

Roman Catholic Schooling in Ontario: Past Struggles, Present Challenges, Future Direction?

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Abstract

Ontario Roman Catholic communities have established and maintained their own schools for over 200 years. Yet, their struggle for survival has not come without many challenges, setbacks, and criticisms. With the achievement of open-access at the secondary level and equal funding across the system, many question the legitimacy and worthiness of maintaining two Ontario educational systems. Compounded with the modern faith diversity witnessed in many Roman Catholic schools, those challenges are coming, ironically, from both within as well as between the systems.

Keywords: Roman Catholic Schooling, Ontario, Anti-Colonialism

Résumé

Les communautés catholiques d'Ontario ont fondé et ont maintenu leurs propres écoles pendant plus de 200 années. Cependant, leur lutte pour la survie n'est pas venue sans beaucoup de défis, reculs et critique. Avec l'accomplissement du l'ouvrir-accès au niveau secondaire et du placement égal à travers le système, beaucoup interrogent la légitimité et le mérite de maintenir deux systèmes d'éducation d'Ontario. Composé avec la diversité moderne de foi étée témoin dans beaucoup d'écoles catholiques, ces défis viennent, ironiquement, de tous les deux dans aussi bien qu'entre les systèmes.

Mots-clés : Enseignement catholique, Ontario, Anticolonialisme

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Introduction

The fight by Roman Catholic communities across Ontario to achieve equal status and monies has been a public struggle since the earliest European settlements some 200 years ago. In 18th century British North America, English Protestant colonists claimed territory and governance over all other ethnic groups, especially non-Protestant Roman Catholic communities. Associated inferiority came not only with imperially assigned titles on the colonized Indigenous populations, but also with those groups who were historically marginalized in their homelands of Britain, Ireland, and mainland Europe. Diasporic groups who imagined the new lands to which they had immigrated to be free of ethnic, racial or religious judgment were challenged again to accredit their space and identity as legitimate.

Roman Catholics were especially alienated in the newly Protestant-established territory of British North America. Roman Catholics formed community alliances, eventually banding together in their own villages and towns, forming their own network of trade groups and establishing their own schools and schooling practices. The main purpose of creating their own school system by the early 19th century was to avoid assimilation and the erosion of their culture, customs, and values. The rudimentary government system at this time did not demand acculturation, and allowed independent Roman Catholic communities to remain active with limited political involvement (Dixon, 1976; Manzer, 2004). Slander and ridicule haunted Roman Catholic communities, including their educational system, and they were constantly on the defense to nurture and mould their youth on their own terms in the face of illegitimacy.

Roman Catholic high schools in Ontario today house a diverse range of students who identify with being English as Second Language speakers, who cover a diverse scope of socio-economic conditions, and align with other Christian or non-Christian denominations (Ornstein, 2006; Strategic Research and Statistics, 2005; White, Leake & Hunter, 2005). Parents and students who also admit to not reflecting on faith, or admit to agnosticism or atheism are also amongst the school populations. The inclusive nature of a modern Roman Catholic school now represents the multi-dimensional ethnic, racial, and faith-based communities that exist throughout Ontario and, in particular, the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area.

The public secular school system also represents the multi-dimensional, diverse communities that exist in Ontario but the main difference it shares with the Roman Catholic school system is the acknowledgement of faith as an aspect of spiritual identity. As various adaptations to teaching and learning within an environment of faith evolve across Ontario and around the world, global society must take stock of the nature and existence of “religious” education, and ask whether it is upholding colonial ideals that persist marginalization or if it offers a progressive alternative within an ever-growing secular world.

A single-case study methodology was employed to gather research data on youth identity in schooling, education, and anti-colonial oppression versus community empowerment in Ontario Roman Catholic secondary schools. The methodology incorporated survey and interview data from 10 schools across the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), analyzing critical ethnography through an anti-colonial discursive framework. The intent of this research is to present a critique of the current Roman Catholic secondary school environment using the voices of youth. Based on this research, I argue that the modern Ontario Roman Catholic school system

is still a site of colonial supremacy, which dictates and delivers Euro-centric assimilationist knowledge while ignoring the lived histories and identities of the current youth in the system.

Prior to confederation: Ryerson's legacy

From its inception, Canada has been a nation molded by religious and lay voices as strong as those of the Fathers of Confederation in laying the foundational itinerary of the Canadian constitution and subsequent political and social policies, including education. Some of the earliest notes on organized education came through the push of John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant Governor of British Upper Canada (the area largely known as Ontario today) in 1791, who offered publicly subsidized education for children from the upper classes (Sweet, 1997). Simcoe's work resulted in the first piece of educational legislation to preside over the area with the District Grammar School Act of 1807. This Act offered male children of Upper Canada's social elite a publicly funded education decidedly constructed and pedagogically taught through the lens of the Church of England (Sweet, 1997, p. 21-22).

During the early half of the 19th century, education was in the hands of men and women who were training for a life in public service or the clergy in British North America (McGowan, 2005; Gidney & Millar, 1990). Clergymen from both Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations taught those youth within their respective parish communities. However, Protestant church leaders were the only educators to receive funding from governmental groups in support of their time teaching. Teaching communities were in effect congregational communities, but regional authorities oversaw the organization of Protestant teaching communities. The recognition of a separate Roman Catholic educational community and possible funding from outside their congregations was not a consideration until 1841 when Bishop Alexander Macdonell introduced the School Act for the United Province of Canada (the union of Upper and Lower Canada, which are respectively Ontario and Quebec today). The School Act of 1841 legitimized and formally recognized Roman Catholic denominational schooling across Ontario, grounding Roman Catholic communities and their right to educate children through the lens of Roman Catholicism in the legislative framework of what would become the British North America Act of 1867 (Dixon, 1976; Murphy, 2001). The establishment of Roman Catholic denominational schooling across Ontario Roman Catholic schools worked parallel to the Protestant school system, both being overseen by the Upper Canada government. As the colonial attitude in Upper Canada at this time was entrenched with ideals and directions that would promote loyalty to the staunch Protestant British crown, the emergence of Roman Catholic schools heightened sectarian violence, social alienation, and linguistic/religious profiling in many rural and urban communities across the region (Stamp, 1982).

It was within this volatile environment that Egerton Ryerson, an influential Methodist minister, became the first chief superintendent of education in Upper Canada. Ryerson, a prolific author and newspaper editor, held the government appointment from 1846 to 1876 and weaved what would become the foundational groundwork for the Ontario Educational system (Dixon, 1976). Although he reported to the provincial parliament, as there was no post for Minister of Education at the time, Ryerson had great discretionary powers and wide administrative latitude (Gidney & Millar, 1990). His curriculum was to uphold civic and moral character in all of Ontario's citizens and was a proactive vehicle for Christian, albeit Protestant, indoctrination. Canadian Protestants wanted to lead all school children "away from the evils of 'Catholicism'," and Ryerson piloted this vision (Dixon, 1976, p. 15) with the implementation of opening and closing exercises consisting of the Lord's Prayer and readings from Protestant scripture in all

common (public and Protestant) schools across the region (Houston & Prentice, 1988). Through Ryerson's lens, the separate Roman Catholic school system was seen as foreign and in opposition to the dominant Protestant curriculum delivered in the common schools. He boasted of his disgust of the existence of a Roman Catholic system on numerous occasions, and pushed for a "free, universal, and academically progressive public school system . . . that would promote loyalty to the Crown, solid citizenship, a sound curriculum, and a generic Christianity" (McGowan, 2005, p. 1). With a curriculum delivered by a majority of clergymen and women, Roman Catholic children and their families were singled out as different and unwelcome in many circles of Canadian society (Houston & Prentice, 1988; Stamp, 1982). The seeds of resentment within colonial oppression were thrust upon Ontario Roman Catholics at a time when their nation was being encouraged to unify in order to stave off territorial challenges by their southern neighbors.

Until his death, Ryerson considered Roman Catholic education to be inferior to that of common/public schooling, and his legislative direction stigmatized public perception of the Roman Catholic Church and its educational system (Dixon, 1976; Murphy, 2001). As parents of Roman Catholic and Jewish students in the common school system complained about the hypocrisy they faced being in a "common" or "public" system, Ryerson insisted on an ethos that was solidly Christian-Protestant (Houston & Prentice, 1988; Shamai, 1997). Yet, despite his best efforts to create a singularly efficient educational system within Ontario, his vision was strongly challenged by Roman Catholic communities across the province.

The Roman Catholic minority of Upper Canada rallied around supporting their schools with private funding and vocal action at all public, political and social events (Dixon, 1976). Political allies, in the form of the French Roman Catholic population in Upper Canada, propelled another significant move forward for all Roman Catholic communities across Upper Canada with the passing of the Tache Act in 1855. This Act extended the rights of the Roman Catholic minority to create and manage their own schools. In 1863, the Scott Act confirmed that Roman Catholic school trustees possessed the rights and privileges to manage and control their own schools with an official share of governmental subsidies through the Common School Fund (Dixon, 1976). In essence, by the time of Confederation in 1867, Roman Catholic school communities in Ontario shared some of the same rights and privileges, organizational power and control as their contemporaries in the Protestant public or common school system. The British North America (BNA) Act of 1867 constitutionally recognized Roman Catholic schools as separate but valid institutions in the colony of Canada.

Since Confederation – Davis's legacy and the politics of equal funding

The 20th century saw Ontario debate extensively on the legitimacy and validity of financially supporting the Roman Catholic school system. As the post-World War I economy improved, both public and separate high schools became numerous and accessible. Yet, the provincial government limited access to enrolling in separate schools beyond Grade 10 when there was a competing common high school within the same district boundaries. Archbishop of Toronto, Neil McNeil challenged this restrictive legislation with the Tiny Township Case (1925-1928), arguing that within the constitution, Roman Catholic schools operated as "public schools" and in turn "high schools" as identified in legislation, and therefore held constitutional rights to receive provincial grants and could collect taxes to support their schools for all grades including 11, 12, and 13. The Privy Council maintained the ruling on the side of the government to uphold

its limitation of separate school grades not to go beyond 10 in rural Ontario (Dixon, 2003; McGowan, 2005).

Post-World War II Canada craved a more inclusive and egalitarian educational system. The country became enamored with producing a well-educated citizenry whose members would enjoy individual freedoms of equality and opportunity to participate fully in public life (Manzer, 2004). Hence, one of the most energetic proposals for equal recognition and funding for Roman Catholic education came about in 1946 when Roman Catholic school trustees argued for equal funding past Grade 10 in The Royal Commission on Education (Hope Commission). The report took four years to create, resulting in an exhaustive investigation into the Roman Catholic versus the public system, and in 1950 it not only reconfirmed the lack of high school funding to separate schools, but further recommended a limitation of the system to Grade 6 in order to boost the numbers for the public junior and senior high schools (Dixon, 2003). The Roman Catholic school system found reprieve however, as the Hope Commission report was shelved by Premier Leslie Frost. Frost became a quiet supporter of the separate school system by alleviating, in small doses, the financial burden of some of the urban separate school boards.

In 1963, the first step toward equal funding came in the delivery of the Foundation Tax Plan (Dixon, 2003). This plan significantly improved government grants for separate schools as compensation for their inability to tax most corporations. Then again in 1969, the creation of county and district school boards replaced the hundreds of small local public and separate boards, thereby funneling monies through fewer hands into a larger pot for distribution. Both of these provisions, as put forth by the provincial government, strengthened the power and voice of the separate system, and strengthened financial support for a separate Roman Catholic educational system.

As the Roman Catholic system continued to fight for equal funding and equal respect throughout the 1960's, the public system began to respond to the diversity of identities that it was witnessing in their communities. The public system initiated the removal of any religious routine in their schools by eliminating the daily Christian prayer in secondary schools. Consequently, in 1969, the Mackay Report recommended a halt to religious education in all primary and secondary public schools, with only the retention of a daily prayer in the public elementary schools of Ontario (Shamai, 1997). Any religious presentation was left to the discretion of the principals at the secondary school level.

By early 1971, William Davis, the Ontario Minister of Education, maintained that if the government were to extend funding to separate schools, the act would be too costly and would be too political toward opening the doors for other denominations to plead their case for equality. The establishment of an equally funded denominational high school system would "fragment the present [public] system beyond recognition and repair, and do so to the disadvantage of all" (Dixon, 2003, p. 14). But with the decisive election results later that year, which saw William Davis become provincial Premier, Roman Catholic school boards were given the option to establish schools beyond junior grades with limited financial support.

Between the years of 1971 to 1984, Roman Catholic bishops persisted in opening 41 new high schools to complement the existing 57 throughout the province. Throughout this period, the demand for extended equal funding continued. In 1977, Dr. Henry B. Mayo suggested in his *Report of the Ottawa-Carleton Review Commission*, "If a thing is right, it should be done, and the tradition should be broken (when prudential judgment allows, as St. Thomas Aquinas might say)" (pp. 127-128). His report encouraged extension as a means to necessarily recognize both parental and religious rights, while appreciating a desirable diversity in Ontario schools. The

Jackson Commission on Declining Enrolment, a year later, also offered a re-examination of extended funding. Then in 1982, the Secondary Education Review Project Report recommended that the separate board become officially established as a Roman Catholic Board of Education including elementary and secondary (Grades 9 and 10) panels, and that grants be provided to equally fund the Roman Catholic secondary panel with partial subsidies going toward private Roman Catholic high schools (Grades 11-13) (Dixon, 2003).

During this same period of time, the instituted Charter of Rights and Freedoms again raised, albeit ineffectually, the question of rights of Roman Catholics versus Protestants in education. The 1982 Charter addressed issues of racism and discrimination in Canadian society, yet its reference to education defaulted to the founding 1867 Constitution. Section 29 of the Charter states, "Nothing in this Charter abrogates or derogates from any rights or privileges guaranteed by or under the Constitution of Canada in respect of denomination, separate or dissentient schools" (Van Loon & Whittington, 1987, p. 704).

Throughout the rest of the 1980's, there was a distinct increase in Roman Catholic high school enrolment throughout the larger cities of Ontario. However, the physical availability of accommodating the increased numbers placed an urgent need on addressing unsubsidized funding for Roman Catholic high schools (Walker, 1986). The existence of the denominational educational system had been supported mostly privately through the archdiocese, local parishes, and partial returned revenues from religious and lay teaching staff. By 1984, the Ontario bishops presented a statement to Premier Davis requesting equal funding for their schools on the grounds of historical and legal precedent that had been set forth through Macdonell's Schools Act of 1841:

Children must be educated somewhere at public expense and since it is visibly not possible to adapt public schools to satisfy the legitimate philosophical and religious views of a respectable segment of the population, it seems unfair that those who work to provide acceptable education for their children in alternative ways should be deprived of reasonable support for public funds. (Walker, 1986, p. 375)

In the spring of 1984, the Ontario Elementary Catholic Teacher's Association (OECTA) reaffirmed their support for extended separate school funding through its Report of the Task Force on Education Policy. As the pressure mounted on all sides for the Ontario Government to take a final stand on extended Roman Catholic school funding and the legitimacy of a separate school system in the province of Ontario, Premier Davis officially announced a complete turnaround from the decisions of a decade previous and put forth Bill 30 in the provincial government (Dixon, 2003). On June 12, 1984, to the total surprise of everyone, Davis's Bill 30 extended funding to Grade 13 for all separate boards in the province of Ontario. He offered that his decision to extend funding was a matter of conscience, equity, and logic. For the last 25 years, Roman Catholic education in Ontario has been openly accessible and equally supported as a legitimate and valued educational option for youth throughout the province.

Roman Catholic schools versus public schools

Whether inspired by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms or by the perceived rise in quality education that the Roman Catholic system was now offering, Premier William Davis' turnaround reignited the social ridicule and racism that Macdonell's Grammar School Act of 1841 perpetuated nearly 150 years earlier across Ontario. Opening the doors of Roman Catholic schools to the general public through full and equal funding as delivered to the public boards has its share of both fans and critics. The biggest concern of some Roman Catholic educators and clergy is that separate school integrity will be lost if their doors are open to everyone (Manzer, 2004; McGowan, 2005). Public board employees and supporters have also gone on the offensive to challenge completion of funding by filing legal action, claiming constitutional religious discrimination in that no other denominational faith has been given the option to receive equal funding for education (Manzer, 2004). Public teacher animosity is reminiscent of Protestant discrimination witnessed 140 years ago in the Ryerson era. Public teachers are experiencing loss of jobs because of declining enrolment and many regard a potential expansion of Roman Catholic high schools as a danger to job security (Dixon, 2003).

Arguments against any form of religious instruction or education in the public system have been strongly presented by many in the Jewish community (Shamai, 1997). Themes of protest revolve around arguments separating church and state in education and the multi-cultural nature of defining Canadian identity. There has also been a call to protect and enforce the self-esteem and social acceptance of non-Christian students in all schools, not just separate schools (Shamai, 1997). The Roman Catholic populace in Ontario has held on to the demands of the Holy See to ensure that an educational system that was Roman Catholic would be available to all in the community and to all grade levels well into the 21st century. Yet, it seems that for years after Bill 30 was adopted, separate schools were considered an insidious threat to a democratic and multi-cultural society. Since the promise of full funding was made, Roman Catholics have wondered about the price. They are taken aback by attacks from public school teachers: many Roman Catholic leaders did not believe job anxieties had come from an unjust concession, but were a response in turn with the historic rejection of Roman Catholic claims (McGowan, 2005; Dixon, 2003).

After a century of evolving legislation in Ontario education, terms such as 'integration,' 'pluralism,' 'values,' 'common good,' 'equitable,' 'enlightened public opinion,' and 'investment in the future' have begun to take on new meaning in government assemblies and school corridors. Equal funding for Roman Catholic schooling has not only come to fruition in Ontario, but has also been upheld and remains flourishing, albeit under the same political and social duress, in the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan (Flynn, 2003). Yet the question of how far the system has come since Pope John Paul II — who in an address to Newfoundland educators in 1984, implored Roman Catholic educators to "grasp firmly the challenge of providing a kind of education whose curriculum must be inspired more by reflection than by technique, more by the search for wisdom than the accumulation of information" (Murphy, 2002, p. 15) — is hard to judge.

As one faith-based educational system found validation in the Ontario government legislature in 1984, if not in the social fabric of the province, public schools continued on a path that was moving in the direction of secularization. The trepidation of promoting or singling out any one faith over another gained momentum as the diversity of Ontario communities evolved and flourished. The response was to erase the option of religious discussion by denying

communities' recognition of diverse faiths in schools. Addressing religious or spiritual concepts in Ontario public schools at present is done with caution and apprehension, usually in the form of highlighting what food or dress is indicative of annual festivals, celebrations, or sacred events. Hence, reference to modern public schools is often interchangeable with the title "secular."

It then becomes a matter for argument over the value of religious or spiritual faith in one's life and how a society can provide a safe space for that identity to flourish. Identity is the thread that binds all religiously based schools, although it is seldom described in exactly those terms. Children who are educated in a secure, familiar, affirmative environment will grow up knowing who they are and where they have come from (Dei, 1996; Dei et al., 2000; Dei et al., 1997; Sweet, 1997). The moral and values-based aspect to religious schooling can be seen as an integral part of growth and learning, while equipping young people with crucial and ethical judgments to tackle the outside world. One could further argue that those who are more religiously literate have a distinct advantage in understanding the world-view of others and will be enabled to better interact in today's ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse society.

Mulligan (1990) states that today's Roman Catholic schools must offer "a Catholic education that unmask[s], questions, critiques and challenges the non-gospel values of our culture and society" (pp. 30-31). His suggestion places the onus on Roman Catholic educators to role model through language and actions the values and morals of a spiritual being for today's youth. One English teacher interviewed by Mulligan (1990) put it this way: "In talking about evangelization in the Catholic high school, we are not talking so much about teaching something as we're talking about being something" (p. 40).

Issues of race, class, gender, and religion are categories that rank people and evoke a standard of measure toward Western Europe's 'civilized' societies. In all cases, "difference becomes the means by which a dominant group can assert its identity by exterminating, oppressing, marginalizing, or simply ignoring those it wishes to exclude" (Wright, 2004, p. 133). The voices of youth promote the Roman Catholic system as a healthy alternative to the secular educational system of Ontario, yet it appears to be difficult for Roman Catholic youth to embrace and internalize a Roman Catholic world-view as a living directive because of the historical stigma associated with the denomination. For non-Roman Catholic youth in the system, their hidden identity remains necessary for avoiding alienation that is expected from peers within the system. As Mulligan (1994) suggests, "Catholic education really takes place in the gap; that is, in the struggle area, between the ideals of the vision statements and the lived reality of the corridors, classrooms and cafeteria" (p. 157).

Whereas youth in the secular or public school system may feel "deeply threatened at the core of their being by the invitation to enter a mindset where there is no sense of the sacred, where connection is devalued" (hooks, 2003, p. 180), youth in the Roman Catholic system, who sit outside the denominational concept of this faith, can also feel devalued and relegated toward searching for space that honors their difference or identity as 'other.' Youth shift their identities through image and action, defiant not to be labeled or pigeonholed within a single identity.

One can only hope that the expansion of social diversity in our public schools has propelled educational communities to recognize and value difference, striving to transform from a historically vertical mosaic into an equitable space for minority social groups and diverse youth identity (Manzer, 2004). Students have been aggressively thwarted in pursuits to explore their inner selves in a society that has been evolving beyond the confines of a Euro-centric agenda, and modern curriculum further restricts their attempts to embody a concept of equality of educational experiences for individual students. To the critics who suggest that religiously

segregated schooling leads to a form of “religious apartheid” and “ghetto” schooling (Zine, 2004, p. 52), their argument fails to take into account the number of healthy and tolerant citizens who place their own successful educational experience in the Ontario Roman Catholic system of the past 150 years.

Roman Catholic schooling: Are they truly communities of respected identities?

In the past, Greeley et al. (1976) and Greeley and Rossi (1966) have offered that as a group, American Roman Catholic school youth are more inclined to share in the broad value consensus of the larger society. In more recent times, the work of Frey et al. (2004) has provided quantitative data suggesting that a spirituality of well-being and hope is alive and well in American Roman Catholic school students. It therefore becomes crucial for Roman Catholic schools to bring some form of spiritual dialogue predominantly into community discussions, especially as Roman Catholic theologians and educators interpret the move of Roman Catholic youth away from a community alliance in church attendance. This fluctuation in what appears to be a disinterest in faith has prompted Roman Catholic schools to push the concepts of church during class-time more vehemently.

Yet, it has been suggested that education in the Euro-American context is directed under the reality that schools are merely political sites for the reproduction of power and social inequality (Dei et al., 1997). The importation of colonial and imperial forms of education — that is, education from a perspective of Euro-centric superiority controlling and dominating what is learned and how it is delivered — can amputate the self from the educational community. For youth to embody an identity that is empowering, the essence of how their identity is multi-dimensional in body, mind, and spirit needs to be acknowledged. Westernized forms of education, focusing on naming and defining the body, mind and material, neglects the soul and spirit, while negating identity and voice of the minority, marginalized or ‘other.’

The Roman Catholic school finds true justification in the mission of the Church. It is based on an educational philosophy in which faith, culture, and life are brought into harmony. Through the Roman Catholic school, the local Church evangelizes, educates, and contributes to the formation of a healthy and morally grounded lifestyle among its members (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1988, p. 34). Ontario Roman Catholic schools offer a value-based system through the lens of a particular religious denomination. Roman Catholic values are defined as a set of principles, codes, and ethical mores based in Christian philosophy and Biblical parameters. The lessons of the Ten Commandments, the awareness and practice of the sacraments, and a belief in the salvation of Jesus are all aspects of Roman Catholic values as outlined in modern Roman Catholic schools. Without a values-based system of learning and growth, many argue that present and future generations will not be able to nurture supportive and sincere citizenship in community.

The need to build and nurture a sense of trust and support in the epistemological sense of community is a directive of the Church and Institute for Catholic Education in Ontario (ICE). Community as a living entity is the heart of Roman Catholic schools in Ontario. As Murphy (2002) explains, “Creating community is never accidental to the Catholic educational enterprise but at the very heart of what we do” (p. 16). Although Roman Catholic school communities are made up of diverse faiths, it is their existence as a community that accepts and flourishes in spiritual faith that sets it apart from the public secular system, without apology. As Murphy (2002) further suggests, “What is often forgotten is that community is necessary to remembering and telling the stories by which people define themselves” (p. 6). Roman Catholic communities

need to unify in faith toward knowing who they were, who they currently are, and where they are going as a community-of-persons.

During Mulligan's (1990) interviews with students, the idea of a Roman Catholic school community was very salient in discussion. The community was a living entity for some students that emphasized obligations to support each other both within and outside the larger community. As one of the students, Christopher, suggested:

I've experienced a public high school and a Catholic high school, and here I really do feel there is a stronger sense of community. Also, there is emphasis put on the community outside the school: the city, those in need, our responsibility as Christians for the poor, etc. None of this was emphasized in the other high school. (Mulligan, 1990, pp. 166-168)

Throughout Mulligan's (2004) interviews, youth consistently identified that the Roman Catholic school system provided a valued and legitimated space of spiritual identity within a sense of community. Youth can build inclusive connections as a community-of-persons in schooling when spiritual identity is prized and encouraged separate from religious doctrine in afforded alternative freedom (Dei et al. 2000). A spiritual identity is a valuable and legitimate identity worth protecting, nurturing, and promoting in all youth. A spiritual identity is also one that can be freed, acknowledged, and valued through acts of liberation, liberation in society, in faith, and in schooling. Broaching youth in faith-based educational environments requires a discussion platform that is rooted in safety, compassion, and a freedom to expose the self without persecution. Roman Catholic schools provide an advantage over their secular counterparts in offering a space that recognizes the spirit in youth, but these schools will persistently stay within an oppressive colonial framework if the diversity of its youth are not fully acknowledged, respected, and promoted as the true essence in making their educational space on the path to an inclusive community-in-persons.

Alternative learning within spiritual environments

In Netherlands, which is a pluralistic society on a similar scale as Canada, a section within the school system have taken on the ideology that children should come from a position of strength in their own religion and culture to contribute to a multi-faith society (Sweet, 1997). If those same children are exposed to all other religions and cultures during their educational experience, a broader vision of their own spiritual identity and, hopefully, a respect and appreciation for diversity will follow (Sweet, 1997). The Dutch describe their system as one formed on the concept of integration: an exchange between a minority community and the larger community, where the newcomers do not have to sacrifice their identity in order to be accepted and/or respected. According to Rahmat Khan Abdur Rahman, the principal of the Soeffah Islamic School outside of Amsterdam, "Integration is a basic set of rules which is valued by everyone and yet people have in addition a certain freedom toward developing their own identity" (Sweet, 1997, pp. 134-135). The Soeffah Islamic School is an example of a publicly-funded religious school that provides an inclusive plurality of faith-based pods housed in a single playground, where religious/non-religious teaching is offered for a period each day in a separate pod, but the children then share core training in math, English, science, social sciences, and fine arts in shared buildings (Sweet, 1997). In this environment, faith in education carries value, and the option to attend a publicly-funded religious-based school such as the Soeffah Islamic School is certainly an alternative to the public secular school for Dutch parents. The Soeffah Islamic

School offers a multi-faith ecumenical environment that embraces difference in faith and nurtures a respect and pride in one's own identity as well as that of others. "For those who believe the public funding of religiously-based schools will lead to ghettoization, social division, and religious conflict, the Dutch experience suggests otherwise" (Sweet, 1997, p. 144).

In 1995 the Edmonton Public School Board responded to public pleas for the subsidization of a public Hebrew school. Fears did expound from the Jewish organizers that the presence of non-Jews would negatively alter the school, yet, within a framework of self-reflexivity, the system works because there is an acknowledgement and acceptance of diversity (Sweet, 1997, p. 71). Mark Weinberg, Director of Education at the private Hillel Academy Jewish school in Ottawa, offers, "Because culture and religion are so intertwined ... you can't have one without the other" (Sweet, 1997, p. 72). One can even argue that the success of a cultural or ethnic community is imbedded within the success of its religious community, and vice versa.

The image of modern Ontario Roman Catholic schools: True exposure or a realistic evolution toward adapting within a diverse future?

Examples of successful faith-based schools provide evidence to counter the argument that assimilation over integration will disintegrate the minority religion within any dominant culture. But what of Catholic Schools and communities that, although still dominant in faith-based demographics throughout Ontario, fear a loss of identity, power, and even existence if they reveal the spiritually diverse nature of those youth within their walls? Of the 600 surveys distributed to students and their respective parent or guardian, 71 were returned by students and 69 were returned by parents. Of the 71 student surveys, 15 students volunteered freely, and with parental permission, to participate in an interview process. Extracted from the data, only two-thirds of today's secondary level Roman Catholic school students identify as Roman Catholic. This proportional representation is both observed and echoed in dialogue during the student interviews, as ethnic and diasporic identities are diversified and multiple. During the interviews, Tiffany (all names in this document are pseudonyms) suggested that up to 50% of the students in her school were non-Roman Catholic with a noticeable Muslim population, and Randy suggested at his school maybe only 45% were Roman Catholic, with Sikh students being most visible. Randy's school had the largest return rate for students with 14 of 30 surveys returned. Nine Roman Catholic, two Sikh, one Adventist, one Pentecostal, and one Muslim student were randomly selected and voluntarily returned their surveys. The random generation of student respondents from this one school supports the larger statistical picture of the range in youth diversity for Toronto CMA Roman Catholic schools today.

The struggle that Roman Catholics have put forth to be recognized as a legitimate community who warrant the right to educate under their own guidelines is a crucial aspect to understanding the evolution of Roman Catholic schools in British colonies around the world. The determination and success in avoiding assimilation within the Protestant-governed territory of Ontario is one of noted pride amongst Roman Catholic communities and the educational system. However, with the ever-changing landscape of schools and schooling across the vast multi-cultural and multi-spiritual landscape of the province, the legitimacy of Roman Catholic schooling maintaining their unique faith-based lens on knowledge acquisition and delivery must be questioned. The provisions for maintaining any form of education outside the secular will always be challenged by mainstream society (Matthews et al., 2003, p. 29). Yet, since the

identity of the clientele at schools is constantly changing, so too should the constitutional framework that legitimizes an educational system that privileges one faith above all others. Even when the Euro-centric nature of Canadian schools is deconstructed — toward revealing the historic legacy of Roman Catholic education in Ontario — the political power dynamics that the system still enacts on modern youth is apparent. Overarching these revelations is that the Roman Catholic school system might offer an alternative to a secular system, but by the very nature of its colonial assimilationist routine, it will eventually drive its clientele away. The Ontario Roman Catholic school system needs to embark on a process of self-reflexivity to thereby acknowledge its bias and historical position as oppressor within the defense of being oppressed. With these actions, the voices of our most valuable clients, the youth in schools, will continue to become empowered and valued as fully respected voices of identity from the past, in the present, and for the future.

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