

Moderate revisionism and its advantages history essay



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The theme of this paper is the conception of moderate revisionism and its application for historical researches of evolution of Canadian educational system. I prefer moderate revisionism because for my opinion this is the most reliable historical perspective. I paid some attention to the book of Paul Axelrod “ The promise of schooling: Education in Canada. 1800-1914”.

Besides, I described the person who had a great impact on the educational system in Canada in 19th century, Rev. Dr. Egerton Ryerson.

First of all I'd like to highlight the importance of studying the evolution of Canadian educational system for identification of current intellectual trends. The education is the important part of national development. However, it was largely ignored in conventional history books as well as sciences and the art. At the same time it is necessary to remember that “ Many of the current social issues that education attempts to deal with have roots in such a historical and political framework, including demands for equality in language rights or religious rights, or for anti-racist education.” ()

That is why the book of Paul Axelrod is so significant. The author has explored “ the social context in which educational policy was formed and implemented” (Axelrod, p. viiii) Axelrod pull out the themes and trends that characterize the country as a whole at the beginning of the 19th century. Besides, he generalized information about Canadian education as a whole.

I think I will not mistake saying that the book of Axelrod is the example of moderate revisionism. Revisionism in social sciences is “ the advocacy of revision of some political theory, religious doctrine, historical or critical interpretation, etc.” (FreeOnlineDictionary)

Revisionism as the historical perspective arose like the alternative to Whigs history. " Revisionist historians suggest that early Canadian educational historians of whig orientation tended to concentrate on the work of individuals rather than considering the impact of the social context." (...) That is why revisionist historians tried to review the educational system in the broader social context, compare it with the political and social events and explore the issues of calls, gender and ethnicity.

As far as I understood, the radical revisionism is too global. It pays a lot of attention to issues of power and domination, but it misses the development of small groups and individualities.

Besides, the term " revisionism" is often used with negative meaning like the example of the falsification of the history.

Moderate revisionism seems to be more reasonable method. Historians, who preferred moderate revisionism, try to " present past events in the wider social religious, political and economic context of the times in which they occurred" (Hardy, 1980, p. 65; quoted in Mazurek, 1986, p 27) I feel it is the optimal method for today. I strongly believe that the evolution of education system can not be researched solely, in isolation from political and social circumstances, but from the other hand, global issues must not dominate in the history of education.

" One particularly promising version of revisionism-moderate revisionism- appears to be immune to many of the worries that seem to fuel hesitancy and resistance to revisionist approaches." (Manuel R. Vargas: The

Revisionist's Guide to Responsibility)

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The example of revisionism is the history of church schools. It is common knowledge that the first schools in New France were operated by the church.. In 1999 United Nations decided that funding of Catholic schools in Canada is non-tolerant. That time the Canadian media were the place of stormy polemics, and the history of church schools in Canada was revised many times.

I considered the other historical perspectives, and I found them unattractive to me. Whigs history, in spite of its advantages, is rather biased and outdated. Ethnographic history, just opposite the radical revisionism, is too narrow. It studies historical events on the level of ethnos, and it is the important part of the historic science, but it can not be used as the universal method.

Postmodernism as the method has a great potential, because it allows the expansion of theoretical and methodological ideas of other disciplines, particularly sociology and anthropology. It is very effective method for some issues, like gender. However it is rather new and that is why it has no single terminology, its principles are contradictory sometimes, it makes its implementation rather hard.

The origins of Canadian educational system

As was stated above, first Canadian schools were operated by the church. At the beginning of 19th century the colonial governments moved to set up publicly funded education systems. Going slightly ahead, I want to mention that the contradictions between Catholics and Protestants soon made

religious divisions very problematic. In Upper Canada the Catholic minority
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rejected the Protestant practice of Biblical study in schools. Over time public schools became increasingly secularized. Canadians came to believe in the separation of Church and state, and the main boards became secular ones. In Ontario all overt religiosity was removed from the public school system in 1990.

Returning to the origins of Canadian educational system I'd like to emphasize that the obvious breakthrough has happened in 1840s, Earlier privately funded schools were as numerous as those receiving state aid. " Sunday schools operated exclusively by Christian churches were teaching approximately 10, 000 students in 1832. In Lower Canada, the very limited success of the Royal Institute for the Advancement of Learning compared unfavorably with more broadly based initiatives under the Syndics Act 1829 which allowed locally elected trustees (or syndics) to administer the establishment of government aided schools. Public schooling in Lower Canada was dealt a considerable blow following the Lower Canadian Rebellion when schools closed following the suspension of school legislation." ()

This was a period when schooling transformed from something informal, sectarian and voluntary to a strong system of education, administered by a complex bureaucracy and taught by credentialed staff. The book of Paul Axelrod helps to understand this process more clearly. The significance of Axelrod's book is based on his description of the public schooling in context of social changes that swept through Canadian society in the nineteenth century.

Speaking about the origins of public schooling in nineteenth-century Upper Canada, it is necessary to mention Rev. Dr. Egerton Ryerson. In October 1844 he was appointed to the position of Chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada, the highest position in the Department of Public Instruction for Upper Canada.

“ Egerton Ryerson (1803-1882) was the son of a prominent loyalist farmer from the Norfolk area of south-western Ontario. Like a number of his brothers before him Ryerson became a Methodist Minister. He served the ministry for nearly 20 years before being appointed Chief Superintendent of Education. For the next 30 years he would have a dramatic impact on the development of education in Ontario.”

Ryerson researched educational systems across the British Empire and Europe and drafting legislation appropriate for Upper Canada. He was the person who legitimated universally accessible elementary education for all children, it was one of the underlying principles of new legislation.

“ On the importance of education generally we may remark, it is as necessary as the light-it should be as common as water, and as free as air...”

()

Educational laws of Upper Canada created the basis for a universal education system. New administrative body called the General Board of Education for Canada West was founded. After renaming it changed the name to the Department of Education in 1876. The new Department “ was empowered to regulate the governance of public school boards across the province, grant funding, approve textbooks and curriculum materials, establish a Provincial

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Normal School which was to include a Model School for the training of teachers, and oversee their certification. (...)

Rev. Ryerson was one of the people who came to the right place in the right time, In the middle of 19th century British North America was transformed economically, technologically and politically. This new social order demanded public education to be a tool, an instrument of democratization. The rebellions in 1837 became the starting point for school reform. " For them the rebellion was a sign of a society in danger-threatened, without rule of law, by social collapse," - Axelrod explains. " No longer should political authority or the opportunity for formal learning be the prerogative of the privileged." The objectives of public education system were the cultivation of loyalty to the Crown, respect for property, and deference to authority. These merits should form the reliable citizens. Reliable citizenship was the force with the great potential to underpin economic progress and civil order, and would play a key role in ensuring political stability. Axelrod notes that domination of citizenship education in the emergent public schools was evident in the " ever-present British flag, homilies to the Queen, non-American textbooks, and the promotion of Loyalist mythology." () He writes the cultural differences between French and English Canada that are still important our days, " date from the earliest days of public schooling" ()

The analysis of ideological system of public schooling shows that schools were a crucial instrument in the evolution of class rule. Schools provided middle class attitudes and values for poor and idle. In a world of mass education, the community would be rendered safer. Middle class believed schooling was a strategy for the future economic and social ascendancy of

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their children. So, that is no wonder that grammar schools in Upper Canada expanded from 12 to 100 in the years 1840 to 1870.

Axelrod considers public schools to be the instrument of social dominance and highlights the growing tense between bureaucratic authority and local communities. He explains his belief on the example of the treatment of Native peoples and the children of European immigrants. His book has the name " Promise of schooling" to highlight the disadvantages of public education that time. However, the general impact of education reform was positive for the country. This is the widely spread point of view for moderate revisionists, and mine too. I found very interesting document, the letter of gratitude, teacher praises Rev. Ryerson for bringing Ontario's education system out of chaos and rooting it firmly in God and the British Empire.

" And now Sir when the [sic] I come to compare the present with the past I can well understand the amazement of Rip Van Winkle when he opened his eyes on the Banks of the Hudson after his 20 years sleep the change in my case is far greater than in his. When our great and good Dr. Ryerson assumed the Herculean task laid upon him by the Government it now appears to one that the state of our public schools was well depicted by the Hebrews Legislator in his account of the state of affairs " E'er the Spirit of God came down at first" it was as regards educational matters ' without form and void' darkness covered the land and gross darkness the minds of the people" and now what do we behold - a system (for a system it certainly is) that his genius conceived and brought forth from this Chaotic mass that the most civilized nation on earth might well be proud of and of every patriotic Canadian may justly boast." (...)

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I think this is the brilliant evidence of positive impact, that was hardly valued in 19th century, but could not be undervalued our days.

Conclusion

The development and reforms of Canadian educational system was rather hard process, but its impact was generally positive, and close connection of the current educational system with the system of 19th century proves it in a better way.