

The evolution of the Quebec society over 300 years seen through Quebec textbooks

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If there is a world-wide product among the printed literature, it is textbooks. They can be found in every country. They present similarities as well as distinctive features. I hope the limited information I will give about the history of Quebec textbooks will help you discover some similarities as well as recognize your specific features.

I must specify at the outset that the provinces have jurisdiction over education in Canada. Therefore, without entering our constitutional debates, I will be speaking about Quebec textbooks, rather than Canadian textbooks, which means about textbooks edited in the province of Québec, including many foreign textbooks re-edited in this province, but I will leave aside the foreign textbooks used in this province but not reprinted here.

Quebec is a laboratory offering numerous possibilities of comparative analyses with other cultures. Our population comes mainly from two great migratory currents from Western Europe which left their stamps on us. After absorbing more or less those foreign contributions, we attempted to create our own model by trying to include the cultures that appeared before us on our land and the cultures that coloured our scenery. Those inward and outward influences, not to say that ambiguity, colour all our cultural products, starting with the literature we have been using in teaching for three centuries. The following thoughts about the evolution of textbooks in Quebec will be organized around three main lines: the users, the producers and the regulating authorities.

1608-1762

It might be tempting to leave aside the whole period of New France – from the first French settlements in the early 17th century to 1763, when the territory was given up to the crown of England – and, due to the absence of any printing house and of any state structure governing the educational field, to conclude that there were no textbooks. Although embryonic, the educational system was offering a first market. We have very few data about school attendance and, therefore, about the number of possible users. It is said that the College of the Jesuits, the only higher education institution before 1763, received 1,700 students over 130 years of existence.

There were few possible buyers for textbooks that were inevitably produced elsewhere. Published in Paris in 1702 by the second bishop of Quebec, the *Catéchisme du diocèse de Québec* was written, for a large part, in France by Monsignor de St-Vallier, a French man, and its distribution here was very limited due to the hazards of the Spanish War of Succession. The bishops are not the only persons who brought French textbooks in Quebec. Antoine Forget, a French layman arrived in Montreal in 1701 to teach at the Collège des Sulpiciens after being trained in Paris at the seminar of the Brothers of the Christian Schools for rural teachers, was promised that Brother Nicolas Vuyart, his former teacher and the director of that teachers' training college, would send him what he had requested for the schoolboys. We also know, from the *Conduite des écoles*, the collection of the directives of the Institute regarding classes,

that the books intended for the students consisted, at that time, of a book of prayers, a spelling book, a reading book in cursive script, a treaty about civility and a book of psalms. Therefore, we can rightfully suppose that those are the books Forget asked his former mentor, but I cannot, for the moment, identify more formally the textbooks that were used in the junior schools.

Beside those who produce or use textbooks, there are those who make the rules about them. In New France, not surprisingly, education falls under the influence of the Catholic Church. In a 1727 ruling, the Intendant Dupuy states that it is necessary to obtain the permission of the bishop for teaching activities. The bishops do not only supply the schools with catechisms; they also supervise the printed materials distributed to the students. In 1703, Monsignor de St-Vallier reminds, in his *Rituel*, that the vicar general, when he visits the schools, must make sure that the children do not read in bad books.

The change of allegiance of 1763 greatly modifies the situation. The new masters speak a different language and practice a different religion. Moreover, the taking over of New France by England provokes the arrival of a new wave of immigrants that will want to be educated in its own language. Finally, and this is a major change, the settling in Quebec City of a first printer coming from Philadelphia means that it will be possible to produce didactical material locally.

1763-1839

During the following 80 years, from 1763 to 1840, appear the first governmental structures intended to regulate the functioning of the schools.

These new interventions of the state in the educational field are felt moderately even in the production and use of textbooks. At the beginning of the 19th century, the bylaws speaks about “An uniform system to be pursued in these Schools, prescribing, as far as possible, the Books to be used, according to a list to be made for the Schools belonging to each Church, by those Trustees of the Institution, respectively, who are members of that Church”. For the first time, not the last, there is a concern for the uniformity of textbooks. Moreover the two accredited Churches are asked to see to the application of that policy. The act of 1829 asks the inspectors to include in their reports the list of the books that are used.

Those who produced textbooks did not wait for the intervention of the state before setting to work. Between 1765 and 1839, 142 textbooks are printed in Québec, a little less than two per year. That average doubles during the decade of 1830, which is an obvious sign of the increasing number of clients due to the new schools opened as a consequence of the act of 1829. Less than 12,000 students were attending the elementary schools in 1828. Seven years later, there are more than 50,000. Therefore, there is a market for textbooks and there will be producers of textbooks.

About sixty authors positively identified write for the schools. Among them, there are about 15 members of the clergy, including a bishop for the catechism of 1765 and some teachers in seminaries. The proportion of teachers who write textbooks is somewhat surprising in view of the embryonic stage of the educational system. More than half of the authors work as primary school teachers. While some, like Joseph Laurin, who has the training of a notary and is a teacher for some time, write in order to pay debts incurred during their studies, others initiate the movement of persons making a career in teaching who, prompted by the deficiencies or the absence of textbooks, want to correct that situation on the basis of their own experience in teaching. Joseph-François Perrault, with 13 titles, is at the origin of that movement.

In addition to writing, we must speak about publishing, which is a related activity. While there was a sole publisher in 1765, more than 60 printers or publishers would have worked at the production of textbooks books by the end of the decade of 1830, attesting at the same time a cultural fact (the growing number of readers) and a socio-economic reality: the English-speaking publishers take up, for a while, the larger part of the production of texts. Among the 142 titles already mentioned, 32 are in English (22%).

While the Quebec authors or authors working in Quebec begin early to write textbooks (La Brosse, a French Jesuit, publishes for the Montagnais a prayer book that is also used as an alphabet primer), it is imperative, because of the scarcity of staff, to reprint in Quebec textbooks from overseas; 26% of the books used by the students will come from France, and 13% will come from England; one will come from the United States. I remind that I am always speaking of foreign manuals reprinted in the Quebec territory. Finally, I must mention an opposite but limited tendency. Some textbooks originally written and published in Quebec are reprinted overseas, such as the two grammars of the Sulpicians Rivière and Houdet, published in Montreal in 1811 and re-edited in France in 1832, as well as the Mohawk alphabet primer published in Montreal by Daniel Claus in 1781 and that reappears in London, England, five years later.

There are more students and more buyers. Moreover, the spectrum of subject matters grows larger, which is confirmed by titles published in Quebec for new subject matters. We must therefore speak of first occurrences: first French grammar in 1778, first Latin grammar in 1796, first French reading book in 1809, first general geography in 1804, first history of the Antiquity and first arithmetic book in 1809, first book of French as a second language in 1810, first book of English as a second language in 1811. But the students are not only beginners. Other first manuals are published for more advanced students: a manual of astronomy in 1824, a manual of trigonometry in 1827 and a manual of philosophy in 1835.

The widening of the teaching disciplines leads us a step farther. For the first time, some Quebecers express their views about the school system. This launches the reflection in a science that is totally new here, pedagogy. The first Quebecer to study that discipline, Joseph-François Perrault, will later write many textbooks. However, his first intervention in that field is rather surprising. To counter the scarcity of textbooks and their cost too high for a vast portion of the parents, he suggest, as soon as 1822, to print

large pictures for the initiation to reading rather than to publish textbooks. In fact, Perrault reiterates, as his own, a suggestion contained in a governmental report published about ten years earlier, and obviously inspired by Lancaster, an English specialist of teaching.

Very soon, the analysts agree on the necessity of textbooks and they call for uniformity while, at the same time, they deplore the severe shortage of textbooks. There is another motive for reflection and concern: the foreign content of our textbooks, where foreign countries and the Antiquity are given more attention than the history and the topography of North America. One might be surprised that somebody wrote that warning as soon as 1833, but it is still more surprising to read it in an essay published in France by an author that never came to Quebec.

If the period between 1765 and 1840 saw the apparition of the first textbooks and of the first administrative structures regulating the teaching practices, these structures did impose very little constraint due to the limited staff assigned to the supervision of the teaching practices.

1840-1875

The creation of the position of Superintendant of the Public Instruction in 1840, overseen by a first Public Instruction Council in 1856, represents a major change in the management of the educational sphere by the government. Afterwards, the teaching will be subject to strict rulings taken by stable bodies for that purpose. Textbooks are also touched by those measures. In 1841, the choice of textbooks is entrusted to the brand new school boards, bodies having the responsibility to administer the schools of a given territory, before it is stated in 1846 that the ministers of religion, Catholic or Protestant, have a right to examine the manuals used to teach religion or the moral doctrine. As long as the governmental authority was concentrated in the Superintendant Jean-Baptiste Meilleur, it is understandable that the local school boards enjoyed great latitude. However with the creation of a body entrusted with the management of the schools of the whole Quebec in 1856, some powers imparted to the local authorities until then are transferred to the new body. For instance the act of 1856 charges the new Public Instruction Council to make a list of the books that the teachers can use. That is the origin of the policy, still effective after more than 150 years, regarding the approbation of textbooks.

If the structuring of teaching can be explained, at least in part, by the growth of the number of students (more than 240,000 in 1875 compared to 5,000 in 1842), the same spectacular growth justifies a more abundant and diversified production of books: 379 new textbooks concerning at least 49 subject matters over three decades. Not only more children attend school but, once again, the spectrum of courses offered is widening as it can be inferred from the arrival of textbooks for new subject matters: physics in 1841; botany, differential and integral calculus in 1848. On the other hand, one surprising fact is the proportion of books written in English, 46%, which is more than twice the percentage for the previous period. The demographic data do not completely

explain that fact. French-speaking people still constitute a large majority. It would be necessary to determine what part of the production for English-speaking students went to schools for French-speaking students. Thus textbooks could be seen as indicators of social attitudes that have not yet been analyzed much.

The outburst of the market leads to a proliferation of authors. At least 145 new names appear on title pages of textbooks during those 35 years. Half of these new authors work, in some way, in education. There are also a few famous persons, such as the national historian François-Xavier Garneau, who accepts to write a summary, by questions and answers, of his monumental *Histoire du Canada*.

The reprinting of foreign textbooks, although slightly lower than during the previous period, 27% compared to 39%, indicates that the local production is too low and that there is a desire in the population to identify itself to one or the other of our original cultures. Let us mention the arrival of two other players: the United States and Ireland. The arrival of large contingents of immigrants from these countries explains, at least in part, the feeling that it is necessary to reprint here some textbooks that will help them maintain links with their original cultures. Beside the more or less integral reprints, there is the vast domain of more or less explicit adaptations. The case of teacher Juneau is interesting. While the princeps edition of his alphabet primer of 1847 bears an explicit mention of its source, the French teaching specialist Jean Palairret, on the title page, that mention disappears in the ulterior reprints, leaving all the merit to the Quebec adapter. These borrowings create both a problem of ethics and a problem of ideology.

Written here or borrowed more or less from other countries, textbooks take up a growing place in the book industry. Between 1840 and 1875, close to 150 firms launch themselves in the editing of school materials. A little more than one third of them have an English-sounding corporate name.

Fortunately, the growth of the production is accompanied by a more intensive reflection about the products. People wonder about the importance that must be given to textbooks in teaching, and even question their utility altogether. Reverend Verreault, principal of the Jacques-Cartier teachers' training college, do not reject textbooks but, putting forward as his own the arguments developed 50 years earlier by Perrault, he proposes to systematically use wall pictures to overcome the scarcity of textbooks, which is largely due to their excessive cost. Nevertheless, the utility of textbooks is not generally disputed, but there are different opinions about their use.

Do textbooks help more to understand or to remember? The great number of textbooks by questions and answers for various subject matters, not only religion, clearly favours the memorization. The absurdity to which such a practice may lead becomes obvious quite rapidly. It is denounced in the 1869 *Journal of Public Instruction*, which publishes an article under the suggestive title "Un vice dans nos campagnes" (An aberration in rural areas).

Another subject for debate appears: the multiplicity of textbooks for the same subject matter. In clear terms, the question is: Should there be only one textbook for each subject matter in the whole Quebec? In his report of 1853 about education, Sicotte refers to the complaints of the schoolmasters who say that each child brings a different book to school. In 1856, Superintendant Chauveau even blames the teachers themselves when he says that each teacher chooses his books and that each change of teacher means that new books must be bought. There were many denunciations of the perverse effects of the excessive diversity, including by persons of indisputable credibility, beginning by Meilleur, who establishes, as soon as 1846, an equation between the uniformity of textbooks and the progresses in teaching.

If certain uniformity can be justified in the name of pedagogical efficiency, it represents a problem of another nature linked to the different religious allegiances. One can hardly imagine a situation where Protestants would have to read texts glorifying Rome. The attorney Mondelet, who was favourably listened to by political authorities, thought he had found the solution when he proposed in 1841, at least for the beginners, a unique book for all subject matters, acceptable for Catholics and Protestants, because it would consist of quotations from the *Bible*. Needless to say that nothing came out of that project. Morin, another attorney more realistic, suggests a few years later, to use for English-speaking students the series of textbooks written in Ireland because they were considered as completely neutral from a religious standpoint.

Let us finally mention the exportation of textbooks used here to French-speaking students living outside Quebec. In 1872, the Superintendant of the Public Instruction in Manitoba, Joseph Royal, mentions the use of reading books imported from Quebec, in particular the *Traité des devoirs d'un chrétien*, which is a French textbook reprinted in Quebec.

At the Public Instruction Council, created in 1856, sit side by side Catholics and Protestants who jointly administer the public sector of education, even if its members form two separate subcommittees, based on religious allegiance, for the approbation of textbooks. That dichotomy is officialised in 1875 by the creation of two denominational committees, each one independent from the other, within the Public Instruction Council. >From that moment until the great reform of 1964, the school world will be managed by a Catholic committee and a Protestant committee, each of these managing its own policies without consulting the other. That will have a profound influence on the sector of textbooks.

1876-1964

Due to the constant progression of the school attendance, there is a significant rise of princeps editions and of reprints; 2,020 titles are printed during the decade 1950, compared to 584 during the decade of 1870.

The Private Instruction Council, an actor of first importance, will pursue two goals concerning textbooks during the following 80 years: uniformity and, until textbooks are completely free of charge, the reduction of their cost. What does uniformity mean? In

1879, a circular addressed to the school inspectors asks for uniformity within a school. More ambitious, an act of 1880 speaks for the first time about the uniformity in the whole Quebec. That objective is still quite far in 1898, as realizes Premier Marchand, who declares that the government wants to gradually establish the uniformity of the books used in the schools.

There are quite a few opponents to the uniformity of textbooks in the whole Quebec, starting with the Public Instruction Council, which admits that it had not been consulted before the act of 1880 was adopted. Superintendant Ouimet summarizes the grievances of that organization in his 1881 report: opposition of affected publishers, regional usages to be respected. Such a measure is so new that even European countries never thought about taking it. In addition to these arguments, there is also an educational one: the complete uniformity would suppress all spirit of competition, therefore destroying all true talent, as the Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools writes in a memorandum addressed to the Bishops in 1894. The government finally gives its verdict with the act of 1899, which imposes the uniformity of textbooks within each school board and charges the local commissioners to see to it.

Governmental authorities have another favourite idea: textbooks must be distributed free of charge; that idea is closely related to their uniformity, as was saying Langlois, a member of the Legislative Assembly, when he was complaining about the high cost of textbooks, in a document of his crusade for that uniformity. Evoked for the first time and cary vaguely in an act of 1897, limited to poor children and at the expense of the school boards in an act of 1899, proposed as universal but always at the expense of the school boards in an act of 1912, free distribution of textbooks becomes a reality with the act of 1944, which gives the local administrations the guarantee that the government will reimburse them three quarters of their expenses. As the policy about the uniformity, the policy about gratuity will arouse heated debates, often by the same persons.

In spite of the hesitations and the oppositions, the government always wants textbooks to be free of charge and uniform. In 1900, it gives a strong signal of its will by launching itself in a great adventure: the production of a series of textbooks, one for each level, with all the contents to be taught during that school year, that would be distributed without charge. Even if only one textbook was published, *Mon premier livre: lire, écrire, compter*, the project was quite ambitious. In spite of the strong opposition of certain sectors, the operation, although limited to the first year, had a great success: more than one million copies of that textbook, used at least until 1938, were distributed free of charge.

It was certainly a teaching tool but also an economic tool. The number of publishers climbs from about 60 in the decade of 1870 to about 100 in the decade of 1950. In the publishing field, there is a tendency to concentration, including in our collectivity. On the other hand, if there is something specific to Quebec in the publishing of teaching material, it is the role played by religious communities. While they published a few titles in the middle of the 19th century, they were responsible for 65% of the

princeps editions during the decade of 1920, before seeing a progressive decline of their influence.

Various factors explain that unique situation. Founded mostly in France, the religious communities, at least the best known male communities, arrive here with an experience in that field and can reproduce in Quebec the textbooks of their fellow members of France. Being composed of lifelong teachers, they can count on their members not only to write textbooks but also to test preliminary versions with target groups of users. Managing hundreds of schools, they can count on an automatic if not captive population of users because each community uses, if possible, only its own textbooks. That situation arouses, between them and lay publishers, conflicts that will disappear completely only when religious communities will gradually stop publishing textbooks in the decade of 1960.

We continue using products from elsewhere but we also export our products. The Sisters of Saint Anne print in Montreal, under the title *Vocabulaire bilingue*, a series intended for their schools of New England, where they work mostly for the benefit of Franco-Americans. But our attention is turned mainly towards French-speaking people of the Canadian diaspora. It is for ideological reasons in the first place. Collects of textbooks are organized in favour of Franco-Ontarians or, in the beginning of the decade of 1950, for French-speaking students of Vancouver. The commercial factor also enters into account. During a long time, the French-speaking people of Western Canada study history in textbooks published in Quebec, mainly by religious communities. The novelist Antonine Maillet reminds, with some bitterness, that Acadians, a French-speaking minority of the eastern provinces of Canada, were given textbooks no longer used in Quebec.

1965-2010

Since the creation of the Department of Education in 1964, the horizon of textbooks did not change much, except that the trends already observed have gained in intensity, beginning by the growth of the publishing of school books. The catalogue of textbooks, still incomplete, contains 2,479 documents published in the decade of 1970 and 4,006 published in the decade of 1990. We can observe that there are proportionally less publishers in the decade of 1990 than in the decade of 1970, which reflects a vigorous trend to concentrate the production in a few publishing houses. That fact can be explained by the raising investments required, among other factors. Recently, Guérin, one of the biggest publishing houses in the sector, estimated that an investment of one million dollars is necessary to produce a new title.

The transition from the Public Instruction Department to the Department of Education did not weaken the interventions of the governmental authorities in the field of textbooks, far from that. Not only the policy of approval remains in force, but it is abundantly explained in numerous documents addressed to publishers as well as potential writers: the former supervision stays, but it is motivated by new preoccupations. The didactical value of textbooks is considered, but in a constantly

more multicultural society, the underlying ideologies are scrutinized. There is a haunting desire to eliminate discriminatory racist or sexist stereotypes from all didactical material.

From an educational point of view, it seems that the end of the debates over the role of textbooks in teaching is still far away. In 2000, the following question appears in *Québec-français*: "Is it appropriate to use textbooks to teach?" That question is all the more pertinent that new technologies (CD-ROM and internet) encroach upon the traditional printed materials and are popular among children, who are their main users. This is why the Department of Education is constrained to slightly open the door to digital materials. They can cross the borders even more easily than the printed materials.

One could have thought that, with the years, the consumption of foreign products would have disappeared, if only as a consequence of the rise of the Quebec nationalism during the decade of 1960. That did not occur; it was even the contrary. Fewer products came from France and England, but we turned ourselves more towards the English-speaking Canada. During the last 50 years, we used in our francophone schools more than 400 textbooks coming from outside Quebec, especially texts published for the English-speaking Canada. More than half of these were used to teach mathematics.

We can find a little comfort in thinking that we reciprocate, at least in part. The reading method developed by a community of nuns during the 1950's has inspired imitations in English-speaking Canada, France and even in French Polynesia. Moreover a Quebec publisher of textbooks has found an important opening in French-speaking Africa.

Here is, in its great lines, the history of our adventure into textbooks. I hope that these few ideas will help you to reflect on your own adventure and that they will inspire you to come in Quebec and see by yourself what I told you.