

# Bilingual School District Trustees and Cultural Transmission: The Alberta Experience, 1892–1939

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The system of confessional schools established in the Northwest Territories before 1892 recognized distinct English Protestant and French Catholic populations. In the seven Roman Catholic Public school districts organized by French Canadians in Alberta between 1885 and 1892,<sup>1</sup> cultural continuity thus was assured. Further, the French Program of Studies developed by the Catholic Section of the Board of Education in 1884, and textbooks from Quebec, guided teachers in the great task of transmitting French Canadian heritage, Catholic ideals, and religious morality.<sup>2</sup> However, by the late nineteenth century the numerical and political ascendancy of English-speaking settlers on the Canadian prairies led to a struggle between English Protestants and French Catholics over secularization of schooling.

Ontario abolished confessional schooling in 1846 and rapidly instituted a system of provincial schools. The Ontario “model” of schooling was reproduced in Manitoba in 1890, and in the Northwest Territories in 1892. State schooling *à la* Ontario, everywhere supported by the judiciary and the legislature, had as its primary goal a nation of homogeneous English-speaking citizens with an appreciation of British heritage and institutions.<sup>3</sup> In a word, compulsory, secular, province-wide schooling threatened French Canadian cultural survival in provinces outside of Quebec.

Legislation governing the management of local public schools changed little after the establishment of state-controlled schools in Alberta. Trustees in

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<sup>1</sup>Yvette T. M. Mahé, *School Districts Established by French-Speaking Settlers in Alberta, 1885–1939. Identification of Bilingual School Districts*, vol. 1 (Edmonton: Faculté Saint-Jean, University of Alberta, 1989), 12.

<sup>2</sup>Yvette T. M. Mahé, “L’idéologie, le curriculum et les enseignants des écoles bilingues de l’Alberta, 1892–1992,” *La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes* 49, no. 4 (1993): 687–703.

<sup>3</sup>Kas Mazurek, “Interpreting Educational History With a Commentary on the Social Context of Early Public Schooling,” in *Essays on Canadian Education*, ed. Nick Kach, Kas Mazurek, Robert S. Patterson, and Ivan De Faveri (Calgary: Detselig, 1986), 23–40; Neil G. McDonald, “David J. Goggin: Promoter of National Schools,” in *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*, ed. David C. Jones, Nancy M. Sheehan, and Robert M. Stamp (Calgary: Detselig, 1979), 14–28; J. Donald Wilson, “The Ryerson Years in Canada West,” in *Education in Canada: An Interpretation*, ed. E. Brian Titley and Peter J. Miller (Calgary: Detselig, 1982), 61–92.

French-speaking communities maintained the right to hire and dismiss teachers and to supervise teaching in schools under their jurisdiction.<sup>4</sup> For these reasons, local public schools in French-speaking communities became important sites for French Canadian cultural transmission, since Francophone parents could elect trustees who favoured legitimizing French language and culture in school.

Trustees' role in French-speaking communities, like that of all trustees, was regulated by Departments of Education. School inspectors ascertained that trustees implemented departmental policies and regulations in their schools. In French-speaking communities, the question whose language and culture should be transmitted in local public schools became a source of tension between government agents and trustees. Such was the case when French was taught beyond the time allowed by law in Alberta and Saskatchewan,<sup>5</sup> and clandestinely in Manitoba after its abolition in 1916.<sup>6</sup>

I mean to shed light on the cultural transmission work of trustees in 118 school districts established by French-speaking settlers in Alberta before 1940. Hereafter I call these "bilingual school districts."<sup>7</sup> Using archival materials for the period 1892 to 1940, I outline commonalities among bilingual school district trustees' experiences and practices, showing how they responded to the

<sup>4</sup>"Duties of Trustees and their Officers," in *Statutes of the Legislature of the Province of Alberta. A Consolidation of the Ordinances Respecting Schools of 1898, 1905 and amendments up to 1910*, ch. 75, sec. 95, nos. 1 to 16: 275-76; Raymond J. A. Huel, "L'enseignement du français dans les écoles publiques de la Saskatchewan: une étrange dérogation aux dispositions de la Loi des Écoles dans l'Arrondissement scolaire d'Elhier No. 1834, 1921-1923," in *Perspectives sur la Saskatchewan*, ed. André Lalonde, Richard Lapointe, and Louis Julé (Regina: Société Historique de la Saskatchewan, 1983), 202-18; Cornelius J. Jaenen, "Le français au Manitoba: fruit de l'histoire ou d'une contrainte extérieure?" *Langue et société* 13 (1984): 3-24.

<sup>5</sup>Wilfred B. Denis, "Ethnicité et conflits scolaires en Saskatchewan de 1905-1980," in *Une langue qui pense: la recherche en milieu minoritaire francophone au Canada*, ed. Linda Cardinal (Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1993), 77-100; Yvette T. M. Mahé, "L'enseignement du français dans les districts scolaires bilingues albertains, 1885-1939," *Cahiers Franco-canadiens de l'ouest* 4, no. 2 (1992): 291-305; Keith A. McLeod, "Politics, Schools and the French Language, 1881-1931," in *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*, ed. David C. Jones, Nancy M. Sheehan, and Robert M. Stamp (Calgary: Detselig, 1979), 59-83.

<sup>6</sup>Jaenen, "Le français au Manitoba"; Brian Titley, "Religion, Culture and Power: The School Question in Manitoba," in *Canadian Education: Historical Themes and Contemporary Issues*, ed. E. Brian Titley (Calgary: Detselig, 1990), 45-77.

<sup>7</sup>The terms "bilingual schools" and "bilingual school districts" were used by school inspectors before 1940 when they referred to schools in localities where there was a concentration of French-speaking people and where trustees, by resolution, decided to have a primary course in French taught.

Francophone community's expectations of cultural transmission and how they reacted to Department of Education Anglo-conformism, especially in setting the goals of education for their schools. I argue that the rules of administration, the forms of political practice, and the school curriculum in French districts were decided by bureaucrats who had power and the necessary resources to shape cultural transmission.

#### PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND CULTURAL DISCONTINUITY, 1892–1940

By the end of the nineteenth century the English-speaking Protestant majority had institutionalized its language and world-view in Alberta society. The number and types of schools established by Franco-Albertans after 1892 reveal their religious minority status, and the linguistic politics of public school management in French-speaking communities show their linguistic minority status.

#### *Establishing Public Schools in Francophone Communities*

School Ordinances in Alberta after 1892 stated that in each area a public school district had first to be established before a separate district could be considered.<sup>8</sup> Constituting a majority in most French-speaking communities, Francophones were limited to establishing public school districts. Of 3,881 school districts in Alberta in 1940,<sup>9</sup> Francophones had organized only 118 or 3.04% of all districts. Between 1892 and 1939 they erected 111 districts, 105 or 94.5% being public school districts and only 5 or 4.5% being Roman Catholic separate school districts. One district, the Duclos Protestant S.D. No. 2, was registered in 1928 by French-speaking Presbyterians.<sup>10</sup>

Beginning in 1930, the trend in most Canadian provinces was to consolidate small school districts into large units or divisions.<sup>11</sup> From 1940 onward Alberta's bilingual school districts were consolidated into sixteen school

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<sup>8</sup>Harry T. Sparley, "A History of the Alberta School System to 1925" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1958), 146–47.

<sup>9</sup>Department of Education (hereinafter cited as DE), *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Department of Education of the Province of Alberta, 1940* (1941), 91.

<sup>10</sup>Mahé, *School Districts Established by French-Speaking Settlers in Alberta*, vol. 1, pp. 12–17, 72.

<sup>11</sup>F. Henry Johnson, *A Brief History of Canadian Education* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Canada, 1968), 110–15.

divisions<sup>12</sup> administered by Anglophones uninterested in French Canadian cultural maintenance.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Politics of Language*

In Francophone communities bilingual school district trustees generally conducted school business in French. My preliminary investigation into the ethnicity of 830 bilingual school district trustees disclosed that prior to 1940 the majority, 723 or 87%, were Francophones, and a small minority, 107 or 13%, were non-Francophones.<sup>14</sup> However, when non-Francophone settlers in French-speaking communities questioned the legitimacy of the French language for public school administration, Department officials took advantage of the situation to institutionalize the dominance of English in public schooling.

Trustees in nine school districts sporadically kept Minutes of Meeting in French.<sup>15</sup> When a Tangent S.D. No. 4477 trustee enquired if this practice was acceptable, a Department official replied that Section 35 of the Interpretation Act required that all public records "shall be kept, had or taken in the English language."<sup>16</sup> In Boudreau S.D. No. 3893 and Irene S.D. No. 3405, trustees sent out Notices of Annual Meetings and Tax Notices in French, but in the Irene S.D., when a non-Francophone trustee approached the Department about the problem of sending Notices of Meeting in English to people unable to read the language, Deputy Minister Ross replied

<sup>12</sup>Mahé, *School Districts Established by French-Speaking Settlers in Alberta*, vol. 1, 7–8, 25–28.

<sup>13</sup>For more information on bilingual education and Francophone assimilation after school district consolidation, see Ousmane Silla, *Projet de Recherche. École bilingue ou unilingue pour les franco-albertains?* Vols. 1 and 2 (Edmonton: Collège Universitaire Saint-Jean de l'Université de l'Alberta, 1974).

<sup>14</sup>For a list of the names of bilingual school trustees see Mahé, *School Districts Established by French-Speaking Settlers in Alberta*, vol. 1, pp. 30–167.

<sup>15</sup>See Minutes of Meetings of Ratepayers for the following school districts: Beaumont S.D. No. 741, Provincial Archives of Alberta [PAA], Accession No. 68.245 (roll no. 5); Irene S.D. No. 3, PAA 68.278:647; Lefebvre S.D. No. 4634, PAA 84.37:37031b,e; Mangin S.D. No. 3935, PAA 68.278:676; St. Cecile S.D. No. 3377, PAA 68.278:644; Tangent S.D. No. 4474, PAA 84.371:35446; Thibault S.D. No. 55, PAA 81.405:4 (roll no. 1); St. Laurent S.D. No. 1614, PAA 73.248:50; St. Paul S.D. No. 2228, "Procès verbaux, 1910–1921," St. Paul Cultural Archives.

<sup>16</sup>Letter from Deputy Minister of Education (hereinafter cited as DME) to I. Langlois, 18 February 1933, Tangent S.D. No. 4474, PAA 84.37:3544b.

It is my opinion that the notices calling the annual meeting should be written in the English language. It would be in order, of course, to post a notice in the French language as well. If proper notices were not posted it is my opinion that it would be ground for having the election set aside.

He then outlined procedures to follow if someone protested.<sup>17</sup>

The School Act before 1940 required that to be nominated as trustee in Alberta, a person had to be a British subject and to "be able to read and write."<sup>18</sup> When non-Francophones reported elected trustees in their school districts who could not read and write English, Department officials differed in their interpretation of the Act. In Ardmore S.D. No. 3463 the Deputy Minister wrote that the "ability to read and write in any language is sufficient,"<sup>19</sup> whereas an inspector responsible for the Gauthier S.D. No. 4452 told trustees "a man had to be able to read and write English."<sup>20</sup>

In Francophone communities with growing non-Francophone populations, trustees in five bilingual districts arranged to read Minutes of Meeting in English and French and to have someone translate the French speeches into English.<sup>21</sup> In four bilingual districts the use of French in annual meetings became an issue when non-Francophone candidates for the position of trustee were defeated. Defeated candidates and their supporters asked the Department to investigate election improprieties. Department investigators concluded complainants became suspicious of voting procedures because they had not understood what was said during the meeting.<sup>22</sup> Mr. Roberge, a French-

<sup>17</sup>Minutes, 10 February 1934, Boudreau S.D. No. 3893, PAA 84.37:2968; also DME to Mike Lukeniuk, 1 February 1932, Irene S.D. No. 3405, PAA 84.37:2507a,b.

<sup>18</sup>"An Act Respecting Schools" *Statutes of the Province of Alberta, 1922*, c. 51, sec. 86, p. 637.

<sup>19</sup>DME to O. S. Riste, 26 January 1932, Ardmore S.D. No. 3464, PAA 84.37:2555c.

<sup>20</sup>Inspector Wilson to DME, 8 February 1935, Gauthier S.D. No. 4452, PAA 84.37:3522a.

<sup>21</sup>See Minutes for the following school districts: 12 January 1935, Chartier S.D. No. 3166, PAA 84.37:2283a; 1932-39, Frontenac S.D. No. 416, PAA 84.37:157a,b; 1934, Girouxville S.D. No. 4352, PAA 84.37:3422a,b,c; 1938, Irene S.D. No. 3405, PAA 84.37:2507a,b; 24 February 1935, St. Leon S.D. No. 4, PAA 74.360:SE.

<sup>22</sup>Inspector Gibault to DME, 8 June 1934, Beauvallon S.D. No. 2235, PAA 79.334:1672; DME to D. J. W. Oke, Inspector of Schools, 10 March 1933, Brochu S.D. No. 4594, PAA 84.37:3664a; also Statutory Declarations from Joe Bolinski, John Mazurkewich, Steve Hawrishoh, and Charles Brochu to the DE, 21 March 1932, Brochu S.D. No. 4594, PAA 84.37:3664a; Jos. Brossard, Albert Brossard, and Wilfred Doyon to Minister of Education (hereinafter cited as ME), 20 December 1935, Jousard S.D. No. 4730, PAA 84.37:3799a,b; C. Anderson to ME, 11 January 1937, Therien S.D. No. 2149, PAA

speaking candidate for the position of trustee in the Beauvallon S.D. No. 2235, describes in a long letter to the Department the conflicts which arose during a meeting in 1935 when French and Ukrainians tried to get their candidates elected. According to Roberge, the situation in the district prior to elections was so volatile that Mr. Lessard, a former trustee, refused to attend the meeting unless "he had bodyguards."<sup>23</sup>

After the abolition of the dual system of confessional schools, French-speaking Catholics were no longer empowered to establish schools that took into account their cultural diversity. As a result, the norms, rules, and language for public school administration were defined by English-speaking government officials.

#### FRANCOPHONE EXPECTATIONS OF BILINGUAL SCHOOL TRUSTEES

Following the establishment of state-controlled schooling outside Quebec, French-Canadian cultural societies—La Société St. Jean-Baptiste, La Société du Parler Français, and Le Cercle Jeanne D'Arc among others—took an interest in promoting French education and the teaching of Religion. Cultural and professional associations including l'Association canadienne-française d'éducation de l'Ontario, founded in 1910, l'Association Catholique franco-canadienne de la Saskatchewan, founded in 1912, l'Association d'éducation des Canadiens français du Manitoba, founded in 1916, l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta (l'A.C.F.A.), founded in 1926, and l'Association des instituteurs bilingues de l'Alberta (l'A.I.B.A.), founded in 1927, established unofficial or parallel French "Departments of Education" in their respective provinces. Their members developed a hidden cultural curriculum and evaluation strategies, and a system of school inspection and teacher professional development to assure their cultural continuity in public schools in French-speaking communities.<sup>24</sup> In Alberta, l'A.C.F.A. expected trustees in

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84.37:1299c; also John Talaska to ME, 16 February 1938, Therien S.D. No. 2149, PAA 84.37:1299a.

<sup>23</sup>Alphonse Roberge to DE, 19 January 1937, Beauvallon S.D. No. 2235, PAA 79.334:1672.

<sup>24</sup>Gratien Allaire, "Pour la survivance: L'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta," *Les outils de la francophonie*, Les actes du sixième colloque du centre d'études franco-canadienne de l'ouest (Vancouver: Université de Colombie-Britannique, 1986), 67-99; Hélène Chaput, *Donatien Frémont. Journaliste de l'ouest canadien* (Saint-Boniface, Man.: Les Éditions du Blé, 1977), 109-30; Raymond J. A. Huel, *L'Association catholique Franco-canadienne de la Saskatchewan: Un rempart contre l'assimilation*

bilingual school districts to implement their cultural agenda, but trustees had difficulty finding dedicated agents of French Canadian transmission.

### *Educating Trustees About Their Cultural Duties*

From 1900 on, members of Franco-Albertan cultural associations were under the impression that trustees neglected the teaching of French and religion in their schools because the trustees did not understand their duties and responsibilities as agents of French Canadian transmission.<sup>25</sup> Association members therefore used the press, School Ordinances in French, and the founding of a bilingual trustees' association, to educate trustees about their cultural duties.

Clerical and professional elites used the Francophone press to inform trustees in French-speaking communities of their duty to help children preserve their religious and national identity. They also urged parents to elect as trustees only dedicated compatriots who were willing to hire patriotic French Canadian Catholic teachers. Parents were cautioned not to elect trustees from other ethnic groups.<sup>26</sup>

In 1898, members of La Société St. Jean-Baptiste, founded in 1894, conducted an inquiry into the state of French Canadian transmission in Alberta's bilingual schools. They concluded that trustees were not well versed in laws governing the teaching of French and religion. Subsequently, they put pressure on French-speaking politicians and the Minister of Education to translate school ordinances into French. In 1908, the Department made available a French version of the school ordinances, but according to the Francophone press few requested these ordinances between 1911 and 1915.<sup>27</sup>

*culturelle* (Regina: Les Publications Fransaskoises, 1969); Cornelius J. Jaenen, *Les franco-Ontariens* (Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1993).

<sup>25</sup>"Résolutions présentées à Morinville par la Société St. Jean-Baptiste d'Edmonton," *L'Ouest Canadien (Edmonton)* (hereinafter cited as *L'OC*), 30 juin 1898, 4; "Discours du président," *Le Courrier de l'Ouest (Edmonton)* (hereinafter cited as *LCL'O*), 30 mai 1912, 1; "Le Cerele Jeanne D'Arc. Lettre circulaire aux commissions scolaires bilingues d'Alberta," *L'Union* (hereinafter cited as *L'U*), 2 février 1928, 8.

<sup>26</sup>"Unissons-nous: Résolutions de la Société St. Jean-Baptiste d'Edmonton," *L'OC*, 15 mai 1899, 2; "Discours du président," *LCL'O*, 30 mai 1912, 1; "L'élection des commissaires d'école," *L'Étoile de St. Albert*, 12 novembre 1913, 1; "Les commissions scolaires," *L'U*, 29 décembre 1929, 1.

<sup>27</sup>"Société St. Jean-Baptiste," *L'OC*, 7 avril 1898, 3; "Le français dans l'Alberta," *LCL'O*, 10 septembre 1908, 4; "Les lois d'Alberta en français," *Le Progrès Albertain (Edmonton)* (hereinafter cited as *LPA*), 18 mars 1915, 3.

*L'Association des Commissaires d'écoles de langue française de L'Alberta*

Francophone elites wanted to help bilingual school trustees to define their role in French-Canadian transmission. In 1935, the Catholic clergy, with the support of members of l'A.C.F.A. and l'A.I.B.A., united twelve trustees to found l'Association des commissaires d'écoles de langue française de l'Alberta (l'A.C.E.L.F.A.). Membership in l'A.C.E.L.F.A. increased to 125 trustees in 1936, and to 171 in 1937. In 1936, bilingual school trustees had a representative on the Executive of the Alberta School Trustees' Association (A.S.T.A.).<sup>28</sup>

Rev. Father Jean Fortier, S.J., the unofficial bilingual school inspector, was elected secretary of l'A.C.E.L.F.A. at its founding meeting in 1935. Fortier claimed the mission of bilingual school trustees was to protect the interests and religious rights of Francophones and to ensure that children were taught to love their Catholic faith, their cultural heritage, and the French language.<sup>29</sup>

Prior to the annual A.S.T.A. convention, A.C.E.L.F.A. members met to study laws and issues affecting the teaching of French and religion, and the Department's French Program of Studies. Clerical and professional guest speakers suggested how trustees could expand the teaching of French beyond the time allowed by law. They were told, for example, to make sure teachers taught students their prayers, Catechism, Canadian history, and songs in French, assigned homework in French, and explained in French the school subjects to be taught in English. Trustees were asked to involve students in the Concours de français, community festivals, and the Avant-Gardes.<sup>30</sup>

The Avant-Gardes was a Catholic youth organization whose goal was to instill in students principles of Catholicism and to prepare them for Catholic Social Action. Avant-Gardistes met once a week, and under the tutelage of a parish priest, nun, or teacher they studied Catholic doctrine and its history, and biographies of French Canadian Catholics who struggled to defend their faith and linguistic rights.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup>“Fondation de l'Association des commissaires d'écoles de langue française de l'Alberta,” *La Survivance* (hereinafter cited as *LS*), 13 février 1935, 7; “Aux commissaires de langue française,” *LS*, 22 janvier 1936, 4; “Au congrès des commissaires,” *LS*, 10 février 1937, 1.

<sup>29</sup>“Fondation de l'Association des commissaires d'écoles de langue française de l'Alberta,” *LS*, 13 février 1935, 7.

<sup>30</sup>“M. le curé Beauregard souhaite la bienvenue aux délégués canadiens français,” *LS*, 12 février 1936, 1; “Aux commissaires d'écoles de langue française de l'Alberta,” *LS*, 27 janvier 1937, 8; “Au congrès des commissaires,” *LS*, 10 février 1937, 1, 5.

<sup>31</sup>“Coin des Avant-Gardes,” *LS*, for the following dates: 16 novembre 1932, 2; 23 novembre 1932, 2; 23 février 1933, 2.



*Implementing a Hidden Cultural Curriculum: The Concours de français*

The Concours de français was an annual French examination administered in provinces outside of Quebec by provincial French Canadian cultural associations.<sup>32</sup> Since examination results were published in French-language newspapers and Lauréats were honoured at special community ceremonies, the Concours de français represents a form of Francophone social control over cultural transmission in public schools in French-speaking communities.

In Alberta, La Société du Parler Français, founded in 1912, began by awarding prizes to students distinguished in French composition and religion.<sup>33</sup> In 1918, Le Cercle Jeanne D'Arc, also founded in 1912, instituted a yearly Concours de français taken over by l'A.C.F.A. in 1929 and maintained until mid-1960. *L'Union* and *La Survivance* published the Concours examination results, and prizes awarded to Lauréats were provided by French and Quebec governments, religious orders, financial institutions, and businesses, and by Franco-Albertan associations and private donors.<sup>34</sup> Not all bilingual schools participated in the Concours de français, but participation rates did increase over the years. In 1918, of 68 bilingual schools, only 27 schools or 40% participated in the Concours, whereas in 1933, of 107 bilingual schools in existence, 74 or 69% had students in the Concours.<sup>35</sup>

A sampling of questions from the Concours de français for 1927 and 1933 shows that its main goal was to measure students' knowledge of French grammar while reinforcing their nationalistic, patriotic, and religious beliefs. In the June 1927 Concours, Grade 6 students were asked to write the following sentence in a plural form: "L'enfant canadien français de l'Alberta doit être cent pour cent canadien-français comme celui des autres provinces." Grade 7 students had to identify the number of prepositions in the following sentence: "Le petit canadien-français qui ne parle pas sa langue est un soldat déserteur; c'est même un traître qui passe à l'ennemi au moment du combat."<sup>36</sup> In the

<sup>32</sup>"Le Concours de français," *LS*, 11 mai 1932, 1. This article refers to similarities between the Concours de français held in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

<sup>33</sup>"Convention d'Alberta," *LCL'O*, 6 juin 1912, 3.

<sup>34</sup>Cercle Jeanne D'Arc, "Grand concours de composition française pour les élèves des écoles de l'Alberta," *L'U*, 15 juin 1918, 1; "Soirées familiales, distribution des prix," *L'U*, 15 octobre 1918, 1; "Les lauréats du concours de français," *LS*, 26 septembre 1929, 7–8; "La liste de donateurs au concours de français," *LS*, 9 juillet 1931, 1.

<sup>35</sup>"Grand concours de composition française pour les élèves de l'Alberta," *L'U*, 15 juin 1918, 1; Maurice Lavallée, "En marge du dernier concours de français," *L'U*, 15 août 1934, 3.

<sup>36</sup>"Concours de français du Cercle Jeanne D'Arc," *L'U*, 23 juin 1927, 3.

combined Grade 11 and 12 Concours for 1933, which lasted three and one-half hours, students had to correct sentences such as: "Les hymnes de l'office du Saint-Sacrement furent composé par le grand Thomas d'Aquin," and "Dieu est bon et juste pour toutes ses créatures." They had to write a sixty-line composition and one of the topics asked them to describe their impressions about an abandoned farmhouse that once belonged to a French Canadian family: "Vous allez en promenade dans une de nos campagnes canadiennes et vous voyez une maison barricadée, la clôture à terre, l'herbe longue devant le perron. Décrivez vos impressions. Il y avait là une famille canadienne-française autrefois; maintenant, elle n'y est plus."<sup>37</sup>

### *Transmission Role of the Visiteur des écoles bilingues*

The teaching of French and religion in bilingual schools was not inspected by Department officials because these subjects did not form part of the Official Program of Studies. Before 1928 parish priests supervised the teaching of religion in local public schools in French-speaking communities. In 1928, l'A.C.F.A. appointed Rev. Father Jean, S.J. as "visiteur des écoles bilingues" to inspect the teaching of French and religion,<sup>38</sup> and between 1934 and 1940 Rev. Father Fortier, S.J. assumed this role.<sup>39</sup>

During annual visits in bilingual schools the A.C.F.A. inspector met with trustees, tested students' knowledge of catechism and written and oral French, provided teachers and students with holy pictures, and recommended textbooks published by the Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes and the Clercs Saint-Viateurs, to name of few, for the teaching of French, religion and French Canadian history. In 1933, Rev. Fortier requested that teachers use the new French Program of Studies developed by l'A.C.F.A. and l'A.I.B.A. to prepare students for the Concours de français.<sup>40</sup>

My preliminary study of 390 inspection reports completed by Father Fortier, S.J. between 1934 and 1940 indicates he was not able to visit seven bilingual school districts because trustees or teachers were non-Franco-

<sup>37</sup>"Concours de français de l'A.C.F.A., Grade XI et XII," 1 juin 1933, Institut de recherche, Faculté Saint-Jean, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Accession No. AUCL.006.

<sup>38</sup>"Morinville. Distingué visiteurs," *L'U*, 22 mars 1928, 5; "Liste des résolutions du congrès de l'A.C.F.A.," *L'U*, 26 juillet 1928, 1.

<sup>39</sup>Lavallée, "En marge du dernier concours de français," 3; "Nouvelles de Morinville," *LS*, 22 septembre 1937, 4.

<sup>40</sup>Mahé, "L'idéologie, le curriculum et les enseignants des écoles bilingues," 681.

phones.<sup>41</sup> A teacher in the Little Bear Creek S.D. No. 4476 wrote the Department to find out whether she was obliged to let Rev. Fortier into her classroom. The Chief Inspector of Schools replied that this person was not authorized to inspect teachers.<sup>42</sup>

### *Consequences of Bilingual Teacher Shortages*

Successful implementation of the hidden cultural curriculum in bilingual schools depended on the availability of French Canadian Catholic teachers. However, between 1908 and 1935 there was a yearly shortage of some thirty to fifty bilingual teachers.<sup>43</sup> Chronic shortages of bilingual teachers were a result of cultural and economic factors.

Normal School programs, designed to prepare teachers to transmit the English language and British values and ideals in public schools, did not offer teachers second-language training.<sup>44</sup> This problem was compounded by the fact that a number of French Canadian teachers, products of Alberta schooling, were not competent in French. To assist teachers in developing French-language skills and teaching competencies, in 1933 I'A.C.F.A. and I'A.I.B.A. began to offer summers courses in French and in the teaching of French, French Canadian history, and religion.<sup>45</sup> To alleviate bilingual teacher shortages, Francophones maintained pressure on the Department to recognize credentials of teachers prepared in Quebec's French-Catholic institutions. Their demands were not satisfied. Quebec teachers, as a result, had to complete courses in Alberta's Normal Schools before being issued an Alberta teaching certificate.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup>Rapports du Rév. Père Jean Fortier, S.J., 1934 à 1940, Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta Collection (hereinafter cited as ACFAC), PAA 80.226.

<sup>42</sup>Chief Inspector of Schools (hereinafter cited as CIS) to Mrs. L. L. Landry, 26 March 1935, Little Bear Creek S.D. No. 4476, PAA 84.37:3546b.

<sup>43</sup>"Lettre de M. l'Abbé Bérubé," *LCL'O*, 30 avril 1908, 4; "L'école bilingue en Alberta," *LPA*, 17 septembre 1914, 1; "Colonne de l'A.C.F.A.," *L'U*, 8 septembre 1927, 1; Lavallée, "En marge du dernier concours de français," 3.

<sup>44</sup>Robert S. Patterson, "History of Teacher Education in Alberta," in *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*, ed. David C. Jones, Nancy M. Sheehan, and Robert M. Stamp (Calgary: Detselig, 1979), 192-207.

<sup>45</sup>"Cours de français pendant l'été," *LS*, 21 juin 1933, 1; "Cours de pédagogie de l'A.C.F.A.," *LS*, 19 juin 1935, 1.

<sup>46</sup>"Diplômes d'écoles," *Le Progrès (Morinville)*, 13 mars 1909, 1; "À l'école Boudreau," *L'U*, 17 février 1927, 4; "Pourquoi nous manquons d'instituteurs," *L'U*, 14 mars 1929, 1.

The majority of bilingual school districts were in farming communities, and like other rural school districts in Alberta, the bulk of their revenues came from local taxes. Poor crops and low wheat prices affected school districts' operating budgets.<sup>47</sup> In forty bilingual districts the unstable tax base meant that trustees were unable to pay teachers their salaries and to offer them good working conditions. Trustees in these districts obtained departmental permission to pay teachers \$40 to \$150 less than yearly minimum rates allowed, and to borrow money to pay teachers' outstanding salaries. Lacking the necessary material resources, trustees in these districts were unable to compete to attract and retain qualified bilingual teachers. They were therefore obliged to hire non-Franco-phone Catholic and Protestant teachers to keep their schools open.<sup>48</sup>

My preliminary study of the mobility of 452 bilingual school teachers for the period 1892 to 1940 suggests the majority spent an average of one to two years in a school district.<sup>49</sup> High teacher turn-over because of poor working conditions was a problem in other rural school districts in Canada before

<sup>47</sup>Sparley, "A History of the Alberta School System to 1925," 189-97.

<sup>48</sup>Anshaw S.D. 4695, PAA 84.37:3764a; Aprement S.D. No. 4183, PAA 84.37:3253a,b; Beaumont S.D. No. 741, PAA 68.245 (roll no.5); Beauvalon S.D. No. 2235, PAA 84.37:1385; Belanger S.D. No. 4471, PAA 84.37:3541b; Benoit S.D. No. 4706, PAA 84.37:3775a; Berney S.D. No. 3937, PAA 84.37:3009b; Boudreau S.D. No. 3893, PAA 84.37:2968; Bouvier S.D. No. 3308, PAA 84.37:2415a; Brochu S.D. No. 4594, PAA 84.37:3664a; Cartier S.D. No. 3238, PAA 84.37:2349a,b; Champlain S.D. No. 1776, PAA 84.37:929; Charest S.D. No. 51, PAA 68.245 (roll no. 5); Charron S.D. No. 4224, PAA 84.37:3294a,b; Chartier S.D. No. 3166, PAA 84.37:2283a; Doucet S.D. No. 2932, PAA 84.37:2063a,b; Doussal S.D. No. 4490, PAA 84.37:3560a; Durlingville S.D. No. 2664, PAA 84.37:17971, PAA 84.37:2555a, and PAA 79.334:680; Egg Lake S.D. No. 429, PAA 84.37:163b; Fremont S.D. No. 3297, PAA 84.37:2404a; Gauthier S.D. No. 4452, PAA 84.37:3552a,b; Girouxville S.D. No. 4353, PAA 84.37:3422a,b,c; Jeanne D'Arc S.D. No. 2205, PAA 84.34:1355; Jousard S.D. No. 4730, PAA 84.37:3799a; L'Abbe S.D. No. 1842, PAA 84.37:992a; Labrec S.D. No. 2309, PAA 84.37:1457a,b; Lac Magloire S.D. No. 4343, PAA 84.37:30, PAA 84.37:3414a, and PAA 84.37:3422b; LaCorey S.D. No. 4425, PAA 84.37:3495a; Lafond S.D. No. 3304, PAA 84.37:2411a; Mangin S.D. No. 3935, PAA 68.278:876; Pelletier S.D. No. 4351, PAA 84.37:3421a,b; Plamondon S.D. No. 2696, PAA 68.278:559; Pontiac S.D. No. 4316, PAA 84.37:3386a; St. Cecile S.D. No. 3377, PAA 68.278:644; St. Cyr S.D. No. 4128, PAA 84.37:3198a,b,e; St. Paul S.D. No. 2228, PAA 79.334:1660 and PAA 75.126:4965; St. Laurent S.D. No. 1614, PAA 73.248:50; Thibault R.C.S.S.D. No. 35, PAA 81.406:4 (roll no. 1); West Legal S.D. No. 3315, PAA 84.37:2422a; Whiteland S.D. No. 4506, PAA 84.37:3576a.

<sup>49</sup>Yvette T. M. Mahé, *School Districts Established by French-Speaking Settlers in Alberta, 1885-1939, The Teachers*, vol. 2 (Edmonton: Faculté Saint-Jean, 1991): 7-65.

1940,<sup>50</sup> but in the case of Francophone education, teacher shortages and mobility had long-term detrimental effects on French Canadian cultural continuity.<sup>51</sup>

#### CULTURAL TRANSMISSION AND ENGLISH DOMINANCY

The cultural transmission role of bilingual school trustees was complex. On the one hand, Francophones anticipated they would integrate a hidden cultural curriculum in their schools. On the other, government officials expected them to conduct their schools according to departmental regulations and the dominant society's norms. Bilingual school trustees' role became problematic when the knowledge and values transmitted in their schools were questioned by school inspectors and non-Francophone parents. Under these circumstances, government officials used their power to establish Anglo-normalcy in bilingual school districts.

#### *School Inspectors: Agents of Anglo-Conformism*

School inspectors visited schools at least once a year to evaluate teachers' work and student progress in achieving goals of schooling. Inspectors also played a major role in legitimizing the dominant society's language and world-view. According to a Department Annual Report, inspectors showed animosity toward teachers who used a "foreign language" in the presence of children," as they believed "the teacher will accomplish more in the end by using the English language exclusively."<sup>52</sup>

From 1900 on, Franco-Albertans tried to convince Department officials to hire French-speaking school inspectors to inspect bilingual schools. In 1912, J. J. LeBlanc was hired as an inspector, but his inspectorate covered very few French communities. LeBlanc recalled years later, "I spoke French, but I had to follow the law as a school inspector. . . . They expected me to get French teachers for them. They accused me of preventing their children from speaking French on the school grounds." He adds about Anglo-dominance: "anyone with

<sup>50</sup>Jean Barman, "Birds of Passage or Early Professionals? Teachers in Late Nineteenth-Century British Columbia," *Historical Studies in Education* 2, no. 1 (1990): 17–36; Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice, "Revising the History of Teachers: A Canadian Perspective," *Interchange* 17, no. 2 (1986): 135–46.

<sup>51</sup>Rodrique Landry, Réal Allard, and Raymond Théberge, "School and Family French Ambiance and the Bilingual Development of Francophone Western Canadians," *Canadian Modern Language Review* 47, no. 5 (1991): 878–915.

<sup>52</sup>DE, *Annual Report of the Department of Education of the Province of Alberta, 1906* (Edmonton: Jas. E. Richards, 1907), 53.

a French name or who could speak French got the runaround from the government."<sup>53</sup> In 1929, Léon Gibault was named inspector, but only for the District of St. Paul. All other inspectors responsible for bilingual school districts were Anglophones.

In the Francophone communities teachers had a double workload. They were compelled by the Department to teach the content of the Official Program of Studies in English, and the French community expected them to transmit the French language and culture. However, inspectors evaluated only their work in achieving the English goals of schooling. There were claims in the Francophone press that bilingual school teachers spent more time on English instruction than French so they could obtain favourable reports from school inspectors.<sup>54</sup>

The paucity of archival documents before 1932 makes it difficult to assess how many trustees were asked to limit French instruction in their schools, but according to the press this was common practice,<sup>55</sup> and certainly was the case in Bouvier S.D. No. 3308 and Legal S.D. No. 1738.<sup>56</sup> Preliminary analyses of Rev. Fortier's inspection reports show that in nineteen of the sixty to seventy bilingual school districts he visited between 1934 and 1940, teachers neglected the teaching of French. In seven schools, for example, he found that instead of teaching the primary course in French, teachers started the school year in French, then switched to English at Christmas time, while others taught half a day in French and the other half in English.<sup>57</sup>

Except for the teaching of French allowed by law, all school subjects had to be taught in English, with prescribed English textbooks,<sup>58</sup> so when inspectors

<sup>53</sup>Serge Tittley and Janet Vlieg, "Clergy Brought French-Canadians West," *Edmonton Journal*, 30 July 1976, 22.

<sup>54</sup>"Les inspecteurs d'écoles bilingues," *LCL'O*, 6 juin 1912, 4; "Colonne de l'A.C.F.A.," *L'U*, 28 avril 1927, 2; "À propos de nos écoles," *L'U*, 1 mars 1928, 1; "Aux commissaires de langue française," *L'U*, 27 septembre 1928, 1.

<sup>55</sup>"La question scolaire dans l'Ouest," *LCL'O*, 16 novembre 1911, 1; "Colonne de l'A.C.F.A.," *L'U*, 3 mars 1927, 1.

<sup>56</sup>DM to X. P. Crispo, Inspector of Schools, 16 June 1924, Bouvier S.D. No. 3308, PAA 84.37:2415a; Report of Inspector H. E. Balfour, 20 October 1939, Legal S.D. No. 1738, PAA 84.37:893a,b,c.

<sup>57</sup>See the following reports of Rev. Father Fortier, S.J., all in ACFAC, PAA Accession No. 80.226: 22 mai 1935, Girouxville S.D. No. 4352; 6 juin 1935, Lacorey S.D. No. 4425; 22 janvier 1935, Riopel S.D. No. 1488; 29 mai 1937, St. Cecile S.D. No. 3377; 3 janvier 1935, St. Emile S.D. No. 1443; 19 et 20 mars 1935, St. Paul S.D. No. 2228; 4 janvier 1935, West Legal S.D. No. 3315.

<sup>58</sup>DE, *Instructions Concerning the Teaching of French in the Elementary Schools of the Province of Alberta* (Edmonton: J. W. Jeffery, 1925), 1.

found French textbooks for teaching Canadian history in two school districts, trustees were warned by the Department they would lose school grants if these practices continued.<sup>59</sup> My preliminary analysis of Father Fortier's reports for the period 1934 to 1940 led me to conclude that in at least 80% of the 390 schools he visited he recommended textbooks in French with a clerical nationalist orientation for the teaching of Canadian History.<sup>60</sup>

### *Majority and Minority Rights*

The greatest threat to French Canadian transmission was the arrival in the French-speaking communities of ethnic groups who did not understand why French and religion were taught in public schools. Department officials, whose mandate was to assimilate all new Canadians in the ideals of British citizenship,<sup>61</sup> supported non-Francophones in changing the cultural climate in bilingual schools.

When non-Francophones in five bilingual districts complained that French and religion were taught in their local schools, Department officials outlined in a letter provisions of the School Act that permitted trustees to allow such teaching. An investigation of the district's practices followed and inspectors who thought non-Francophone students were denied access to instruction in English directed trustees to make proper provisions in their schools for such instruction.<sup>62</sup> In Donnelly S.D. No. 66, where 90% of the student population was French-speaking, trustees informed the Department that to accommodate non-Francophones would create hardships for Francophones. Officials tried to persuade them that if Francophones received instruction in English during their primary grades, they would be more proficient in the language when they

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<sup>59</sup>See Minutes for 14 January 1906, Brosseau S.D. No. 1614, PAA 73.248: p. 6; also letter DM to D. H. Mackenzie, Inspector of Schools, 2 October 1922, Jeanne D'Arc S.D. No. 2205, PAA 84.37:1355.

<sup>60</sup>Rev. Father Fortier, S.J., Reports, ACFAC, PAA 80.226.

<sup>61</sup>DE, *Twelfth Annual Report, 1917* (1918), 57; *Eighteenth Annual Report, 1923* (1924), 65.

<sup>62</sup>Mrs. Sterling to ME, 7 December 1935, Clover Valley S.D. No. 2558, PAA 84.31:1693; letters Mrs. Butterbrodt to CIS, 15 January 1935, Clover Valley S.D. No. 2558, PAA 84.31:1693; Walter Groner to Hon. William Aberhart, 15 January 1937, Joussard S.D. No. 4730, PAA 84.37:3799a; CIS to G. H. Hollinshead, Inspector of Schools, 20 April 1937, Racine S.D. No. 2143, PAA 75.126:4893; DM to Mr. X. Crispo, Inspector of Schools, 5 March 1925, St. Edward S.D. No. 2329, PAA 84.37:1477b; DM to C. Anderson, 18 January 1937, Therien S.D. No. 2149, PAA 84.37:1299c.

reached Grade 3.<sup>63</sup> As to non-Francophones' worry about the religious climate in bilingual schools, Department officials informed parents that under Section 48 of the School Act, their children were not obliged to stay during religious instruction. Trustees were then advised of this Section and of Section 147, which states that only the Lord's prayer can be recited at the opening and closing of the school. In four school districts officials told trustees the Lord's Prayer had to be recited in English.<sup>64</sup>

In certain bilingual school districts newly elected non-Francophone trustees banned the teaching of French and sometimes religion. In five of these districts the Department refused to intervene to protect Francophones' linguistic and religious rights. Parents were told that Boards of Trustees have complete authority in these matters.<sup>65</sup>

### *Appointment of Official Trustees*

The Department was authorized to replace a Board of Trustees with an Official Trustee when trustees declined to carry out the instructions of the Department or when all settlers were unable to speak English.<sup>66</sup> Official trustees, who were also school inspectors, were appointed from 1924 to 1940 in nine bilingual districts that were experiencing cultural conflicts and financial difficulties. Official trustees attempted to resolve these problems by assisting non-Francophones to organize new school districts, hiring English-speaking teachers to re-open schools, re-assessing the districts' tax bases, and obtaining funds to pay

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<sup>63</sup>CIS to G. L. Wilson, Inspector of Schools, 1 April 1936, Donnelly S.D. No. 66, PAA 84.37:2485a.

<sup>64</sup>See "Petition" signed by non-Francophones sent to DE, 16 February 1933, Ardmore S.D. No. 3463, PAA 84.34:2555a; DM to John F. Marshall, 16 October 1936, Clover Valley S.D. No. 2558, PAA 84.31:1693; DM to Miss Fortier, 26 November 1936, Clover Valley S.D. No. 2558, PAA 84.31:1693; CIS to Philippe Lavigne, 18 November 1938, Lepage S.D. No. 4456, PAA 84.37:3526a; CIS to Mrs. Revoir, 18 April 1936, Little Bear Creek S.D. No. 4476, PAA 84.37:3546b.

<sup>65</sup>Eleanor Carter to DM, 25 February, 1933, Bellerive S.D. No. 4175, PAA 84.37:3245a; Father Leon Nadeau to DM, 24 February 1933, Brochu S.D. No. 4595, PAA 84.37:3664a; Mrs. Beauchamp to Premier of Alberta, 5 January 1937, Clover Valley S.D. No. 1558, PAA 79.334:1486; Miss Smith to DE, 6 April 1933, Gauthier S.D. No. 4452, PAA 84.37:3522a; Mrs. Chauvet to DE, 15 February 1936, DM to Chauvet, 29 December 1936, Springfield S.D. No. 1495, PAA 79.334:1537.

<sup>66</sup>Sparley, "A History of the Alberta School System to 1925," 97-98, 184-85.



teachers' outstanding salaries. Official trustees returned the task of school administration to local trustees within a period of one to five years.<sup>67</sup>

French Canadian transmission in bilingual districts was curbed by school inspectors, whose role was to assure the production and reproduction of the dominant group's language and culture in public schools. With the arrival of non-Francophone settlers in French-speaking communities Department officials tended to accommodate the small minority of non-Francophones who wanted to integrate their children into the mainstream society. Because of these external factors, Francophone trustees experienced difficulties in maintaining cultural diversity in local public schools.

#### CONCLUSION

After confessional schools were replaced by compulsory and secular schools, Francophone elites saw trustees who managed public schools in French-speaking communities as a key source of cultural continuity. Subsequently, members of French Canadian cultural associations planned organizational and educational strategies to legitimize the French language and culture in local public schools. When trustees tried to satisfy the French community's cultural demands, they were faced with constraints imposed by the dominant English-speaking Protestant population seeking to maintain control over public schooling.

Anglo-dominated teacher training institutions and certification policies in Alberta before 1940 created a shortage of French Canadian agents of cultural transmission. Trustees in Francophone districts were therefore faced with having to hire non-Francophone Catholic and Protestant teachers to keep schools open. Also, Anglophone inspectors disregarded cultural diversity and put pressures on trustees to develop English-speaking British citizens. When non-Francophones questioned the legitimacy of the French language in local public schools, Department officials used the situation to establish English as the dominant language of public schooling.

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<sup>67</sup>See references to official trustees in the bilingual school district files as follows: 28 December 1938, Belanger S.D. No. 4472, PAA 84.37:3541a,b,c; 16 March 1926, Berney S.D. No. 3937, PAA 68.679; 16 July 1924, Bouvier S.D. No. 3308, PAA 84.37:2415a; 25 June 1932 and 18 September 1937, Brochu S.D. No. 4595, PAA 84.37:3664a; 7 January 1933, Doussal S.D. No. 4490, PAA 84.37:3560a,b; 29 January 1937, Gauthier S.D. No. 4452, PAA 84.37:3522a,b; 9 May 1938, Irene S.D. No. 3405, PAA 68.278:647 and PAA 84.37:2507a,b; 1935, Lefebvre S.D. No. 4634, PAA 84.37:3703a,b,c. Also see Rév. Père Fortier, S.-J., rapport 1 mai 1936, Guy R.C.S.S.D. No. 30, ACFAC, PAA 80.226.

The study of public school districts in French-speaking communities helps to show how Anglophones used their power for cultural dominance and how Francophones sought to resist Anglo-conformism. By studying trustees' experiences in French Canadian transmission before consolidation of small bilingual school districts in Alberta, one acquires a sense of how unequal power relations are produced and reproduced in the education system, and how a dominant group's cultural knowledge becomes socially legitimated.