

# Historical and Economic Changes in the Development of Teaching in Canada in the 19th and 20th century

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**Abstract:** Different authors have presented the development of teaching in Canada and its characteristics in the provinces of Eastern and Western Canada. There are several approaches concerning historical changes of the teaching profession in Canada and how the professionalization of teaching can affect the teacher socially, economically and politically. The development of teaching in Canada as a profession started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is presented with different critical observations concerning its particularities as it has evolved through time.

This research describes the development of the teaching profession in Canada and introduces the concept of the professionalization of teaching and its implications for Canadian teachers, their education and work in class. This paper generally shows the particularities of the evolution of this profession in different provinces from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then, the role played by progressive education in Canada and the importance for Canadian education of the "back-to-basics" movement are presented.

Moreover, this paper briefly depicts the characteristics of self-regulated professions and a timeline of the establishment of teaching as a self-regulating profession in different provinces of Canada, with an example of teaching as a self-regulated profession in British Columbia. Another aspect presented in this work shows the effects of professionalization on the recruitment and status of teachers, with an example from Nova Scotia concerning gender discrimination.

**Keywords:** teaching profession in Canada, professionalization and proletarianization of teaching, "back-to-basics" movement, "feminization of teaching".

## THE PARTICULARITIES OF TEACHING AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA; THE CONDITIONS FOR A SELF-REGULATED PROFESSION

**F**rom a general perspective, teaching is seen as a profession like any other, but its conditions and terms of employment are rather unique. Ozga and Lawn (1981) identified three common ways of understanding teaching as a profession: professional traits, history and group theory<sup>1</sup>.

When describing traits that characterize professions, Carr-Saunders (1966) presents them as being a mix of knowledge provided for social recognition, capacity for decision-making in the workplace, and dedication to work and customers. Different authors, including Wotherspoon (2014), conclude, "Teaching falls short of full professional status because it lacks autonomy and prestige, or that teaching is at best a semi- or quasi-profession that remains constrained by external forces such as other professions and bureaucratic school authority structures"<sup>2</sup>.

Concerning the historical perspective of understanding teaching in Canada, in 1962 Paton listed four historical steps taken by Canadian teachers to have their profession recognized. The first, from 1850 to 1914, was just for teachers to meet and find information about the interests of their schools. The second, from 1914 to 1935, was based on the organization of teachers to improve their working conditions. The third, from 1935 to 1955, was based on teachers' efforts for official recognition and inclusion in educational policy decision-making. The fourth, which started in 1955, includes teachers' attempts to strengthen their professional status in terms of their responsibilities and benefits.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ozga, J., Lawn, M. (1981) *Teachers, Professionalism and Class: A Study of Organized Teachers*. London: Falmer.

<sup>2</sup> Wotherspoon, T. (2014). *The sociology of education in Canada: Critical perspectives* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Toronto: Oxford University Press. p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> Paton, J.M. (1962). *The Role of Teachers' Organizations in Canadian Education*. Toronto: W.J. Gage.

The impact of group theory on the teaching profession includes some of the following effects: one is collective bargaining and another concerns the regulations created through provincial legislation, which dictate the responsibilities of teachers. Wotherspoon claims that at present Canadian teachers are well-represented “on curriculum committees and other educational bodies that set or influence policies relating to schooling. Their work is informed by critical reflection, collaboration, reliance on specified performance indicators, and extensive in-service and continuing learning”<sup>4</sup>.

The development of Codes of Ethics by teachers’ associations have helped guide teachers when solving conflicts, assigning duties and responsibilities, and defining expectations and benefits.

### **PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION, THE “BACK-TO-BASICS” MOVEMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN CANADA LEADING TO SELF-REGULATION**

The movement of progressive education had its beginnings in the United States. The development of progressive education in Canada started after World War I and was supposed to be possible due to the implementation of educational reforms in different provinces. Teachers were to change the way in which they taught their subjects and treated their students.

Patterson (1986) presents aspects of progressive education in the United States and its particularities in Canada in the 20th century. He organized his research around the goal of showing if progressive education existed in Canada at that time and the particularities of the practical adoption of it in Canadian schools. The author shows how the implementation of progressive education was unsuccessful in Canada and was impossible to be implemented for the teaching profession due to the economic and social conditions of the interwar period and the difficulty in finding skilled teachers. Regarding complaints about a lack of equipment, in Calgary, Superintendent Frank G. Buchanan observed that some difficulty was “experienced in providing all the additional equipment and supplies that teachers would like in connection with their project work”<sup>5</sup>. Patterson completed his research with different interviews that he used to find out how teachers approached the reforms at that time and concluded that at both formal and informal levels there was not a real applicability of progressive education in Canada. In this sense, he states that “the formal policy level showed only a partial commitment to progressive education” and “confusion and reluctance” were felt by teachers in classrooms during the Depression and World War II<sup>6</sup>.

Another author who brought a critical perspective to progressive education and its particularities in Canada is Kach (1987).

In his analysis, Kach includes several criticisms of the progressive education movement. Firstly, he describes three sides that the *Humanistic Critique* presents as aspects of progressive education: “the excessive contemporaneity of the moderns; the pseudo-science of pedagogy; the educational value of the classics”<sup>7</sup>. The critiques embodied by this perspective state that modernistic preoccupations are not as lasting as the eternal humanistic approach on the spirit and that students have to be protected from the “pseudo-science of progressive pedagogy”<sup>8</sup>. Secondly, Kach presents the Neo-Thomistic Criticisms, which are related to the criticisms of progressive education that came

<sup>4</sup> Wotherspoon, T. (2014). Op. cit., p. 165.

<sup>5</sup> Superintendent of Schools. (1936-1937). *Annual Report 1936-37*. Alberta: Calgary Board of Education Archives.

<sup>6</sup> Patterson, R.S. (1986). *The implementation of progressive education in Canada. 1930-1945*. In Kach, Mazurek, Patterson and DeFaveri (eds.) *Essays on Canadian education*. (pp.79-96). Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Kach, N. (1987). *Criticism of progressive education*. In Kach, Mazurek, Patterson and DeFaveri (eds.) *Essays on Canadian education*. (pp.121-140). Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd, p. 122.

<sup>8</sup> Kach, Op. cit., p. 123.

from different sides of the Catholic Church at the beginning of the 20th century. Two different perspectives of the Catholics are presented: the side that accepted the reforms of progressive education and the other side which considered that modern education was a challenge to the traditional perspective of the Catholic Church. In the traditional approach concerning the teaching process, the article about pedagogy in the work of the church, written by Cain in 1921 states that education as a whole must be religious<sup>9</sup>. Then eight years later, in 1929, O'Hara criticizes the work of Dewey, who is considered the father of progressive education, stating that his work is "a complete rupture with the tradition"<sup>10</sup>.

Kach includes the opinion of Pope Pius XI in 1929 who claimed that Catholic education was the ideal education because it prepared students for their destiny guided by the will of God. Three points were presented as being the difference between Encyclical and progressive education: "education should primarily be religious, not secular in character, the content of curriculum should be determined according to the canons of tradition; doctrines such as freedom and student government should be opposed"<sup>11</sup>. Another criticism from the Thomistic perspective presented by Kach was that "modern secular education denied spiritual values by focusing on the relationship of the child to society" and not preparing the "child's soul for immortal life"<sup>12</sup>. This traditional approach maintained that the subject of teaching was not to be decided by teachers and that teachers should not have freedom of choice regarding their teaching process. Concerning the first and second criticisms of the progressive education, the initiators of these approaches were traditionalists following more the interest of church, then the interest of developing the teaching process according to the values of a free education.

Thirdly, Kach presents the *Traditionalist Condemnation* of progressive education based on the criticisms that progressive education attacked traditional education without consideration of conserving traditional cultural heritage and that it was more inclined to innovation and materialistic interests. Fourthly, the author presents the *Progressivist Critique* which claimed that "progressive education tended to be intellectually and academically weak" because it "was not based on a planned and distinctively organized curriculum"<sup>13</sup>. The third and fourth criticisms show how any change in the teaching process was condemned by the traditionalist perspective presented by the church and by the progressivist perspective that wanted to see a curriculum oriented progressive reform in the teaching process.

When analysing the Canadian view concerning progressive education, Kach presents two points of view: the acceptance of the new educational approach as being part of the initial steps to build a good "educational millennium" and the traditionalist approach presented by the Catholic Church in Alberta. In 1936, Alberta had its education system reorganized by having new public secular schools under the direction of a new Divisional Board. These reforms challenged the Catholic influence in education and the traditional approach on education that now had to be adapted to the needs of a contemporary world in change as opposed to the traditional approach that failed to keep its dominant position in Canadian education. Therefore, the *Alberta Catholic Education Association* was formed in 1947 and its publication, *The Bulletin*, analysed "religious education, minority rights and principles of progressive education vis-à-vis Catholic education"<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Cain, M. (1921). *The Danger of False Principles of Pedagogy in Catholic Educational Work*. In *Catholic Educational Association Bulletin*, XVIII, p. 445.

<sup>10</sup> O'Hara, J.H. (1929). *The Limitations of Educational Theory of John Dewey*. Washington D.C: Catholic University of America, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> Kach. Op. cit, p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, p. 126

<sup>13</sup> Kach, Op.cit. p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, p. 132.

The writers of *The Bulletin* were strongly against the new educational approach, but they did not represent all of the Catholic community and did not include a common view point from teachers. This shows that teachers were not consulted or asked to share their perspectives concerning changes that took place in their educational system.

In analysing the development of the teaching profession in Alberta, Chalmers (1968) describes in two parts the story of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), known at its beginnings as the Alberta Teachers' Assembly, and its impact on the teaching profession. In Chapter 5 from Part 1, titled *From Trade to Profession*, Chalmers presents the role of the ATA in the development of the teaching profession in Alberta. The members of the association understood that "with better qualified teachers, better salaries could be obtained and the financial circumstances of teachers as a group will improve" (p.87). The ATA's membership did not value being rich; instead, they sought recognition of the importance of their profession: "the prize which the majority of people value most highly is not wealth, but prestige"<sup>15</sup>. Another reason for the representation of teachers' interests in Alberta and the investment in research and classroom facilities was to improve the quality of education in the province and to help teachers to have better conditions concerning their work.

Looking at the development of the teaching profession in Alberta it can be seen that many of the recommendations that the ATA made in the 1920s were not taken into consideration by the minister of education. However, an important piece of advice that was accepted for the training of teachers was the creation of a school designed just for teaching about education, which was created in 1928.

Chalmers shows that even if the ATA was taking small steps in representing teachers' interests at that time starting in 1935 the association received authority "to enact and enforce disciplinary powers over its members who from 1936 included all the teachers from the foothills province"<sup>16</sup>. The Teaching Act of 1935 and its amendments from 1936 gave a legal voice to the ATA that in June 1935 changed its name from the Alberta Teachers' Assembly to the Alberta Teachers' Association and "made it legal to refer to teaching as a profession"<sup>17</sup> and the Association's voice changed to represent the teachers' interests. Here Chalmers states that "the Association's representatives could claim that just as their medical or legal opposite number spoke for all the physicians or lawyers, so did they for all the teachers"<sup>18</sup>. The argument that Chalmers gives here is in the favour of teaching as a self-regulated profession, which is represented by an organized body with an institutional value and historical impact for the development of the teaching profession in Alberta.

In the mid-20th century, educational research in Canada presented a strong view that progressive education could not benefit the work of teachers because it lacked an academic structure and there were no guides for teachers or students about how education could be better organized. In this sense, Harries (1948) presents the circumstances that created the negative effects of progressive education: Firstly, there was a "lack of consensus regarding the definition of education, and particularly of progressive education". Secondly, there was "confusion of the practical purposes of progressive education". Thirdly, there was "ambiguity regarding student's power of choice". Fourthly, there were "dubious grading methods", and finally, there was an "absence of objectives and the means to achieve these objectives"<sup>19</sup>. Harries also argued that before analysing the failure of progressive education, there is a need to find an acceptable approach concerning a general objective of education.

<sup>15</sup> Chalmers, J.W. (1968). *Teachers of the Foothill Province: The Story of The Alberta Teachers' Association*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 87.

<sup>16</sup> Chalmers, Op. cit, p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> Idem, p. 128.

<sup>18</sup> Idem, p. 131.

<sup>19</sup> Harries, S.O.(1948) *Has Progressive Education Failed?* In *The B.C Teacher*, pp.146-147.

Ewing (1948) compared Traditionalism and Progressivism and concluded that neither one “can serve the purposes of Canadian education”<sup>20</sup>, but that a new educational philosophy was needed as a mix of both traditionalist and progressivist principles.

The teaching profession at that time was not a self-regulated profession and was affected by the dilemma of how to organize the work in class. Additionally, there was the failure of standardized tests that were supposed to follow the requirements of progressive education.

In the 1960s, the “back-to-basics” movement came not just as a critique of progressive education in Canada, but as a solution to the new situation created by the increase in the number of students who needed teachers, qualified and ready to teach masses. During the 1960s and 1970s, some teachers in Canada were poorly qualified and unable to meet the needs of both an increased number of students and new immigrants coming from a wider world than previously was the case in Canada. Stevenson (1960) states that “by 1960 about 90% of elementary teachers in the country were without degrees; 24 percent of secondary teachers had none”<sup>21</sup>. The practical solution found here was to import from abroad the necessary qualified teachers.

Titley and Mazurek (1990) show that the increase in graduation rates in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Saskatchewan meant also an increase in spending for education, not just for each student, but also for the increasing number of teachers and their better salaries. At that time, Canadian schools “were regimented, teacher-directed and authoritarian”<sup>22</sup>. The profession of teaching was more a necessity than an organized activity. The need for more teachers made the Canadian government spend more on education, students studied harder in order to earn more in the future, and the investment in “human capital” was used to answer the needs of the market. More students came from the Third World, creating the need to introduce the policy of multiculturalism into a new learning environment. Education was seen more and more as a controlled investment, not as a way to discover one’s soul, but to improve its contribution to society’s development through efficient work.

Concerning the teaching profession, Titley and Mazurek show that in 1968, Ontario’s Hall-Dennis Report, titled *Living and Learning*, which followed a progressive approach, was considering “teacher autonomy to be a key factor in the successful implementation” of a reorganized curriculum at the interdisciplinary level which included communication or environmental studies<sup>23</sup>. The report was received with optimism by elementary school teachers, but criticized by other academics who found it lacking a rigorous intellectual format. The old centralized control was replaced with giving freedom to teachers to organize their classes based on what they considered relevant for their students and situations. In many cases, this approach affected the profession of teaching because teachers without experience did not have any standard materials to follow for their teaching practice, making it difficult to have an innovative teaching process if there are no specific rules to follow.

The concerns about education that were recognized throughout the country made Canadian provinces review their secondary school programs in 1984-85 and led them to offer teachers and students a new educational approach.

The teaching profession is included in the group of regulated professions in Canada, being controlled by provincial or territorial law and being “governed by a professional organization or

<sup>20</sup> Ewing, J.M. (1948). *Educational Paradise More Than Hope?* In *Toronto Saturday Night*, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Stevenson, H.A. (1970). *Developing Public Education in Post-War Canada to 1960*. In Wilson, Stamp, Audet (eds.) *Canadian Education: A History*. Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice Hall of Canada, p.390.

<sup>22</sup> Titley, E, Mazurek, K. (1990). *Back to basics. Forward to Fundamentals?* In Titley (ed.) *Canadian education: Historical themes and contemporary issues*. (pp.111-125). Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd, p.113.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, p. 116.

regulatory body”<sup>24</sup>. The common terms of self-regulated professions are the status of being *Registered, Accredited, Certified or Licensed*. The ten provinces and three territories have their own regulations and strategies concerning the practices of the teaching profession. For example, only in 1987 did teaching become a self-regulated profession in British Columbia when the Teacher Profession Act established the B.C. College of Teachers with the “sole responsibility for governing the profession’s standards of entry, discipline, and professional development, and in doing so distinguished these from other interests pursued by the traditional teachers’ association, such as collective bargaining and the welfare of teachers”<sup>25</sup>.

### **HOW THE GENDER DEBATE, THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT, THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF TEACHING AND LATER ITS PROLETARIANIZATION HAVE IMPACTED TEACHERS’ ACTIVITY**

The impact of gender on professionalism is presented by Perry (2003) who analysed the number of female teachers in Nova Scotia between 1870 and 1960. The author evaluated how the employment of many less-qualified female teachers led to female teachers in Nova Scotia between 1870 and 1960 to be employed for the lowest Canadian salaries.

In Nova Scotia in 1870, the majority of common-school teachers were women because they received less education than men who could apply for better jobs. This created a misconception about “the feminization of teaching” which places women in a position to accept any payment for their work. Furthermore, at that time, school teaching in Nova Scotia was not seen as a career, but as how Perry shows, “it was a temporary job for both men and women”<sup>26</sup>. The option of teaching was always available and the interest of the government was to always have a surplus of teachers. The problem between 1855 and 1950 was that teaching required “no training at all until 1930” and “only brief periods of compulsory training, often less than a year as late as the 1950s”<sup>27</sup>. This challenged the profession of teaching and its role in the province’s development during the interwar period and World War II. This situation created a legacy of the “feminization of teaching” in the province because later female teachers were affected by the legacy of low salaries.

According to Harris (1994) the professionalism of teachers in the Western world reached a peak in the 1980s. The author affirms that after the 1980s teachers lost their autonomy and control, creating a process of deprofessionalization that can be understood as being the proletarianization of teaching<sup>28</sup>. The author argues that if the proletarianization of teaching is promoted and accepted, it will produce negative effects socially, politically and economically. Proletarianization will force teachers to concentrate more on management and less on instruction, creating a relatively de-skilled instructional process. The proletarianization of teaching will also cause teachers to lose control over curriculum and have less knowledge concerning the conditions of their employment.

The concept of the proletarianization of teaching was also described by Wotherspoon (2014) who presents it as “the processes whereby teachers, like workers in many industries, are subject to increasing, externally driven forms of control and pressures to intensify their work”<sup>29</sup>. The author

<sup>24</sup> Building Canada’s Competitive Edge (2014). *Professional Practice in Canada*, retrieved in October 2018 on <http://www.capecinfo.ca/professional-practice-in-canada/>.

<sup>25</sup> Wallin, Dawn. (2014). *Understanding Canadian Schools*, retrieved in October 2018 on <http://homepage.usask.ca/~dcw130/chapternine.html>

<sup>26</sup> Perry, George. (2003). *A Concession to Circumstances: Nova Scotia’s ‘Unlimited Supply’ of Women Teachers, 1870-1960*. In *Historical Studies in Education / Revue d’histoire de l’éducation*, 15, 2 (pp. 327-60), p. 333.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 338.

<sup>28</sup> Harris, K. (1994). *Teachers: Constructing the future*. London: Falmer Press, p.7.

<sup>29</sup> Wotherspoon, T. (2014). Op. cit., p.184.

argues that according to some researchers the teaching profession is not dominated by professionalism and gender equity, but is starting to be more regulated and to have a dominant tendency of proletarianization. In this sense, proletarianization is presented by Braverman (1974) as being part of every job, having a common tendency of de-skilling workers who lose their ability for planning, deciding and choosing the right skills for their work<sup>30</sup>.

The profession of teaching has its own particularities that makes it quite difficult to understand, penetrate or change. The professionalization and proletarianization of teaching have affected the political and social environment of teaching. Looking through Canadian history, examples can be found of teachers used as instruments of the state to promote the interest of common schooling by excluding the values of Natives and forcing the assimilation process upon them. For instance, the evolution of common public schooling in the Upper Canada of the 19th century was not just fragmented but also operated according to a "hidden curriculum". The interest of governments was to develop schools controlled by the state that would "civilize", educate and help the poorer people. Describing the class nature of education, Alison Prentice (1978) argues that Ryerson, the father of Canadian public schooling, established an instrument for social control by centralizing school administration<sup>31</sup>.

In the past teachers were not consulted about their working conditions and from many perspectives were considered simple agents of the state. According to modern teaching requirements, teachers have to respect a provincial curriculum that promotes a multicultural society, is more open to dialogue and accepts diversity.

At the end of the 20th century, the economic perspective of teachers' work can be understood in many ways. Teachers can be seen as promoters of equality or, from the neo-conservative perspective, teachers provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for economic recovery when the business cycle reaches a low. From this perspective, in the case of a long economic recession, teachers would be responsible for it and would be expected to find solutions for economic recovery. In this sense, different authors write that schools tend to be market-oriented, especially universities. Buchbinder (1993) describes market-oriented universities as changing their role by adapting teaching to the context of the globalization of capital and a society of information<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, the role of the teaching profession in Canada is not just to deliver information, but also to make learners to create arguments, to develop critical-thinking skills, to be ready to understand the challenges of the modern globalized world and to find the suitable answers to theoretical questions that can be applied in the social context.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the development of the teaching profession in Canada followed periods of reform and adaptation to meet the needs of an increasing number of students that came from different cultures and areas from around the world. The Great Depression and the interwar periods brought another perspective to the profession of teaching, based on having more qualified teachers that had to adapt to the changes of Canadian society of that time.

Based on the historical evidence from the provinces analysed, the development of teaching in Canada was very slow in the 19th century and was accompanied by small steps toward improving

<sup>30</sup> Braverman, H. (1974). *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

<sup>31</sup> Prentice, A. (1978). *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada*. In *The Canadian Historical Review*, volume 59, Number 3, (pp. 362-363). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

<sup>32</sup> Buchbinder, H. (1993). *The market oriented university and the changing role of knowledge*. In Marginson S (eds.) *Higher Education*, volume 26, Issue 3.(pp. 331-347). Netherlands: Springer.

the conditions of teaching and providing teachers with adequate knowledge and an adequate school system.

The profession of teaching in Canada developed at the end of the 19th and in the 20th centuries differently in throughout the provinces. It could be argued that teachers were relatively better organized in Alberta, especially after World War I. However, the employment of many female teachers without qualification led to the concept of the “feminization of teaching” in Nova Scotia and created difficulties for later female teachers in negotiating for better salaries.

The training of teachers is very important and was slowly developed in the 19th and 20th centuries in Canada, being affected first by a traditional approach, then by a progressive approach, and then by a back-to-basics approach.

At the end of the 20th century, the modern approaches of teaching show that in many cases it is expected to have teachers ready to bring innovation into the classroom because success cannot be achieved in the classroom without talent and because students have to be prepared for the demands of the market. The profession of teaching is unique because it is based on following a curriculum and adjusting it to the needs and abilities of the students that come from different social and religious backgrounds, have unique genders and different expectations.

Based on the arguments given in this paper, it can be concluded that teaching as a profession slowly developed in Canada in the 19th and 20th century, developing into a self-regulated profession in British Columbia in 1987, and waiting to be a self-regulated profession in other provinces.

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