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THE CHANGING SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

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This paper is designed for persons who are not acquainted with the organization of education in Canada. At the outset it may be helpful to explain that each of the ten provinces is autonomous in respect of the organization and control of education within its borders according to the agreement reached at the time of Confederation in 1867. Division of responsibility between provincial governments and the federal government exists throughout since each province delegates a considerable degree of control to the local school boards for public elementary and secondary education and to the governing bodies in higher education. A strong conviction that the alignment of the provinces and federal government should have major control of education is seldom questioned. The province enters few restrictions on those operating private schools and colleges. A local interest, which is inevitable today, is shown especially through grants to vocational education, to higher education institutions, and to research.

Interest in education has not only increased, it has changed. Few dinner-table speakers confine themselves today to any one aspect of the "little red schoolhouse", whether a red-brick box-like affair, one-room structure of rough-hewn logs, the services started with more, warmed by a fireplace, or a place in an open field, and standing sentinel in a forest clearing. In an open field, and standing sentinel in a forest clearing, or a frame structure heated by a pot-bellied stove, or a person on the wind-swept, snow-covered prairie, indeed, that are likely to emerge in the great historical poems of the time and purposes of education, a schoolmaster, and his flock, victorious disciples of our schools, teachers and pupils, ending too often with the nostalgic suggestion that we should return to the good old days of their childhood. However, the present struggle is evidence of a new interest in the part of teachers and others. It may be said as a sign of health and a content of progress.

In the early days, schooling at the elementary level consisted of reading, writing and number work, which was considered adequate for the majority. The fatherly role of our French-speaking population were interested in the practical use for the occupations and professions, and the Roman Catholic Church showed interest in the conversion of the Indians and the production of good citizens with some knowledge of reading, writing, arithmetic and religion. The Italian-speaking population from the peninsula was more secular, but possessed an equal respect for the role of education. In the English-speaking areas, there were many private primary schools, and in the French-speaking areas, the French schools had been established.