

**International Forum on Federalism in Mexico
Veracruz, Mexico, 15-17 November 2001**



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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS
BY
PADDY TORSNEY, M.P.**

to the Members of the Forum of Federations

Veracruz, Mexico
November 16, 2001

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Canada is an immense country with a population of 31 million people, most of who live along the southern border in many different parts of the country. This presents enormous challenges for our country of 10 provinces and 3 territories. 3% of our population is aboriginal. We have two official languages, French and English.

At approximately \$61 billion or \$2,000 per capita, education represents the second largest category of public expenditure in Canada.

On a per student basis amongst G7 nations, in 1995, we ranked 2nd behind the United States. Combined public and private spending per student is some \$ 6, 400 US. Almost 2/3 of public education expenditures were on elementary and secondary education.

Education is considered a valuable asset for all Canadians- regardless of gender- where secondary school graduation greatly enhances one's chances for employment, and further education at college or university is strongly desired. Attainment of degrees, diplomas, or certificates by 25- to 34-year-olds increased from 44 percent in 1981 to 59 percent in 1991. Furthermore, it is estimated that about 40 percent of Canada's jobs now require 16 or more years of formal education.

With regard to intergovernmental relations in Canadian education policy, in the Canadian federation our provinces and territories have the constitutional jurisdiction to enact laws governing education. The federal government does not have a minister responsible for education or higher education. Federal activities in the educational sector are spread across a number of departments. The federal government is responsible for status Indians and the Inuit, those aboriginal peoples living on reserves and in the north.

I will divide this education discussion into three areas where intergovernmental relations in Canadian education policy vary: our "K-12" or grade school systems; our higher education systems; and then our education system for aboriginal peoples. From there I will identify some of the challenges or opportunities within these areas.

Kindergarten to Grade Twelve

Regarding grade school systems, the federal government plays little or no role. Each province and territory has its own way of funding, regulating and monitoring outcomes. The provinces and territories are solely responsible for their own teacher accreditation, curriculum, and infrastructure. Each has a series of school boards that have a variety of

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powers including the hiring and paying of staff; the implementation of curriculum; and in many cases, the raising of revenues.

The federal government does provide for education in Canada's two official languages. Provinces and territories receive funding for education in the minority language (English in Quebec and French everywhere else in the country) and to provide the teaching of English and French as second languages.

Enrolment rates for elementary and secondary schooling are now close to 100 percent of the population between the age of 5 and the age at the end of compulsory schooling (the total number of youth between the ages of 5 and 19 in 1996 was estimated at 6,068,399).

Canadian education levels, already high by international standards, continued to improve throughout the 1990s. More Canadians are graduating from high school and more graduates are going on to higher education. Many adults are also upgrading their education

There is coordination and collaboration amongst provinces and territories, and a remarkable degree of similarity in the delivery of education outcomes across the country. Since 1967, the Council of Ministers of Education have met to discuss education issues and to develop strategies and projects to improve Canada's education system. From time to time the federal government is invited to participate in these projects.

Higher Education

Post-secondary education is an area where the federal government plays a substantive role. There are three ways in which the federal government plays this role: providing cash transfers to provinces; funding research at universities and colleges; and, with financial assistance and tax measures to assist students to study.

With regard to transfers to provinces, on an annual basis, the federal government provides a block transfer payment (CHST) to provinces and territories to ensure comparable social programs across the country. The transfer is used to support healthcare, social assistance, and post-secondary education. This year, the transfer is \$34.6 billion. It's fair to say there are always intergovernmental tensions around the appropriate level of the transfer payment.

Funding of research and development at our universities reached over \$900 million.

The third way in which the federal government plays a role in the area of post-secondary education is by its implementation of financial instruments. The federal government has

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always placed a great priority on ensuring that every qualified student has the financial ability to attend higher education.

The Canada Student Loans Program provides over \$1.7 billion in financial assistance to more than 350,000 students every year.

We have grants for targeted disadvantaged groups.

New Canada Millennium Scholarships target those students identified with the greatest financial need. More than \$3 billion will be provided over a ten-year period.

In addition to loans and grants for students the federal government provides educational saving incentives for parents of young children such as the Registered Education Saving Plan and the Canada Education Savings Grants.

In addition, the federal government provides income tax credits or deductions to help offset the cost of university.

Federal expenditures exceed \$3 billion per year in student loans, grants, scholarships, tax incentives and educational savings incentives.

The federal government also provides official languages funding to help support 26 university and colleges across the country that provide minority and/or second language programming.

First Nations and Aboriginal People

The federal government is responsible for First Nations peoples' education. The federal government seeks to ensure those students receive a level of service of a comparable standard to other Canadians. The day to day responsibility for education is in the hands of First Nations communities who can choose to provide their own schooling on-reserve or pay to send their students to provincial schools. About 60% of First Nations students attend school on reserve.

The federal government covers the full cost of First Nations students attending a university or college including tuition, living allowance, books, travel, etc, although there is some debate the program is oversubscribed.

Challenges and Opportunities

In terms of challenges and opportunities, there are several that I want to highlight. Canada is officially bilingual—French and English. Interestingly, though, about 60 percent of recent immigrants under 18 entering Canada speak neither French nor English.

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The province of Ontario receives over 50 percent of immigrant children and youth. Increasing cultural and linguistic diversity has become most evident in many large Canadian urban centres such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. As a result, special demands are placed on school systems to provide English- and French- as-a-second-language programs and enhanced support and guidance.

In the Northwest Territories, almost 40 percent of households speak neither official language- French nor English- but rather they speak a variety of native official languages of the territory.

It is estimated that by 2010, one of every three Saskatchewan and Manitoba youth will be of Aboriginal ancestry. Aboriginal students have fewer role models to encourage them to continue their schooling.

Great projects have been created to help combat this problem. For instance, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College was founded in 1976 and is the only university-level institution in North America controlled by First Nations. The University of Saskatchewan Native Law Centre has had a major national influence in educating Aboriginal lawyers as well as ensuring that Aboriginal issues and perspectives are fully addressed with the Canadian legal system. The Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) was the first institution in Canada to have a comprehensive Education Equity Plan approved and monitored by a provincial Human Rights Commission.

Distance is another problem confronting education in Canada. Peoples are often far from major urban centres. Again, Saskatchewan is a leader in the Community Access program, which provides public access to the Internet in rural and northern Saskatchewan. The department maintains an extensive Web site and provides its entire curriculum online for the use of students, teachers and all members of the community.

Similarly, the Northwest Territories is using information networks to support personal development and learning as well as innovative approaches to program delivery. The Department of Education is developing computer operating systems in Aboriginal languages and expects that people in all communities in the NWT will have access to information networks.

The federal government introduced initiatives to promote the use of information technology in education. Industry Canada's SchoolNet and Computers for Schools (CFS) programs are two examples. Every school in Canada is linked to the internet through SchoolNet. Computers for Schools (CFS) has delivered 180,000 refurbished computers donated from government and private sector to schools and libraries. Young Canadians are employed to repair the computers in workshops across the country and by 1998, CFS

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computers accounted for almost 37 percent of all computers purchased or placed in Canadian schools.

Low income Canadians and their children is an issue we are trying to address. In 1996, nearly 1.4 million children 15 years of age and under in Canada, almost one child in five, were living in low-income households. These students are more likely to face greater difficulties in education and have lower levels of educational attainment than students from families with higher socio-economic status.

Finally, one challenge that confronts the education systems is human resources. There are 268,000 full-time elementary and secondary educators and more than 60,000 university and college faculty in Canada. As a group, educators tend to be older than the rest of the work force. Close to one-half of full-time university faculty and almost 40 percent of college staff will become eligible for retirement over the next ten years.

Canada has achieved much success in educational attainment and quality. This has contributed enormously to our international competitiveness and quality of life. At the same time, Canadians have very strong opinions about, and demands for, our education systems.

In my home province, which has been implementing many changes, it's fair to say that if an election were to happen without the situation settling down a little bit, the provincial government could be defeated in the next election because of the concern over changes to the education system.

A certain level of educational attainment is critical to an individual attaining a higher economic status in Canada.

Our ability to evolve in our education systems will determine our continued national economic success. Education is important.

Lastly, I've brought for distribution copies of a list of federal, provincial and territorial websites that you may find useful.

Thank you.