Egerton Ryerson and educational policy borrowing: aspects of the development of Ontario’s system of public instruction, 1844-1876

Abstract:
Literature within the field of Comparative Education often cautions against the transfer of foreign policies from one context to another. Despite this warning, Ontario’s public education system is said to have been based on an eclectic mix of foreign examples: teacher training institutes replicating Prussian Seminaries, school financing and the role of the chief superintendent and board of education as in the states of Massachusetts and New York, and using the Irish curriculum. This study ...

Egerton Ryerson is widely known for his contributions to Ontario’s public educational system. As Chief Superintendent of Education, Ryerson’s recommendations were instrumental in the design and implementation of the Indian Residential School System. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reported that children in the schools were subjected to unthinkable abuse and neglect, to medical experimentation, punishment for the practice of cultures or languages and death. The education systems of Quebec and Ontario are shaped by complex historical and cultural specificities that cannot be examined in any detail here. In brief, between 1791 and 1841, these two regions were called Lower Canada and Upper Canada, corresponding to the southern parts of the provinces we know today. With over 400 years of history, summarizing the development of education in French Canada in this textbook can only partially cover the many events that led to the system of education that now exists in Quebec. More complete discussions are available by noted educational historians of Quebec, such as Louis-Phillip Audet (1971). Egerton Ryerson became chief superintendent of education in Upper Canada in 1844—a position he held for 32 years.
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