W]e have as yet no intellectual history of Canadian education,”² Tomkins tells us, nor do we have [any]thing comparable to Goodson’s social history of the British curriculum based on his studies of the origins and evolution of the subjects that comprise it.”³ Tomkins’ project – “understanding the course of curriculum development”⁴ – overlaps these as he promises to provide “a tentative interpretation and preliminary synthesis of the course of Canadian curriculum development from its beginning in early French and English Canada until 1980.”⁵ He notes that “before Confederation the term ‘curriculum’ seems to have been rarely used officially, during the nineteenth century curriculum development, as such, gradually became a more or less systematic process by which courses of study and school programs were conceived and implemented.”⁶ Tomkins defines “curriculum” as “the ostensible or official course of study, typically made up in our era of as a series of documents covering various subject areas and grade levels together with statements of ‘aims and objectives’ and sets of syllabi, the whole constituting, as it were, a set of rules, regulations and principles to guide what should be taught.”⁷ He admits, however, that “both in the past and today, this tidy definition may obscure (and be obscured by) the reality of the curriculum actually taught by the teacher and experienced by the pupil in the classroom.”⁸

Accompanying nineteenth-century “industrialization” were calls for “national initiatives in technical and scientific education” as well as “demands for the ‘Canadianization’ of the curriculum” (demands that intensified as immigration increased) and for “temperance education (following concerns for “national sobriety”).⁹ Also accompanying industrialization and the shrinking of the agricultural sector came demands for increased “agricultural education,” and after “francophone nationalism and Quebec separatism came bilingual education.”¹⁰ Despite their reactive character – Grumet would call these contradictions¹¹ – there was, in Tomkins’ judgment, a “distinctive Canadian education and curriculum,” citing a “British observer during the 1930s” – Fred Clarke - who coined a “felicitous phrase” (which Tomkins used for the title of the book) - “a common countenance” – adding “at least throughout Anglophone Canada.”¹²

Not so in “French Quebec” – according to Clarke – a point with which Tomkins disagrees, countering that “Clarke was probably exaggerating, even at that time, the separateness in educational and other matters of two deeply conservative societies which shared more common values than their obvious linguistic, religious and other cultural differences implied.”¹³ Even those differences have “narrowed” in “recent decades” (recall Tomkins’ book was published in 1986), what he sees as a

“reflection of the closer sharing of a common North American way of life,” something not shared politically, as “paradoxically, political differences have at times increased to the point of endangering the very fabric of Confederation itself.”¹⁴ Despite these political differences, “school promoters in both solitudes” promoted “socialization to approved religious, social and cultural norms,” triggering “conflict.”¹⁵

For the dominant Anglo-Celtic majority, survival meant socialization to Protestant Christian and British patriotic norms, and resistance to external, mainly American, cultural hegemony; secondarily it meant resistance to the claims of various minorities, especially the francophone minority within the Canadian “mosaic.”¹⁶

Predictable it would seem, as for “minorities, cultural survival meant resistance to the cultural leadership of the dominant majority.”¹⁷ Francophones, for example, “sought to preserve their language, cultural traditions and Catholic morality.”¹⁸ Such “cultural conflict” became “curriculum conflict, focused on the basic curriculum question of what the schools should teach.”¹⁹ This could be the “common countenance” of Canadian curriculum, if Tomkins is right when he asserts: “In few nations has the course of study prescribed for schools engendered more conflict in the wider society.”²⁰ So much for “common values.”

Not only “Canadians have long viewed education as much broader than schooling,” a “perspective [that] underscores the fact that the school can only be understood in relation to other educative institutions and to society itself,” a “fact is equally true of curriculum development.”²¹ Tomkins cites “the Jesuits and their famous *Ratio Studiorum* (plan of studies),” the “course of study” – the curriculum was “international,” meaning not only a human concern worldwide but also acknowledging the fact that “Canadian educators, like their counterparts in other nations, were influenced by developments beyond their own borders.”²²

Starting in Canada’s “pre-industrial” period (before 1840), Tomkins characterizes “Canadian schooling as an informal, intermittent experience not yet sharply separated from work in parent-church-controlled systems that aimed at teaching basic literacy religious precepts and loyalty to the reigning monarch.”²³ During this period “[w]e can hardly speak of curriculum development ... as a systematic process in any modern sense.”²⁴ It is only after 1840 and “the emergence after 1840 of ‘responsible government’ [did] the era of state-controlled schools and curricula begin.”²⁵ During the fifty years that followed “school promoters established administrative structures that enabled them to sort children into classes and grades, to create a hierarchically organized teaching force and to devise a common curriculum for a whole province.”²⁶ During this period, official courses of study were backed by “legislation and official documents began to appear.”²⁷ Also appearing were “mechanisms of curriculum control” to ensure implementation.”²⁸ Still sketching his

study Tomkins tells us that Part II starts in 1892 “with the founding of the Dominion Educational Association, an event that conveniently marks the beginning of a nationalizing era in Canadian education” which saw the “development of a de facto national curriculum across Anglophone Canadian at a time when, under the impact of the forces of modernity, traditional education was being called into question in all western nations.”²⁹ Francophone curriculum “proceeded separately,” he adds, “but was not unaffected by reform impulses.”³⁰ In Part III Tomkins tells us he will “trace curriculum development during the post-1945 decades when affluence, the baby boom, new demands for mass schooling and the gradual breakdown of the long established consensus based on Judeo-Christian and Anglo-conformist imperatives led to conflicting demands for curriculum change.”³¹ “Rapid social change,” he adds, “was reflected in rapid oscillations between subject-centred, work-centred and child-centred reform after 1960s.”³² Among the developments of this period was the rise of research universities (Tomkins cites “new knowledge”³³ – accompanied by workplace demands and the diversification of the school populations as well as “new social tensions” caused by the “questioning of traditional values, renewed fears of Americanization, the rise of Quebec separatism and the demands of equality for Native peoples, other minorities and women.”³⁴ “All these trends were reflected in widespread curriculum innovation and in a temporary relaxation of centralized control,”³⁵ Tomkins continues. Somehow “these developments, together with a conservative resurgence in the late 1970s” resulted in “the emergence of a new social consensus,” including “respect for cultural diversity and the persistence of nationalizing imperatives,”³⁶ all to be discussed in an epilogue. It is a sweeping study, a true synoptic text.³⁷

I’ll move swiftly in Part I, saving detail for other more specialized research briefs. Swiftly Tomkins moves too, noting (for instance) that “by the time of the British Conquest in 1763, New France (whose population was 10,000 in 1700) was a community in its own right,” a fact that Francophone people would struggle to preserve post-Conquest, affirming “its distinctiveness in the interest of cultural survival, using church-controlled schools as a major means to that end.”³⁸ In English Canada, early settlements in Nova Scotia merged with those Loyalists who fled the founding of the American Republic to form “the basis of a distinctive society based on British values.”³⁹ In both Francophone and Anglophone societies “the rudiments of formal studies were nevertheless well established by 1840.”⁴⁰ In New France - schooling was structured “to train the clergy and to evangelize the Indians.”⁴¹ After 1627, only Roman Catholics were allowed entry, a “policy that would greatly contribute to the ultimate social and cultural homogeneity of French Canada.”⁴² As today, “economic needs dictated a practical curriculum in a colony that needed navigators, fishers, sailors, mechanics and farmers, trained in part through apprenticeship.”⁴³

Only a “few schools were established before 1630,” Tomkins tells us, and “the *petites écoles* established after that date may be regarded as the first organized schools in Canada.”⁴⁴ An elementary education was offered to “only a minority of children,” the

basic curriculum of which consisted of the “catechism and the three Rs, supplemented for the more gifted students by the rudiments of Latin as a preparation for secondary studies.”⁴⁵ The forty-seven *petites écoles* known to have been established in New France by 1763 represented only “half the parishes,” inhabited by “itinerants” who “often served as both priests and teachers.”⁴⁶ What Tomkins terms “informal schooling” was “common,” often provided by “notaries or laypersons.”⁴⁷ In 1703, Bishop St. Vallier of Quebec reported “that the children do not read evil books and that the boys and girls never attend the same school.”⁴⁸ In 1727, one high-ranking official “forbade anyone to teach reading and writing or ‘to keep schools’ without the written permission of the bishop of Quebec ‘by whom they shall be subject to be examined at the time of receiving a license and afterward in the course of his visitations’,” what Tomkins terms the “origins of the concept of teacher certification and inspection in Canada.”⁴⁹ The Jesuits’ arrival in 1625 and Laval’s appointment in 1658 as the first bishop of New France “ensured the dominance” of a conservatism that would “characterize French Canadian society and schooling for the new three centuries.”⁵⁰ The Quebec Act of 1774 recognized the Church’s control of the curriculum,⁵¹ control that would continue until the 1960s.⁵² The Jesuits ensured “highly centralized curriculum control in the form of the *Ratio Studiorum*, arguably the most systematic course of study ever devised,” Tomkins suggests, a “carefully graded curriculum organized into classes foreshadowed the ‘standards’ or grades that later became a basic organizing principle for schools in all western systems of education.”⁵³

A Jesuit College - established in Quebec in 1635 - marked the start of Canadian secondary schooling; it “foreshadowed the later development of higher education.”⁵⁴ While Latin was the language of instruction in Jesuit schools in Europe, in Quebec French was; the curriculum included Greek, Latin, the teaching of grammar, rhetoric and philosophy, as well as history, geography, and mathematics.⁵⁵ The College prepared priests as well as upper and middle-class laypersons. Laval’s Petit Séminaire, founded in 1668, spawned Université Laval, the “premier institution of higher education in French Canada.”⁵⁶ With the arrival of the Ursulines at Quebec in 1639 began the education of girls.⁵⁷ There were efforts to teach Indigenous children through mission and boarding schools, the forerunners of the infamous residential schools. A minority of Indigenous boys (and a few girls) were sent to France to be educated, efforts at cultural assimilation (e.g. genocide) that “failed.”⁵⁸ Language was the “basic instrument of social control” as Jesuits translated the Bible into Indigenous languages.⁵⁹ After the 1763 Conquest, priests and teachers were in short supply, and “illiteracy increased to the point that by 1800 only a quarter of the population could read, and no more than one tenth could write their names.”⁶⁰

Following the rebellions of 1837-1838, Lord Durham was dispatched from Britain to recommend solutions to the problems that had provoked the revolts in Ontario and Quebec; he devoted most of his attention to Quebec where, he declared in the most famous statement in his report, “I found two nations warring in the bosom

of a single state.”⁶¹ Canada must be “nationalized and Anglified,” he asserted, and the schools could serve as “the most convenient and powerful instrument.”⁶² After 1841, Durham’s proposals led to the establishment of a dual school system in Quebec - one Francophone, one Anglophone - a system which would remain virtually unchanged for more than a century.⁶³

In contrast to French Canada, Tomkins continues, English Canada was characterized by cultural and religious diversity, prompting the Anglican elite to install a “hierarchical social order based ... on a distinctive British social, religious and cultural identity.”⁶⁴ The character of the curriculum was “of concern” to “all.”⁶⁵ “Despite differences,” Tomkins continues, there gradually grew “general acceptance” of “Christian morality, British patriotism and resistance to American hegemony,” leading to the establishment after 1840 of a unified public school system, non-denominational but Protestant, nonetheless according “special rights” to Roman Catholics, a “sizable, vocal, largely Irish-born minority.”⁶⁶

In Nova Scotia – population 20,000 - New England and Scottish elements dominated, to which were added 15,000 Loyalists from the rebellious Thirteen Colonies. This internal diversity plus a “transatlantic orientation” would lead to what Tomkins terms “a weak sense of Canadian identity in a strong imperial sentiment in curricula and textbooks.”⁶⁷ Even after 1867, London not Ottawa served as “Nova Scotia’s spiritual capital.”⁶⁸ Nova Scotians shared a “mental reservation about things American, providing them with a bond of anti-Americanism ... [ensuring] strong sentiments of loyalty to the conception ‘British’.”⁶⁹ Dalhousie University, established in 1818, was, however, non-sectarian.⁷⁰

In Upper Canada - Ontario, also filled with Loyalists from the Thirteen Colonies – the Church of England was deemed crucial to resisting the “leveling spirit”⁷¹ the revolution in the south. It must be the Church that would do so, if through schooling; in 1839, a legislative committee recommended a common school system for Upper Canada, as conservatives, liberals and radicals agreed that “education was the surest means of realizing their differing social aims.”⁷² Schooling would protect the province from “democratic excesses” and “oppression,” even as it provided a means of “improving farming, expanding trade, eliminating crime and spreading the Gospel,” all (Tomkins notes), “utopian aims that have a remarkably modern ring.”⁷³ In 1842 the *Kingston Chronicle* opined that education was “the young man’s capital, the best assurance of further competency and happiness.”⁷⁴ The term “capital” was literal as well as metaphoric, as schooling was seen “as essential to industrial prosperity” as well as “reducing social ills,”⁷⁵ a view repeated in early twentieth-century U.S. progressivism⁷⁶ and, later, in American neoconservatism.⁷⁷

Before 1840, however, education remained a largely voluntary and parent-controlled affair.⁷⁸ The so-called “dame school”- conducted by a woman in her own home - was the predecessor of the public (common) school, even if still located in the teacher’s home by a woman who over time became a certificated public rather than an

uncertificated private teacher.⁷⁹ The first physical school – a structure built for the purpose of education – was primitive, comprised of logs, maybe “thirty feet by twenty-two, cornered but not hewed, the chinks between the logs being filled with moss, the whole plastered over with clay, with but one small window in each side.”⁸⁰ Pupils worked on their slates, seated on rough wood planks built around the walls; the teacher worked from a desk resting on four upright wooden pillars, into which a small drawer had been carved, a draw containing a ruler and other “official equipment.”⁸¹ During these first decades of public schooling, teaching was “mainly a male preserve ... a transient occupation, taken up temporarily by immigrants or semi-literate retired soldiers with no training and a common school education at best,” men “wielding the switch or birchrod.”⁸² The curriculum was comprised of “the three Rs” – reading, writing, arithmetic - plus (outside Catholic Quebec) the Protestant Bible, in population centers a curriculum supplemented by commercial mathematics, bookkeeping and penmanship.⁸³ Critics complained the curriculum failed to “improve children’s morals,”⁸⁴ something the catechism had evidently also failed to do. Tomkins thought it “easy to see why the leaders of such a society facing, as they saw it, a perpetual crisis of survival, would turn to education as a panacea.”⁸⁵ While it’s true desperation drives people to try anything, it escapes me why anyone thought schools could succeed where churches – presumably with God not retired soldiers on their side – failed. What is easy to imagine is that many were concerned about evil, not Satan (in these secular churches) but the Devil south of the border: Tomkins tells us that “early concern about American influences on the Canadian curriculum would prove to be a persisting one to our own time.”⁸⁶ Nonetheless there were Americans hired as school teachers and they “used their own schoolbooks ... and tintured the minds of their pupils with their own political views,” instilling republicanism “into the tender minds of the youth of the province.”⁸⁷ Yet “another source of curriculum conflict” concerned the use of the Bible as a textbook in schools.⁸⁸ Despite – perhaps due to – these controversies and what seems to curriculum studies students today as the primitive state of the curriculum, “attention was being paid to what we might today call ‘curriculum theory,’” composed by one Richard Cockrell, an English-born Upper Canadian schoolmaster with experience in the United States, who published in 1795 *Thoughts on the Education of Youth*, a book considered “advanced for its day in its treatment of discipline and teaching methods” but also for advocating the “use of spellers in reading instead of the Bible.”⁸⁹ In Nova Scotia in 1819 Thomas McCulloch⁹⁰ adumbrated the first full blown English-Canadian curriculum theory focused on a broad conception of liberal education that was at once “classical and utilitarian” and also “non-sectarian, a concept advanced for the time.”⁹¹ decades before Spencer⁹² and a century before it became the new religion, McCulloch argued for emphasizing science in the curriculum, for him a subject that formulated not only facts but also general principles and abstract truths.⁹³ These, Tomkins reminds, were absent in the curriculum overall, as instruction was (as now, one must add) inconsistent, an issue “exacerbated by the lack of teacher training,

of any organization of pupils into classes or grades and of uniform textbooks.”⁹⁴ Uniformity and standardization would become the problems associated with modernization – the twentieth-century theologian and political philosopher George Grant would term them a “tyranny”⁹⁵ – a phenomenon that picked up speed after the ascension of Queen Victoria to the British throne in 1837, and the British North American colonies’ “evolution” into a “self-governing nation under Confederation by 1867,” a “political evolution” that reflected, Tomkins suggests, “modernization.”⁹⁶

“Technologically,” Tomkins notes, “modernization was signaled most strongly by the coming of the railway.”⁹⁷ “Socially,” Tomkins continues, modernization was characterized by rapid urbanization and population growth and by institutional development,” the latter “marked by a rapid growth of public institutions, notably the public or common schools.”⁹⁸ Ontario led the way in establishing a “formal, centralized, state-controlled public system [that] gradually replaced the informal, decentralized, local, parent-controlled system that had existed before 1841,” and the Ontario system “served as a prototype for school organization in much of the rest of Canada.”⁹⁹ Parents would – will – never disappear from the equation, but curriculum issues would become also influenced by social issues, a fact Tomkins illustrates by noting the temperance movement, which became “a prime curriculum issue.”¹⁰⁰

Cultivating the rational capacities of students was not only an academic obligation, but a civic one, one evident even among the first English-speaking settlers: the English, the Irish, the Scots. It became obvious that reason alone could provide the only non-violent means to solve problems of irreconcilable difference. Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott suggest that this earliest accommodation of difference among English-speaking Canadians led to a “concern with public education which the need for public reasoning was bound to feed.”¹⁰¹ While not unique to Canada, that educational concern – the cultivation of not only academically specific but also public reasoning – led to systems of thought with “distinctive national characteristics.”¹⁰² Armour and Trott add that given the great diversity of early Canada – a diversity only multiplied many times since that early colonial period – there developed a sense that “society must be held together by aims of great generality and of fundamental importance.”¹⁰³ It is these scales of aims, they suggest, that held Canadians together.

One important form public reasoning took was journalism. “As Canada moved from an oral to a print culture,” Tomkins notes, “the press became a pervasive institution.”¹⁰⁴ By the end of the nineteenth century it could be said that “the Canadian cannot get along without his newspaper any more than an American without his tobacco.”¹⁰⁵ By the 1890s more than 400 newspapers were being published and total circulation exceeded the number of families, a fact attesting, Tomkins suggests, “to the growth of mass literacy in which the school played the most essential part.”¹⁰⁶ “Despite the sensationalism of the press,” he continues, “apparent in the space devoted to football matches, prize fights and murder trials, the major newspapers were models of Victorian rectitude and Canada had no counterpart to the American ‘yellow press’.”¹⁰⁷

In addition to religion and politics – featuring “racial and linguistic controversies” – serious journalism “often focused strongly on education.”¹⁰⁸

Another form public reasoning took was professionalism, its early forms embedded in bureaucracies that Tomkins tells us was a response to “civic apathy and corruption.”¹⁰⁹ Experts were also seen as engineering the “economy” as they promoted “efficiency” and social welfare, “administer[ing] police, public health, utility, recreational and public welfare services.”¹¹⁰ These various forms of expertise and professionalism were informed by theories of “scientific management,” a concept that “came more slowly to school systems.”¹¹¹ The depersonalization that accompanied scientific management (and urbanization, as Tomkins notes) prompted nostalgia for earlier eras when the population had been dispersed in the countryside, not concentrated in cities. In education this pining for the past took the form of an emphasis upon the school “community,” then “the chief focus of life outside the home a centre of social, musical, dramatic, political, religious and other events.”¹¹² In this earlier agrarian society, the school was the one institution “many rural people encountered daily,” so that “the school integrated the community even though it was sometimes the source of fierce conflict over the location of the schoolhouse itself, the selection of the teacher and the form of religious instruction.”¹¹³

Accompanying urbanization was immigration and early on, Tomkins notes, Canadians’ “fears centered on American immigrants and especially on the ‘famine Irish’ who arrived during the 1840s.”¹¹⁴ Those fears fastened upon schooling as “the prime means of uplifting them [immigrants] and their children from iniquity to Canadian levels of morality and industry.”¹¹⁵ Those efforts at uplifting implied separating children from their parents’ cultures; “increasingly, children came to be viewed as a class that should, as far as possible, be segregated from society,” something “to be achieved by keeping more of them in school for longer periods” and then segregating “pupils by sex, age and achievement,” all of which “was intended to improve economy, efficiency and morality.”¹¹⁶ In keeping with the principles of scientific management, such segregation “also permitted grading and classification,” eliminating the “moral danger of eighteen- and seven-year-olds sharing common classrooms.”¹¹⁷ By the 1870s, segregation by sex was the norm in urban common school; even school library shelves marked “male” and “female.”¹¹⁸ Sexual segregation remained the practice at the secondary level for decades.¹¹⁹ Onto the child was projected not only (repressed?) sexual desires but (displaced?) hopes for improving society, installing by 1880, “child welfare” as central “general social policy.”¹²⁰ Reforms such as school medical and dental inspection would, when finally implemented after 1900, presage a broader socializing role than teaching had before implied, even affecting the content of the curriculum.¹²¹ Part of the bureaucratization of social life modernization entails, state concern for child welfare – anticipating what a century later Foucault would characterize as biopolitics¹²² – also occurred as women, now isolated – often feeling imprisoned - in tiny apartments with their offspring as their husbands worked in

factories and their extended family members left behind, a phenomenon resulting from the nineteenth-century migration from the farm to the city.¹²³

Another long-term trend during the nineteenth century was the secularization of curriculum, evident in the curriculum's representation of the natural world. "Before Confederation," Tomkins reports, "the study of nature was associated with aesthetic appreciation and religious feeling."¹²⁴ Afterward, nature became associated with science. Also illustrative of such secularization was the acceptance of evolution, at first anathema to believers. While "acceptance of evolutionary theory was more restrained and muted in Canada than elsewhere," Tomkins tells us that by 1900 Darwinism was "generally recognized," at least "in the universities."¹²⁵

So was Social Darwinism,¹²⁶ a racist extrapolation of Darwin's theory that endowed the dominant classes as deserving of their status, an updated but still not entirely secular - indeed Christian - version of the medieval conception of a Great Chain of Being. Egerton Ryerson's 1846 plan for a school system for Ontario anticipates this idea:

By Education I mean not the mere acquisition of certain arts or of certain branches of knowledge, but that instruction and discipline which qualify and dispose the subjects of it for their appropriate duties and employments of life as Christians, as persons of business and also as members of the civic community.¹²⁷

So knowledge was in service to the subjective formation of Christians, citizens and business persons, interlocking elements in Ryerson's eyes, elements would structure curriculum not only in schools but also (and first and foremost) in universities. In fact, as Tomkins notes, the "ideas and moral imperatives that underlay university curricula influenced school curricula, especially in secondary schools that were for so long downward extensions of the universities."¹²⁸

One such "idea" and "moral imperative" was that of "disciplined intelligence," a concept Tomkins traces to "early colonial leaders [who] sought to preserve their inherited cultural tradition and to maintain a common purpose," yes by means of "disciplined intelligence."¹²⁹ As the phrase implies, the mind "must be disciplined by the will, by the moral sense, in the interest of cultivating the whole being."¹³⁰ Knowledge "for its own sake" was a form of idolatry; instead, knowledge must be in service to spreading Christianity and thereby ameliorating society,¹³¹ an aspiration evident in the quoted passage above and one still in circulation today, albeit in secular form. "No Canadian educator was a greater advocate of disciplined intelligence than Egerton Ryerson," Tomkins tells us, and "at the centre of Ryerson's curricula were moral science and theology, the former intended to cultivate a sense of obligation or duty and a pious disposition, and the latter viewed as 'the most expansive and important science in the world.'¹³² All other subjects were to be subordinated to these two, a

curriculum design determined to guide students' discernment of "the will of God."¹³³ As late as 1877, moral philosophy was a required undergraduate course in the University of Toronto curriculum.¹³⁴ Again – as the above-quoted passage indicates – Ryerson combined classical, liberal and practical elements in his curriculum, affirming that "education was a means to an end, for instance, to make youth 'good men' and diligent, useful members of civil society."¹³⁵

Another major figure in the formulation of Canadian curriculum theory – although the phrase or the field does not yet formally exist – was the preeminent philosopher John Watson. Watson had come to Canada from Scotland in 1872 at the age of twenty-five; he "represented a new breed of Canadian academics who emphasized a scholarly rather than a pastoral role."¹³⁶ Watson, Tomkins tells us, held "strong views about the school curriculum."¹³⁷ Like William Torrey Harris in the United States,¹³⁸ Watson linked the moral and intellectual elements of the curriculum, calling for a "common compulsory humanistic curriculum for all."¹³⁹ "During the post-Confederation era," Tomkins summarizes, "secularized Christian morality and British classical ideals, rooted in imperial nationalist sentiment, underlay secondary school and college curricula and the content of common school readers and textbooks."¹⁴⁰ As the British philosopher (and biologist and anthropologist) Herbert Spencer had made clear, the curriculum question was: "What Knowledge Is of Most Worth?"¹⁴¹ Spencer's answer had been "science," one disputed by his contemporary Matthew Arnold, an exponent of the classical curriculum, the point of which was "to know the best which has been taught and said in the world."¹⁴² As of this writing, Spencer's answer has prevailed, as STEM rules, at least in the United States.¹⁴³

In Tomkins' gloss, Spencer accepted what would later be known as Social Darwinism, advancing the idea that history, like evolution, represents the "progressive adjustment of human character to the circumstances of living."¹⁴⁴ The point of education was to "enable people to make that adjustment,"¹⁴⁵ requiring science more than any other subject, as it was (Spencer was sure) the knowledge most suited to survival. "This emphasis on adjustment, and on utilitarianism and on practical education, notably science," Tomkins concludes, "constituted Spencer's most notable legacy to future curriculum policy-making."¹⁴⁶ Tomkins continues:

For Spencer, curriculum priorities should be determined by (1) those activities ministering directly to self-preservation; (2) those that secure the necessities of life; (3) those concerned with the rearing and disciplining of offspring; (4) those that maintain proper social and political relations; and (5) those devoted to the gratification of tastes and feelings.¹⁴⁷

In this list Tomkins sees foreshadowing of "later statements of 'aim and objectives' that would characterize scientific curriculum making in North America,"¹⁴⁸ specifically

the Cardinal Principles of Education” adopted by the U.S. National Education Association in 1918.¹⁴⁹

In Canada, at least before 1900, debates over liberal vis-à-vis practical education were “largely theoretical,” as most Canadians continued to affirm “traditional academic values,” this (Tomkins reminds) in an era “when only a miniscule minority of young people proceeded to secondary education, and even fewer proceeded further.”¹⁵⁰ In Canada, he continues, Social Darwinism found “limited acceptance” and only a “few Canadians” considered themselves “Spencerians.”¹⁵¹

COMMENTARY

Tomkins’ canonical text suffers – as any synoptic text does – from superficiality, but it does provide a starting point for serious students of the intellectual history of curriculum studies in Canada. It is also skewed toward Anglophone Canada and largely ignores the First Peoples. Differences and similarities between Canada and the United States are also indicated, although the extreme utilitarianism characteristic of curriculum in the United States is not altogether absent in Canada, or so Tomkins’ text implies. After all, Ryerson’s affirmation of knowledge – specifically “moral science” and “theology” – depended upon its capacity to produce Christian citizens and business people. Toward the twentieth century in #81.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Considering its position in the world, an uncommon countenance seemed to me a more apt characterization: Ng-A-Fook and Rottman 2012.

² 1986, 3. An intellectual history of curriculum studies in Canada is what this project aspires to provide. That is a narrower undertaking that “an intellectual history of Canadian education,” but it’s a start.

³ 1986, 3-4. Goodson too provided studies of Canadian curriculum. For a summary of Goodson’s scholarship, see Pinar 2020.

⁴ 1986, 3. A category at first rejected (Pinar et al. 1995) then reconceptualized (Pinar 2006; Henderson and colleagues 2015).

⁵ 1986, 1. Tomkins’ focus on these two settler groups reflects the fact that the genocide of Indigenous peoples was not yet on non-Indigenous peoples’ “radar.” That would occur after the former “became more politically active in the 1990s” (Fierlbeck 2006, 37). Now it preoccupies the curriculum studies field – reflected in the first twenty research briefs – and the country, given the discoveries of unmarked graves on Indigenous children on the sites of former residential schools. Austen (2021, June 29, A7) reported that communities across Canada canceled or altered plans to celebrate Canada Day 2021. “Celebrating Canada Day is being seen as

inconsiderate to all the children’s lives that were lost and we encourage everyone to consider the price these children had to pay at the hands of the Canadian government,” said Chief Bobby Cameron of the Saskatchewan Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (quoted in Austen 2021, June 29, A7). Many Indigenous people have never commemorated Canada Day, regarding their Canadian citizenship as imposed on them (Austen 2021, June 29, A7).

⁶ 1986, 1.

⁷ 1986, 1. For curriculum as syllabus, see Rocha 2020.

⁸ 1986, 1. This “reality” is the “curriculum-as-lived” (Aoki 2005 [1985/1991], 231), what I term *currere* (Pinar 1975).

⁹ Tomkins 1986, 1. A similar “concern” occurred in the United States where it was also gendered (Pinar 2001, 400).

¹⁰ Tomkins 1986, 1.

¹¹ 1988, 19.

¹² Tomkins 1986, 2.

¹³ Tomkins 1986, 2.

¹⁴ Tomkins 1986, 2.

¹⁵ Tomkins 1986, 2.

¹⁶ Tomkins 1986, 2. A significant minority, as 31 percent of Canadians were French-speaking 1871 (1986, 29).

¹⁷ Tomkins 1986, 2.

¹⁸ Tomkins 1986, 2.

¹⁹ Tomkins 1986, 2. Spencer’s question. By curriculum, Tomkins (*ibid.*) means “objectives and content, including often the materials used in the classroom.” It’s not clear from the text whether the term “objectives” – and baggage it carries, specially its relation to and its inflation of assessment – was used in these conflicts or whether Tomkins is using the term uncritically, despite its dismantling by Aoki and others during his lifetime.

²⁰ Tomkins 1986, 2. A questionable assertion to be sure, as even south of the border curriculum controversies have been a constant – see Pinar 2019, 54-75 - including now (2021), when Republicans senators protested a proposed presidential promotion of school curriculum that addresses “systemic racism and the legacy of American slavery,” terming it “divisive nonsense” (Edmondson 2021, May 1, A16). In a letter to U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona, three dozen other Republicans singled out U.S. President Joseph Biden’s affirmation of the 1619 Project, specifically its attention to “the consequences of slavery, and the significant contributions of Black Americans to our society” (Edmondson 2021, May 1, A16).

²¹ 1986, 4. I add “not only” because this view is widely shared by scholars worldwide, including by U.S. historian of education Lawrence Cremin, who (Tomkins tells us) “has written of educational configurations made up associations of institutions and

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- informal agencies interacting together and with society. These have included schools, families, churches, museums, libraries and the mass media” (1986, 4).
- ²² 1986, 5. Curiously Tomkins cites theories of education – associated with Pestalozzi, Froebel, Herbart, Spencer, Dewey and Thorndike (1986, 5) – and not events, such as (to take only example) the Cold War (Pinar 2019, 55). Regarding theories, Tomkins underscores that “simple borrowing” has never been the case in Canada (1986, 5).
- ²³ 1986, 5.
- ²⁴ 1986, 5.
- ²⁵ 1986, 5. So “responsible government” and industrialization go hand-in-hand? I wouldn’t have thought so.
- ²⁶ 1986, 5.
- ²⁷ 1986, 5.
- ²⁸ 1986, 5. Among those who have chronicled such “mechanisms” is William E. Doll, Jr. (Trueit 2012).
- ²⁹ 1986, 6.
- ³⁰ 1986, 6. How Francophone curriculum “proceeded” will evidently have to wait. And the use of “not unaffected” amounts to a throw-away line.
- ³¹ 1986, 6.
- ³² 1986, 6. Likewise in the United States: Pinar 2019, 57.
- ³³ 1986, 6.
- ³⁴ 1986, 6.
- ³⁵ 1986, 6.
- ³⁶ 1986, 6.
- ³⁷ Summarizing a swath of topical content constitutes one strand curriculum research, resulting in the much-maligned but never more important – given increasing academic specialization and political polarization – textbook: see Pinar 2006.
- ³⁸ 1986, 10.
- ³⁹ 1986, 10.
- ⁴⁰ 1986, 11.
- ⁴¹ 1986, 11. For one compelling micro-historical study see Hare and Barman 2006.
- ⁴² 1986, 12. Cultural homogeneity perhaps, but not class, as Tomkins tells us that New France was dominated by the agricultural sector – with its own distinctive “folk culture” – but led by businessmen, military and civil officers as well as the clergy (1986, 11).
- ⁴³ 1986, 12. Today it’s computer coding. Despite his cogent critique of “digital society,” even Daniel Cohen recommends it, if only so students “will learn that robots are governed by algorithms, and that algorithms are made and unmade by humans” (2021, 143). We don’t need to know coding to know that.
- ⁴⁴ 1986, 12.
- ⁴⁵ 1986, 12.

⁴⁶ 1986, 12.

⁴⁷ 1986, 12.

⁴⁸ Quoted in 1986, 12.

⁴⁹ 1986, 12.

⁵⁰ 1986, 12.

⁵¹ 1986, 15.

⁵² 1986, 12.

⁵³ 1986, 13.

⁵⁴ 1986, 13.

⁵⁵ 1986, 13.

⁵⁶ 1986, 13.

⁵⁷ 1986, 13.

⁵⁸ 1986, 13.

⁵⁹ 1986, 13.

⁶⁰ 1986, 14.

⁶¹ Quoted in 1986, 15.

⁶² Quoted in 1986, 15.

⁶³ 1986, 16.

⁶⁴ 1986, 16.

⁶⁵ 1986, 16.

⁶⁶ 1986, 16.

⁶⁷ 1986, 17.

⁶⁸ 1986, 17.

⁶⁹ 1986, 17.

⁷⁰ 1986, 18.

⁷¹ Quoted in 1986, 18.

⁷² 1986, 19.

⁷³ 1986, 19. Not sure how “utopian” spreading the Gospel is, but I appreciate his point: schooling would supplement the church in bringing heaven to earth.

⁷⁴ Quoted in 1986, 19.

⁷⁵ 1986, 19.

⁷⁶ See Cremin 1961.

⁷⁷ Cohen (2021, 52-53) characterizes U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s programs as a mix of “economic neoliberalism and moral conservatism,” moving the working classes sharply to the Right, what he terms “a decisive tipping point in the political history of the last century,” extending “far beyond the United States and Margaret Thatcher’s England.”

⁷⁸ 1986, 19.

⁷⁹ 1986, 20.

⁸⁰ 1986, 20.

⁸¹ 1986, 20.

⁸² 1986, 20.

⁸³ 1986, 20.

⁸⁴ 1986, 21.

⁸⁵ 1986, 21.

⁸⁶ 1986, 21.

⁸⁷ Quoted in 1986, 21. In 1843 American teachers in Canada were required to become Canadian citizens.

⁸⁸ 1986, 21.

⁸⁹ 1986, 22.

⁹⁰ See Armour and Trott 1981, 63.

⁹¹ 1986, 22.

⁹² 1884.

⁹³ 1986, 23.

⁹⁴ 1986, 23.

⁹⁵ Pinar 2019, 7.

⁹⁶ 1986, 27.

⁹⁷ 1986, 27.

⁹⁸ 1986, 27.

⁹⁹ 1986, 27.

¹⁰⁰ 1986, 29.

¹⁰¹ Armour and Trott 1981, 4.

¹⁰² 1981, 15.

¹⁰³ 1981, 21.

¹⁰⁴ 1986, 29.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in 1986, 30.

¹⁰⁶ 1986, 30.

¹⁰⁷ 1986, 30. Yellow journalism was a style of newspaper reporting that emphasized sensationalism over facts: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/yellow-journalism>. Today's equivalent would be Fox News.

¹⁰⁸ 1986, 30.

¹⁰⁹ 1986, 30.

¹¹⁰ 1986, 30.

¹¹¹ 1986, 30. Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915) is the key figure here. In his *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911), Taylor characterized the "task idea" as "the most prominent single element in modern scientific management" (quoted in Pinar et al. 1995, 95). At least one day in advance, management was to provide workmen complete instructions regarding each detail of the task to be performed the following day. Production goals as well as means (or procedures) to achieve those goals were to be made explicit. Employing "task analysis," managers would divide each task into their smallest increments. Increments would then become sequenced as work instructions (Pinar et al. 1995, 95-97).

¹¹² 1986, 30. Calls for community continue today, however a chimera community seems, especially in the politically polarized United States. For a laudable example, see Smith 2021.

¹¹³ 1986, 30.

¹¹⁴ 1986, 30. For more on the famine visit:

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Famine-Irish-history>

¹¹⁵ 1986, 31.

¹¹⁶ 1986, 31.

¹¹⁷ 1986, 31. Concerning debates over co-education in the United States, see Pinar et al. 1995, 359-360.

¹¹⁸ 1986, 31.

¹¹⁹ 1986, 31.

¹²⁰ 1986, 31.

¹²¹ 1986, 32.

¹²² Apparently the concept dates to Foucault's courses of 1979 and 1980, *The Birth of Biopolitics* and *The Government of the Living*, the latter of which, Paras (2006, 13) points out, "showed Foucault for the first time speaking of individuals as independent loci of experience – and as subjects able to act upon themselves in the pursuit of certain goals. Autonomy and reflexivity emerged as the characteristics of a subject that could no longer be seen as a mere relay of power." While the concept clearly conveys a reassertion of the human subject as separate and at least relatively autonomous, later theorists focused almost exclusively on Foucault's acknowledgement of subjectivity's absorption by state power. For instance, Han (2017, 21) defines biopolitics as "the governmental technology of disciplinary power," an overly simple definition that he then criticizes as "altogether unsuited to the neoliberal regime, which exploits the psyche above all. Biopolitics, which makes use of population statistics, has no access to the psychic realm." Apparently it does have access, evident in Penney's (2014, 33) explication: "As is widely acknowledged, the biopolitical turn in the work of the later Foucault, and further developed by Agamben, reconceives the relation between power and subjectivity as productive rather than repressive.... In short, biopolitical power exercises its force not by limiting or threatening life, but rather by creating and then colonizing the desire to live it to the fullest."

¹²³ 1986, 31. My phrasing (specifically the speculation about feeling "imprisoned") derives from Grumet's analysis (1988) more than Tomkins, as he notes only that this gendered division of childrearing "increased the influence of mothers" (1986, 31). That it did, but not always by choice and not without a patriarchal reaction against that (sometimes imagined) influence.

¹²⁴ 1986, 33.

¹²⁵ 1986, 33.

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- ¹²⁶ Epstein (2010, 24) points out that Darwin, a “staunch abolitionist, would have wanted to do nothing with it,” adding that “it is crucial to remember that evolutionary theory is only an explanation of what has happened up to now – it is not a recommendation for how human beings ought to behave in the future.”
- ¹²⁷ Quoted in 1986, 34. Edgerton would come to be considered one of the primary architects of the residential school system; in 2021 Ryerson University faculty and students demanded that the institution be renamed. The University's Board of Directors agreed. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ryerson-university-name-change-1.6154716> Accessed September 11, 2021.
- ¹²⁸ 1986, 34. For at least the last century but not always so as Ivor Goodson’s research reminds (Pinar 2020).
- ¹²⁹ 1986, 34.
- ¹³⁰ 1986, 34.
- ¹³¹ 1986, 35.
- ¹³² 1986, 35.
- ¹³³ 1986, 35.
- ¹³⁴ 1986, 35.
- ¹³⁵ 1986, 35-36.
- ¹³⁶ 1986, 36. For detail on Watson and other important Canadian philosophers, see Armour and Trott 1981.
- ¹³⁷ 1986, 36.
- ¹³⁸ See Pinar et al., 1995, 76-77.
- ¹³⁹ 1986, 36.
- ¹⁴⁰ 1986, 36.
- ¹⁴¹ 1986, 37.
- ¹⁴² Quoted in 1986, 37. As Trilling (1972, 43 reminds, “Arnold clearly had *Bildung* in mind in one of its common means when he framed his conception of culture as the development of the self to perfection through its active experience of ‘the best that is thought and said in the world’.” Regarding *Bildung*, see Horlacher 2016.
- ¹⁴³ <https://www.ed.gov/stem> Accessed September 11, 2021.
- ¹⁴⁴ 1986, 37.
- ¹⁴⁵ 1986, 37.
- ¹⁴⁶ 1986, 37.
- ¹⁴⁷ 1986, 37.
- ¹⁴⁸ 1986, 37. Regarding “scientific curriculum-making” see Pinar et al. 1995, 90; regarding the Cardinal Principles of Education see Pinar et al. 1995, 99.
- ¹⁴⁹ 1986, 38.
- ¹⁵⁰ 1986, 38.
- ¹⁵¹ 1986, 38.