

History, Educational Reform, and the Cultivation of Critical Educators

Dear Reader,

These research projects concern the meanings, interpretations, and adoption of science education in New Brunswick over the past century. The historiography of education in Atlantic Canada is sparse; particularly underdeveloped in the context is the twentieth century. The central research questions pursued here involve the qualitatively different understandings and depictions of science education held in the province between 1900 and 1990. This broad context spans two world wars, the Depression, various economic booms and busts, the space race, the rise and fall of two distinct periods where progressive education affected the rhetoric and schemas of schooling. We are, I may add, in the early phase of a third progressive period of education in New Brunswick, where the rhythmic thumping of the themes *modernity*, *active learning*, *individualized instruction*, and *education as preparation for the future* is constant and pervasive. Today, we have biometric scanning in school lunchrooms, smartboards and netbooks, security cameras and Skype as markers of a new age of scientific and technological interaction with the project of public schooling. Future historians will have a field day trying to understand why we espouse the rhetoric of cultivating well-rounded individuals through education whilst elementary students spend half their day on only two subjects.

Present historians of education, whose diligent research is here published, have situated science within the broader context of social and political life. We have come to understand that in order to understand educational reform, you must first try to understand the local, provincial, national, and global contexts in which education is situated. What we, in New Brunswick, mean by *science* has changed. How we teach science has changed. How we evaluate science has changed. The roles for teachers and learners have evolved. The definitions, purposes, and aims of science education are context-specific. Reader, you

will have to engage with each of the research projects published to gain a rich understanding of the evolution of education in New Brunswick.

The research here makes a significant contribution to our understanding of education in New Brunswick. We academics, teachers, reformers, and administrators are notoriously forward-looking; we look ever forward and upward, progressively minded. We must, I caution, look backwards. We must root our educational reforms and our reform initiatives in a solid and robust understanding of the history of education. Enough pendulum-turning and wheel-spinning. Historians of education are vital to the future of education, not just its past. What we refer to today as 21st Century skills were also discussed by the likes of John Dewey, a century ago.

Both primary and secondary sources are examined by the published projects. With regards to the former, these include newspaper articles, annual reports of the minister of education to the province, textbooks, archival images, student notebooks, and magazine publications. With regards to the latter, sources include journal articles, scholarly books, web pages, and newspapers. Sources were carefully scrutinized and references have been annotated.

I am extremely proud of the published work contained herein, despite my knowledge that pride is a deadly sin. The work is rooted in important research undertaken by the Centre for Historical Consciousness and The History of Education Network, which, along with educators and students across Canada, are exploring what it means to think historically in schools. Largely, this involves *doing* history. There are some wonderful textbooks in publication, but none of them should be used as the principal medium of instruction in any subject. In the midst of doing this research, the published authors came to see history as a complex process of meaning making rather than as content to be learned, timelines to be memorized, names and dates to be processed, and eras to frame.

We aimed here not only to publish for the public information that we uncovered, but also to cultivate the habits of mind required of critical and thoughtful educators. We achieved both aims.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'T. Christou', with a stylized, cursive script.

Theodore Michael Christou