

Catholic vs. Secular Public Schooling: Shifting Hegemony in Morinville, Alberta

Kelli Buckreus

Kelli has been working in health research at the University of Alberta since 2004. Through to 2015, her work involved collaborative diabetes research with Aboriginal community partners, with a strong knowledge translation component. In 2016, her work shifted focus even more towards knowledge translation / mobilization, and her activities currently include developing evidence-based family health literacy etools. She began her Masters of Arts - Integrated Studies (MAIS) degree in the Global Change specialization at Athabasca Univeristy, and was interested in the integration of scientific and traditional Indigenous knowledge in conservation ecology and resource co-management. After undertaking a 4-year school-based project with one First Nation community partner through work, she changed her MAIS specialization to Educational Studies, inspired by the potential for integrating pedagogy and educational psychology with knowledge translation at a community level. She is very interested in technology in learning, particularly in game-based learning as a mode for skill development.

Abstract

Until July 2012 Catholic schooling was the only public education option in the town of Morinville, Alberta, embedded within the town's historic francophone-Catholic identity. By 2012 town demographics had changed dramatically enough to challenge this pillar of Catholic hegemony. Catholicism had become the minority faith, and a demand for a secular schooling option galvanized during the town's 2010 municipal elections. The argument seemed straightforward: Non-Catholic families have a right to choose non-faith-based education for their children, and so a secular option must be made available to them within the community. However, the more complex issue was negotiating authority away from the town's Catholic minority, mediated through educational institutions and schooling as fundamental loci for reinforcing and reproducing Catholic hegemony. Through an administrative anomaly embodying the legacy of Canadian colonial history, non-Catholic families were unable to petition to establish a secular option in Morinville via Alberta's School Act (2000) and s. 93 of the Constitution Act (1867) because they did not represent the minority faith. New legislation — The St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act [Bill 4] — creating an exception was necessary to facilitate a solution. This paper examines the sociohistorical context in which this secular school episode in Morinville unfolded; how Catholic hegemony was asserted against external challenges, as well as internal challenges that were constructed as "external"; and how Catholic hegemony is being reasserted through an emergent "First Families" narrative that resituates legitimacy and authority with heritage linked to Morinville's francophone-Catholic founders.

Keywords: Morinville, Alberta, Bill 4 (Alberta), secular education, Catholic schools, demographic change, Catholic hegemony

Introduction

"NEW PUBLIC EDUCATION OPTION FOR MORINVILLE COMMUNITY"

Beginning September 2012, Morinville and area students will have access to both public and separate schools... On July 1, Georges P. Vanier School will be transferred to the Sturgeon School Division, and will be the new public school option. Morinville's other schools will continue to be operated by Greater St. Albert Catholic. The St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act [Bill 4] passed during the spring Legislative session and was proclaimed by the Lieutenant Governor on May 31. Once it comes into effect on July 1, it will expand the Sturgeon School Division, dissolve the Greater St. Albert Catholic Regional Division and the St. Albert Protestant School Division and establish the Greater St. Albert Roman Catholic Separate School District and the St. Albert Public School District." (Alberta Education, 2012a)

Though little socio-historical context is provided in the above announcement, the nature of the circumstances and conflicts leading up to and surrounding Bill 4 can be inferred: until July 2012 Catholic schooling had been the only public education option in Morinville (operated and governed by a Catholic public school board)¹ and that town demographics had changed dramatically enough for this pillar of Catholic hegemony to be challenged.

Advanced by a small group of informally organized parents (commonly referred to in local media as “the parents delegation”), the demand for a secular option galvanized during the town’s 2010 municipal elections (Hartog, 2010). The argument seemed straightforward: non-Catholic families have a right to choose non-faith-based education for their children, and, so, a secular option must be made available to them within the community (Hartog, 2010). However, the more complex issue was negotiating authority away from the town’s Catholic minority, which was mediated through educational institutions and schooling as a fundamental loci for establishing the narratives that reinforced and reproduced Catholic hegemony (Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971). These were set against emergent neoliberal narratives of diversity, multiculturalism, secularism and the maximization of individual potential towards a common good informing public debate during the ensuing two years, and ultimately redefining collective identity for the townspeople, situated within the context of Morinville’s shifting demographics, and more broadly within Canadian demographic trends including increasing immigration of visible minorities (Berthelot, 2008; Popkewitz, 2007). The critical issue was that Catholic public schooling was the only choice available in a town where Catholicism has become minority faith (Statistics Canada, 2013), such that schooling and pedagogy were under Catholic control (Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971).

Through an administrative anomaly created via Canadian and Alberta legislation embodying a legacy of Canadian colonial history, as well as Catholic hegemony situated with early town settlement patterns, non-Catholic families were unable to petition to establish a secular option in Morinville via Alberta’s School Act (2000) and s. 93 of the Constitution Act (1867) because they did not represent the minority faith. New legislation — embodying values including diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion reflective of changing town and Canadian demographics (Berthelot, 2008; Popkewitz, 2007) — was required to create an exception that enabled a solution.

This paper examines the socio-historical context in which this secular school episode in Morinville unfolded; how Catholic hegemony was asserted against external challenges, as well as internal challenges that were constructed as “external”; and how Catholic hegemony is being reasserted through an emergent “First Families” narrative that resituates legitimacy and authority with heritage linked to Morinville’s francophone-Catholic founders.

¹Prior to the 2011-2012 school year, Catholic schooling was the only education option available in Morinville. No secular schooling was available in the community, public or separate.

Shifting Demographics

Periods of rapid population growth have characterized Morinville for most of its history, coinciding with infrastructure developments and fluctuating with economic trends, such as Alberta’s “oil rush” period from 1971 to the mid-1980’s (Morinville, 2014; Town of Morinville, 2011).

The 2006 and 2011 Canada Censuses, and the 2014 municipal census, revealed dramatic demographic shifts in Morinville’s population (Town of Morinville, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2007), largely influenced by newcomers including immigrants, migrants from nearby Alexander First Nation, families of military personnel stationed at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Edmonton (Nmao), and people attracted by Morinville’s affordable housing (as the town repositions itself as a “suburb” of St. Albert) (Town of Morinville, 2011). Outmigration to nearby urban centres (Edmonton, St. Albert) or to jobs in the oil patch (Ft. McMurray, etc.) has also been a factor (Hammer, 2011; Azmier & Dobson, 2003).

Morinville’s population comprised only 6.1% francophone residents in the 2011 Census. Less than 30% of the town’s population self-identified as Catholic, while 37% reported no religious affiliation (Statistics Canada, 2013). Immigrants (including non-landed residents) made up about 5% of the population, the majority from the United Kingdom and Germany, and others from Asia and Africa. The total visible minority population (excluding First Nation and Métis²) was approximately 2%, comprising South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab and Japanese. Six percent of residents self-identified as First Nation or Métis. More than half of

Morinville's population was under the age of 35 (Statistics Canada, 2013). This picture is congruent with similar demographic trends throughout western Canada, especially rural metro-adjacent (RMA) regions (Azmier & Dobson, 2003). Morinville is approximately 19 kms north of St. Albert along the Queen Elizabeth II Highway, and approximately 40 kms north of Edmonton's city centre (Town of Morinville, 2011).

² Per the *Employment Equity Act*, which defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." (Statistics Canada, 2013)

An Early Catholic Hegemony, Challenged by Demographic Trends

Morinville's colonial settlement began with the arrival of Oblate missionary Abbé Jean-Baptiste Morin and approximately 60 settlers from Quebec in 1891, an effort meant to motivate francophone migration to the Territories (Morinville, 2014; Trottier, 1991; Parks Canada, n.d.). A chapel was built that year, and a church was built in 1894. (Morinville, 2014; Trottier, 1991; Parks Canada, n.d.). Steady migration of settlers with birth or ethnic origins³ in Western Europe and Eurasia (most notably, Germany and Russia) or the United Kingdom (England, Ireland and Wales) followed through the 1890's (Morinville, 2014; Trottier, 1991; Automated Genealogy, n.d.; Parks Canada, n.d.).

This pattern of settlement was common throughout the Territories during this period, affecting a general francophone minority (Noonan, Hallman, & Scharf, 2006). In her book *Faith and Tenacity: History of Morinville 1891-1991*, Alice Trottier, a lifelong resident of Morinville and member of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish, describes that the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society (established in 1834 in Quebec) had a mandate to "*keep alive all things that bind us more closely to our faith.... Its task in the West was to preserve French-Canadian nationality despite the minority position*" (Trottier, 1991, p. 133). In addition to situating francophone-Catholic hegemony within the context of Quebec sovereignty in the 1800's, this excerpt characterizes the fundamental tie between francophone national identity and the Catholic Church.

Morinville appeared to be hedging this minority trend; In the 1901 Canada Census, approximately 70% of households⁴ and 80% of individuals enumerated were francophone, and all but one of the individuals indicated Catholic for religion⁵ (Automated Genealogy, n.d.). A clear Catholic hegemony was thus established early in Morinville, despite a decade of increasing immigration. Most interesting, perhaps, is that this data depicts Catholic identity cutting across ethnicity, which would have served to reinforce and reproduce Catholic hegemony by subsuming other ethnicities.

In 1904⁶, four Sisters of Les Filles de Jesus (a teaching order) were hired to replace lay teachers at the Morinville village school, which had been established in 1899 (Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools, 2014; Trottier, 1991; GSACRD, n.d.). Students were divided into an English class and a French class, satisfying the requirements of the School Ordinance Act of 1901 (Noonan, Hallman & Scharf, 2006; Trottier, 1991).

Here too, we glimpse Catholic religion cutting across ethnicity. The village school represented a critical social institution through which migrant and immigrant families were assimilated within the broader context of Canadian public policy and nation-building (Popkewitz, 2007; Noonan, Hallman, & Scharf, 2006; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci, 1971). At the same time, Catholic control over schooling and pedagogy served to reinforce Catholic hegemony in Morinville against a backdrop of anti-Catholic sentiment and growing secularism in the Territory (Popkewitz, 2007; Noonan, Hallman, & Scharf, 2006; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971). Francophone identity was beginning to be rendered a "silent partner" in relation to the Catholic identity, while at the same time maintaining its hierarchical supremacy vis-à-vis other ethnicities subsumed within the Catholic hegemony, and providing a foundation for the "First Families" narrative that has recently emerged in response to contemporary challenges to Catholic hegemony in Morinville.

When the Convent Notre Dame de la Visitation opened in 1909 to house Les Filles de Jesus, Bishop Legal in his dedication spoke of the importance of Christian education and of the imperative to elect Catholic trustees within the existing school system (Trottier, 1991, p. 101; Parks Canada, n.d.). This illustrates the prioritization of an integrated Catholic hegemony, as well as the position of the school as a loci for reinforcing and reproducing it. Bishop Legal's speech also expressed recognition of school governance as a

critical factor in maintaining Catholic hegemony vis-à-vis control of schooling and pedagogy (Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971).

³ Some settlers with non-francophone surnames migrated from Ontario and elsewhere in Canada, and from the United States (Automated Genealogy, n.d.).

⁴ I referred to the original source documents, recorded in the enumerator's handwriting, available and transcribed at <http://automatedgenealogy.com/census/EnumerationDistrict.jsp?id=5784>. Although the transcribed tables indicate 91 households, there appears to be an error: household #32 in the transcribed tables seems as though it should be part of household #31.

⁵ This individual indicated Methodist for religion (Automated Genealogy, n.d.).

⁶ Approximately half of the 60 students enrolled in 1904 were residential students (Trottier, 1991).

Catholic Public School Governance

Morinville's Catholic village school was established under the Thibault Roman Catholic Public School District No. 35 (est. 1892) in 1899. Thibault District, the St. Albert Roman Catholic Public School District No. 3 (est. 1885), and the Legal School District No. 1738 (est. 1907) advanced the tradition of Catholic education begun in St. Albert by the Sisters of Charity⁷ in 1864 (Greater St. Alberta Catholic Schools, 2014; GSACRD, n.d.). This structure remained in place until a regionalization initiative in 1995 amalgamated these to form the Greater St. Albert Catholic Regional Division No. 29 operating public schooling in Morinville, Legal and St. Albert (Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools, 2014). The St. Albert Protestant Separate School District No. 6, operated by a civil electorate drawn from the minority faith, had been providing secular education in St. Albert as a separate school since at least the mid-1970's (Separate School, 2014). Secular schooling is provided in Legal via the Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord (Greater North Central Francophone Education Region No.2), and the Sturgeon School Division No. 24 provided secular schooling in Sturgeon County, the rural areas surrounding Morinville, Legal and St. Albert (Separate School, 2014). This structure provided no secular option in Morinville; Catholic schools comprised public schools in St. Albert and Morinville.

Separate schools in Alberta, serving either the Catholic or Protestant minority, have constitutional status via s. 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867, which is exempted from application of s. 2(a) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.^{8,9} (Separate School, 2014; Alberta Education, n.d.). The Alberta government provides funding to both "public" and "separate" schools as components of an overall public education system (Alberta Education, 2011). In 2011, Alberta Education counted 1,448 public schools, 372 Catholic schools, 34 francophone schools and 19 charter schools within the public education system¹⁰ (Alberta Education, 2011). However, it is unclear whether the Protestant separate schools in St. Albert were counted as "public" and whether the Catholic public schools in St. Albert, Morinville and Legal were counted as "Catholic" in this enumeration. This illustrates the common confusion for Albertans regarding "public" vs. "separate" status, and the general perception/assumption that Catholic schools comprise "separate" schools (even when they have "public" school status).

The process for establishing a separate school can be initiated by a minimum of three residents of a district's minority faith. Steps in the process, outlined in Division 2, s. 213 to s. 220 of Alberta's School Act (2000) (in alignment with s. 17 (1) of the Alberta Act, 1905, and s. 93 of the Constitution Act) include a census to confirm minority status, as well as a majority vote amongst members of the minority faith. Once a separate school is established, minority faith ratepayers are bound to have their taxes support the separate school system within the district, though minority faith families may choose a public school option for their children (Separate School, 2014; Alberta Education, n.d.). This has implications with respect to eligibility for voting for or serving as school board trustee, an issue that was central to the secular school episode in Morinville and assessment of the available solutions.

In the Morinville example, a Protestant separate school (to serve as a secular option for non-Catholic Christians and non-Christians) could not be established via the School Act, as Protestant was no longer the minority faith¹¹ (Statistics Canada, 2013). Additionally, since GSACRD had public status, creating a second system with public status in Morinville to provide a secular option was not possible.

⁷ An order founded by Ste. Marguerite d'Youville (Grey Nuns) (Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools, 2014; Trottier, 1991).

⁸ s. 93 only extends rights to members of the Catholic or Protestant minority faith, and only in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and the territories (Separate School, 2014; Noonan, Hallman, & Scharf, 2006; Government of Canada, 1867; Separate School, 2014).

⁹ *Adler v Ontario*: "Per Lamer C.J. and La Forest, Gonthier, Cory and Iacobucci JJ.: Section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* is the product of a historical compromise crucial to Confederation and forms a comprehensive code with respect to denominational school rights which cannot be enlarged through the operation of s. 2 (a) of the Charter. It does not represent a guarantee of fundamental freedoms." *Adler v Ontario*, [1996] 3 SCR 609. Retrieved from <http://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1446/index.do>).

¹⁰ There is one other Protestant separate school division in Alberta: St. Paul Education Regional School Division No. 1.

¹¹ By a very slim margin, according to 2011 Canada Census data (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Redefining Public Education

During the 2010 municipal elections, demand for a secular option in Morinville was advanced by a small group of informally organized parents (commonly referred to as "the parents' delegation" in local media) comprising 15 families and led by Morinville resident Donna Hunter (Dafoe, 2012a; Hammer, 2011).

In response to a formal request by the parents' delegation, GSACRD Board of Trustees unanimously voted down a recommendation to create a secular option in November 2011. Trustee Dave Caron's motion introducing the recommendation to the board included this preamble:

"Catholic schools by their very nature permeate the Catholic tradition we aspire to. That's why you see crucifixes in the buildings. That's why the December concert isn't a seasonal concert. It isn't a holiday concert. It's a Christmas concert. So while I respect Mrs. Hunter's right to request a secular school, I know our division really can't be something that we're not. We are a Catholic school division, so another alternative must be pursued." (Dafoe, 2011)

This statement very clearly acknowledges the role of education in reproducing Catholic hegemony, and also illustrates why one of the alternatives suggested by the board – that families desiring a secular option utilize s. 50(2) of the School Act or s. 11.1¹² of the Alberta Human Rights Act to exempt their children from specific religion classes within the Catholic schools (something 20% of elementary students and 70% of high school students in GSACRD did at that time)¹³ (Hammer, 2011) – was not acceptable to the parents' delegation. Namely, that Catholic religion permeates all aspects of these educational institutions (Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971).

[Additional pressure came from the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association (ACSTA) advocating Catholic schools be exempted from any provision congruent to s. 50(2) in the new legislation, and that the Alberta Human Rights Act be amended to exempt Catholic schools from s. 11.1¹⁴ (Dafoe, 2011; Hammer, 2011). ACSTA was also proposing provisions whereby only members of the Catholic faith would be eligible to serve as trustees, which would exclude the majority of Morinville residents (Dafoe, 2011; Hammer, 2011). These circumstances similarly reflect acknowledgement of education's role in maintaining Catholic hegemony in Morinville, including political leadership and authority in institutions serving the public (Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971.)]

Popkewitz (2007) describes how narratives, mediated through schooling and pedagogy, shape individual biography that defines one's later democratic participation ("agency"). Narrative frameworks shape how children order their relationships with nature, establishing fundamental conceptions through which children interpret themselves in relation to the world around them, which influences how individual agency is subsequently constructed and expressed (Popkewitz, 2007).

In the Morinville example, for non-Catholic students attending Catholic schools and opting out of religion classes, individual biography is shaped by the dominant Catholic hegemony articulated through all aspects of their school (even through their non-participation in religion classes), and an "other" identity is constructed in opposition to the Catholic students, as well as their teachers and administration (Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971). Singing songs about Christ, for instance, transmits messages about what it is to be a "reasonable person", defined via Catholic values and authority (Popkewitz, 2007). A hierarchy of authority and legitimacy is internalized, as non-Catholic students experience themselves positioned as "other", and this relationship will inform their participation ("agency") as Morinville citizens as adults.

While contemporary narratives integrating lay-science reposition the loci for ordering life from external (religion) to internal (individual biography), pedagogy embodying Catholic frameworks nonetheless reproduce in children the moral rules and standards that influence agency (Berthelot, 2008; Popkewitz, 2007). Therefore, non-Catholic students receiving a Catholic education internalize values that influence their agency to align with Catholic interests, while simultaneously participating in society from a delegitimized position of "other" within the hierarchy of authority. In this way, Catholic hegemony is maintained, despite minority Catholic status (Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971).

As Morinville's population has increasingly grown through an influx of newcomers educated outside the town's Catholic system, democratic participation by citizens has been shaped by different "agency" informed by different individual biographies shaped by different narratives. Values and interests embedded within the Catholic hegemony (and Catholic education) did not align with the interests of newcomers, who were motivated to assert their autonomy to construct an alternative mediated through the institution of schooling (Berthelot, 2008; Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971).

The alternative of bussing students to secular public schools, operated by the Sturgeon School Division surrounding Morinville, was rejected due to the issue of non-residency voting. Parents would not be able to vote or run for the Sturgeon School Division Board of Trustees, excluding them from democratic participation in the institution serving their child(ren)'s education (Dafoe, 2011; Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971).

After a meeting with then Education Minister Dave Hancock, GSACRD began negotiations with the public Sturgeon School Division to come up with a solution, and in August 2011 announced that Sturgeon would be developing a secular program that would be available September 2011 (Dafoe, 2011; GSACRD, 2011). GSACRD situated this announcement within the following context:

- Recognition of parental choice in education;
 - Space will be provided in a manner that does not undermine provision of the faith-based program; and,
- "Since a goal of a Catholic School system is to further growth and expression of Christian values and teachings at every relationship between students and staff, a program that does not share in this belief cannot be blended within our existing learning environments. This explains the need to develop the growth of secular education in an environment that completely separates existing faith based programs, from education that is free from religious expression. This helps to explain a fundamental condition that the Board will place upon the accessibility of program space with Alberta Education for the future."* (GSACRD, 2011)

This represented another assertion of Catholic hegemony, and recognition of the critical role education plays in maintaining and reproducing that hegemony (Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971).

Shortly before the 2011-2012 school year began, GSACRD partnered with the Sturgeon School Division to establish a public secular option in Morinville (Roy, 2012; Jones, 2011). Eighty-seven students enrolled in K-4, the Headstart program and the Preschool Enrichment Program. Without a school building, classes were held at the Morinville Roman Catholic Parish Hall, the new Morinville Community Cultural Centre (MCCC), and later at the Sturgeon School Division offices (located in town). On January 23, 2012, the grade 1/2 and 3/4 classes moved into two new portable classrooms added to École Georges P. Vanier School, which also provided separate space within the main school building for MPES administration (Roy, 2012). This provided a temporary solution, but non-residency voting was again an impediment for parents' democratic participation (Dafoe, 2012; Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971).

It appeared to many (including myself) that the Education Minister would not make a decision with provincial elections looming. Alison Redford's Progressive Conservative Party was elected in October 2011, and swiftly responded: new Education Minister Thomas Lukaszuk introduced The St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act (Bill 4) in the Alberta Legislature on February 22, 2012 as a more permanent solution. Passed on May 1, 2012¹⁵, and taking effect July 1, 2012, Bill 4¹⁶ changed GSACRD's status from public to separate (along with a name change to Greater St. Albert Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 734; however, the acronym GSACRD has been maintained)¹⁷. Bill 4 switched status for St. Albert Protestant Separate School District No. 6 from separate to public, with a name change to St. Alberta Public Schools District No. 5565, which was necessary because two separate school boards could not exist simultaneously within the same area (Alberta Education, 2012b). The public

Sturgeon School Division's jurisdiction was expanded to include Morinville and Legal¹⁸. G. P. Vanier School (formerly operated by GSACRD) in Morinville was dissolved and the building was transferred to the Sturgeon School Division to house MPES. G. P. Vanier School students were unfortunately displaced, moving to École Notre Dame Elementary (Morinville's other Catholic elementary school) (Alberta Education, 2012b; Dafoe, 2012b). In September 2012, MPES opened its doors to approximately 200 students, including new kindergarten classes that included a French immersion class of 13 students¹⁹ (Tumilty, 2012).

From a legal and public policy standpoint, new legislation had to be introduced as an exception to allow the switch of GSACRD's status from public to separate (aligning with minority Catholic status in the town) without satisfying the processes for establishing a separate school proscribes by the School Act. From a socio-political standpoint, the events unfolding around Bill 4 depict narratives tied to the town's changing demographics and directly challenging Catholic hegemony mediated through educational institutions (Berthelot, 2008; Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971). Hegemony in Morinville is being redefined and resituated as a result.

¹² Prior to the announcement of Bill 4, the parents' delegation submitted complaints to the Alberta Human Right Commission in January 2012, asserting rights under s. 4 and s. 11(1) of the Alberta Human Rights Act. While the commission refused the complaint based on s. 11(1), it agreed to hear the complaint based on s. 4, (Ma, 2012) which states:

"No person shall

(a) deny to any person or class of persons any goods, services, accommodation or facilities that are customarily available to the public, or

(b) discriminate against any person or class of persons with respect to any goods, services, accommodation or facilities that are customarily available to the public, because of the race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation of that person or class of persons or of any other person or class of persons." (Province of Alberta, 2000a).

¹³ Trottier (1991) describes similar proportions in 1991, documenting a consistent trend over several decades (p. 127).

¹⁴ In response to public consultations Alberta Education had been undertaking since 2008 in preparation for proposing new legislation to replace the existing School Act (Alberta Education, 2013). Also in response to revisions to the Alberta Human Rights Act in 2009 adding a clause requiring schools to provide advance notice of lessons that would involve religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation subject matter, extending parents the option of opting their children out of these lessons (Dafoe, 2011; Hammer, 2011).

¹⁵ Coinciding with appointment of Jeff Johnson as Education Minister.

¹⁶ Please refer to the boundary maps available at: <http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/6669762/futuresturgeonver6.pdf> and <http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/6669758/currentsturgeonver6.pdf>

¹⁷ The inactive Cardiff Roman Catholic Separate School District # 684 and Cunningham Roman Catholic Separate School District # 704 were subsumed within GSACRD via Bill 4 (Alberta Education, 2012b).

¹⁸ Sturgeon School Division's electoral boundaries were redrawn in consideration of the expansion (Sturgeon County, 2012).

¹⁹ My daughter was one of these 13 French immersion kindergarten students.

Resituating Catholic Hegemony

The Education Minister's statement accompanying the announcement of Bill 4 reflects narratives that position the government's public policy response within the broader Canadian context: "*There will be some who won't be happy with the decision, I'm sure, those who don't want things to change. But to me, this is a human rights issue, and a suffrage issue.*" (qtd. in Dafoe, 2012a).

Similar narratives were embedded within the Minister's earlier statements introducing announcing Bill 2 — a proposed Education Act to replace the existing School Act — in the Alberta Legislature on February 14, 2012 (eight days before Bill 4 was introduced), describing that "*education is fundamental to a democratic and civil society and was [sic] a necessary component to youth developing to their potential*" (qtd. in Morinville News, 2012).

Coinciding with the parent's delegation raising the secular schooling issue in December 2010, former Alberta Education Minister Dave King initiated a petition to eliminate separate schools altogether (Catholic and Protestant) on the grounds that public schools

facilitate and reproduce Canadian values of tolerance, multiculturalism, and inclusion through “*students of different faiths and cultures learning together in the same school*” and “*adults of different faiths and cultures making decisions together*” via a common school board (qtd. in Thomson & Landry, 2010; Morinville News, 2011a).

This commentary reflects broader Canadian and neoliberal narratives of diversity, multiculturalism, inclusion, collaboration and achieving individual potential towards contributing to the common good, which have been shaped by the country’s changing demographics, especially the increasing population of visible minority immigrants of a diversity of faiths and cultures (Berthelot, 2008; Popkewitz, 2007). While Morinville’s visible minority population is at present proportionately lower than elsewhere in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013), it is the recent influx of Canadian/Albertan newcomers seeking affordable housing in the “suburb of St. Albert” (Town of Morinville, 2011) that has stoked population growth. Mayor Lisa Holmes, for instance, moved to town in 2009; Then, she was first elected to town council in 2010, and was elected Mayor in 2013 (Town of Morinville, n.d.).

This growth pattern has coincided with the emergence of a “First Families” narrative that situates authority within Morinville’s francophone-Catholic heritage, constructing a narrative of newcomers as the “other”. Through this process, Catholic hegemony is being resituated and reasserted²⁰.

Through the events leading up to Bill 4’s inception, the “First Families” narrative was reinforced through expression in public debate, as well as through artefacts such as GSACRD’s education satisfaction survey²¹. Narratives expressed by the “other” were situated with external political influences represented by the provincial government. The “First Families” narrative challenged these “external” influences:

“I’m sure you are feeling smug about your accomplishments... to purge God out of our school, an amazing school that my girls proudly attended years ago. I believe this decision to disrupt our town was based on principal [sic] and NOT the greater good of our students, our citizens... Disrupted kids — bigger picture — disrupted town... A faith based town, once pioneered by my ancestors, built around a CHURCH. This was our heritage. You have taken a piece of it.” (unattributed, 2012)

Similarly, public debate via social media and online forums regarding an unpleasant smell from a pet food factory in Morinville has included commentary that dismisses the validity of many residents’ concerns based on them being newcomers to the town.

The secular school episode has additionally challenged Catholic hegemony in Morinville by moving religion from the public to the private/home domain, resituating its political influence with individual democratic participation, rather than concentrating it collectively within the town’s institutions (Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971).

²⁰ French language loss due to francophone demographic decline in Morinville may have also influenced the emergence of this “First Families” narrative, but this is a topic for another paper. I will point out that French immersion had been offered at G. P. Vanier School, and was initiated at École Notre Dame Elementary when G. P. Vanier students moved over there in September 2012. Morinville’s new public school also offers French immersion programming.

²¹ In a survey undertaken by GSARD of families with students in the Morinville’s Catholic schools, 94% of respondents agreed that “*the lengthy history and effectiveness of Catholic education has and should continue to serve the Community of Morinville in a manner that does not impact existing programs promised to students within our schools*” (GSACRD, 2011). GSACRD branded the survey as a tool for gaging demand in Morinville for secular education, but the question asked didn’t really address the issue. Notably, families with children not in school (including me) were excluded from participating in this survey (Morinville News, 2011b).

Conclusion

The Morinville secular school episode illustrates how Canada’s colonial legacy, articulated through federal and provincial legislation, is impacting public policy responses to changing Canadian demographics. Narratives that embody the values of diversity, tolerance, multiculturalism, inclusion, collaboration and the maximization of personal potential towards a common good are challenging colonial-based hegemony (faith-based in the Morinville example), redefining meanings of “citizenship” and “other”, and reshaping the nature of democratic participation (“agency”) (Berthelot, 2008; Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971). This process

continues to be mediated through the institution of education in Morinville, strongly influenced by provincial political authority, but also illustrating instances of redefined agency amongst residents (Popkewitz, 2007; Gramsci, 1995; Gramsci 1971).

Two and a half years after Bill 4 was passed, Education Minister Gordon Dirks announced a new Catholic elementary school will be built in Morinville, funded through a \$43.2 million capital projects fund. No new school was announced for the secular system in Morinville²². This announcement brings the secular school debate back, as both systems are reaching their enrolment capacities²³ and as no secular option is available in Morinville at present past grade 7^{24,25} (Ma, 2014; Simons, 2014; Smith, 2014).

The day after the announcement, a Morinville group calling itself the Supports of Public Education initiated an online petition, which received more than 350 signatures within a week of being launched (Ma, 2014; Simons, 2014; Smith, 2014). One thing that is apparent is that secular education supporters have become highly organized with an established communications infrastructure, drawing on the experience and knowledge gained through the events surrounding Bill 4. This advocacy group example represents one new means of democratic participation within Morinville's changing hegemony (Popkewitz, 2007).

What is promising, and perhaps indicative of this changing hegemony, has been the expressions of townspeople's 'mutual support permeating the media in the wake of this announcement, in recognition of the needs of both systems: "*Lot's of people want to make this a Catholic versus Public issue. It's not about Catholic versus Public. I hope the Catholic system gets their school.*" (qtd. in Smith, 2014)

Common narratives shaped by shared experiences and traumas surrounding Bill 4 provide a common ground upon which Morinville's emerging hegemony may coalesce.

²² The Minister's office has responded that additional school builds are yet to be announced (Ma, 2014).

²³ Enrolment for the 2014-2015 school year: École Notre Dame Elementary School: >500 students (preschool to Grade 4); Morinville Public Elementary School: 547 students (K-7); École Georges H. Primeau Middle School: >450 students (5-8); Morinville Community High School: 580 students (9-12) (Roy, 2014; Simons, 2014).

²⁴ Each year the public school has added a new grade to accommodate advancing students. In the 2014-2015 school year, grade 7 was added, and grade 8 will be added for the 2015-2016 school year. Morinville Public doesn't have the infrastructure to deliver Alberta's junior high curriculum (Smith, 2014; Wayne Rufiange, personal communication, September 2014).

²⁵ MPES' name changed to Morinville Public School (MPS) as of September 2014, as the school now offers junior high (Wayne Rufiange, personal communication, September 2014).

References

- Alberta Education. (2011). *Education funding in Alberta: Kindergarten to grade 12: 2011/2012 school year*. Retrieved November 18, 2014, from <http://education.alberta.ca/media/954300/finalbooklet.pdf>
- Alberta Education. (2012a, June 1). *New public education option for Morinville community* [press release]. Retrieved from <http://alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=32422A90AF34F-B8AC-B4C4-3E96AB48D0D298AC>
- Alberta Education. (2012b). *The St. Albert and Sturgeon Valley School Districts Establishment Act*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.alberta.ca/departement/policy/st-albert-act.aspx>
- Alberta Education. (2013). *Alberta's Education Act: Putting students first*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.alberta.ca/departement/policy/education-act.aspx>
- Alberta Education (n.d.). *Public and separate schools*. Retrieved November 18, 2014, from <http://www.education.alberta.ca/parents/choice/public.aspx>
- Automated Genealogy. (n.d.). *Enumeration district summary: 1901 Census records for Morinville A(3)*. Retrieved from <http://automatedgenealogy.com/census/EnumerationDistrict.jsp?id=5784>
- Azmier, J. J., and Dobson, S. (2003 December). *Western Canada's rural metro-adjacent areas: Building the new West (Report #23)*. Canada West Foundation. Retrieved from <http://cwf.ca/pdf-docs/publications/December2003-The-Burgeoning-Fringe-Western-Canada's-Rural-Metro-Adjacent-Areas.pdf>

- Berthelot, Jocelyn. (2008). *Education and the Common Good. Our Schools, Our Selves* 18 (1): 101-126 (+p. 258) (Edited and translated by David Clandfield)
- Dafoe, S. (2011, January 18). *Secular option not among board offerings*. Morinville News. Retrieved from <http://morinvillemews.com/2011/01/18/secular-option-not-among-board-offerings/>
- Dafoe, S. (2012a, February 21). *Morinville education bill to be tabled Wednesday*. Morinville News. Retrieved from <http://morinvillemews.com/2012/02/21/morinville-education-bill-to-be-tabled-wednesday/>.
- Dafoe, S. (2012b, June 4). *Parents meet to look at changing face of Catholic education in Morinville*. Morinville News. Retrieved from <http://morinvillemews.com/2012/06/04/parents-meet-to-look-at-changing-face-of-catholic-education-in-morinville/>
- Government of the Province of Alberta. (1905). *The Alberta Act*. Retrieved from http://www.solon.org/Constitutions/Canada/English/aa_1905.html
- Government of Canada. (1867). *Constitution Act*. Retrieved from <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-1.html>
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers. ---.
- Gramsci, A. (1995). *The Southern Question*. Translated and introduced by Pasquale Verdicchio. West Lafayette, IN: Bordighera.
- Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools. (2014, August 4). In Wikipedia. Retrieved November 18, 2014, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_St._Albert_Catholic_Schools
- GSACRD. (2011, August 4). *Secular Education to be offered in Morinville for 2011 / 2012 school year*. Morinville News. Retrieved from <http://morinvillemews.com/2011/08/04/secular-education-to-be-offered-in-morinville-for-2011-2012-school-year/>
- GSACRD. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved from <http://www.gsacrd.ab.ca/about-us>
- Hammer, K. (2011, March 4). *In an Alberta town, parents fight for a secular education*. Globe & Mail. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/in-an-alberta-town-parents-fight-for-a-secular-education/article1931158/>
- Hartog, L.D. (2010, December 15). *Morinville parents argue for secular education*. Retrieved from <http://www.stalbertgazette.com/article/20101215/SAG0801/312159971/0/SAG>
- Jones, S. (2011). *Morinville school ready to go*. St. Albert Gazette. Retrieved from <http://www.stalbertgazette.com/article/20110831/SAG0801/308319977/0/SAG>
- Ma, K. (2012, January 30). *Human rights commission denies Morinville school case*. St. Albert Gazette. Retrieved from <http://www.stalbertgazette.com/article/20120130/SAG0801/301309997/0/SAG>
- Ma, K. (2014, October 22). *Where's our new school*. St. Albert Gazette. Retrieved from <http://www.stalbertgazette.com/article/20141022/SAG0801/310229975/0/SAG;%20http://www.edmontonjournal.com/search/search.html?q=%22morinville+school%22>
- Miller, C. (2011, March 21). *Families push for secular school*. Western Catholic Reporter. Retrieved from <http://www.wcr.ab.ca/WCRThisWeek/Stories/tabid/61/entryid/717/Default.aspx>
- Morinville. (2014, November 10). In Wikipedia. Retrieved November 18, 2014, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morinville>
- Morinville News. (2011a, January 5). *Catholic Women's League to hold meeting on former education minister's petition*. Retrieved from <http://morinvillemews.com/2011/01/05/catholic-women's-league-to-hear-of-former-education-minister's-petition/>
- Morinville News. (2011b, May 5). *GSACRD releases survey on non-faith based education*. Retrieved from <http://morinvillemews.com/2011/05/05/gsacrd-releases-survey-on-non-faith-based-education/>
- Morinville News. (2012, February 14). *Province tables education act*. Retrieved from <http://morinvillemews.com/2012/02/14/province-tables-education-act/>
- Noonan, B., Hallman, D., and Scharf M. (2006). *A history of education in Saskatchewan: Selected readings*. Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Centre.
- Parks Canada. (n.d.). *St Jean Baptiste Church and Rectory*. Retrieved from <http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=5008>
- Popkewitz, T. S. (2007). *Alchemies and governing: Or, questions about the questions we ask*. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 39(1):64-83.
- Province of Alberta. (2000a). *Alberta Human Rights Act*. Retrieved from <http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/A25P5.pdf>
- Province of Alberta. (2000b). *School Act*. Retrieved from <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2005/Hiemstra.pdf>
- Roy, L. (2012, January 23). *MPES new location open to students*. Morinville News. Retrieved from <http://morinvillemews.com>

- /2012/01/23/mpes-new-location-open-to-students/
- Roy, L. (2014, September 3). School enrolment strong in Morinville. *Morinville News*. Retrieved from <http://morinvilnews.com/2014/09/03/school-enrollment-strong-in-morinville/>
- Separate School. (2014, October 6). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved November 18, 2014, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separate_school
- Simons, P. (2014, October 17). Province's lopsided Morinville school plan divides community. *Edmonton Journal*. Retrieved <http://www.edmontonjournal.com/search/search.html?q=%22morinville+school%22>.
- Smith, C. (2014, October 19). Morinville parents launch school petition. *Morinville News*. Retrieved from <http://morinvilnews.com/2014/10/19/morinville-parents-launch-school-petition/>
- Statistics Canada. (2013, September 13). Morinville, T, Alberta (Code 4811068) (table). National Household Survey (NHS) Profile. 2011 National Household Survey. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-004-XWE. Ottawa. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>
- Statistics Canada. (2007, March 13). Morinville, Alberta (Code 4811068) (table). 2006 Community Profiles. 2006 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 92-591-XWE. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/index.cfm?Lang=E>
- Sturgeon County. (2012, October 22). Sturgeon School Division reviewing electoral boundaries. *Morinville News*. Retrieved from <http://morinvilnews.com/2012/10/22/sturgeon-school-division-reviewing-electoral-boundaries/>
- Thomson, M., and Landry, F. (2010, December 1). Petition launched to abolish Alberta's Roman Catholic, Protestant schools. *Edmonton Sun*. Retrieved from <http://www.torontosun.com/news/alberta/2010/12/01/16395361.html>
- Town of Morinville. (2011). Town of Morinville municipal development plan: Bylaw #9/2011. Retrieved from [http://capitalregionboard.ab.ca/images/Documents/SharedFiles/REF/REF2012-003/1st_Reading_Revised_MDP-Bylaw%209-2011\[1\].pdf](http://capitalregionboard.ab.ca/images/Documents/SharedFiles/REF/REF2012-003/1st_Reading_Revised_MDP-Bylaw%209-2011[1].pdf)
- Town of Morinville. (2014, July 15). 2014 Municipal Census shows Morinville population exceeds 9,400. *Morinville News*. Retrieved from <http://morinvilnews.com/2014/07/15/2014-municipal-census-shows-morinville-population-exceeds-9400/>
- Town of Morinville (n.d.). Mayor Lisa Holmes. Retrieved from <http://www.morinville.ca/index.php/government/morinville-town-council/elected-officials/mayor-lisa-holmes>
- Trottier, A. (1991). Faith and tenacity: History of Morinville, 1891-1991. *Morinville: Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish*. Retrieved from http://www.ourfutureourpast.ca/loc_hist/toc.aspx?id=1201
- Tumilty, R. (2012, August 29). Morinville school ready for fall in new setting. *St. Albert Gazette*. Retrieved from <http://www.stalbertgazette.com/article/20120829/SAG0801/308299992/0/SAG>
- [unattributed]. (2012, June 15). Some Morinville feedback [web log message]. Retrieved from <http://www.edmontonatheists.ca/2012/06/some-morinville-feedback/#more-9752>