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**Educational Policy Making and Cultural
Diversity:
A Case Study of the Administration of the
Public Education in Canada**

By

Dr. Abdelhady Elnagar

**Lecturer of Administration, Planning
and Comparative Studies**

**Al- Azhar University, Faculty of Education,
Dakahliah Campus, Egypt**

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Educational Policy Making and Cultural Diversity:

A Case Study of the Administration of the Public

Education in Canada

Introduction:

When the policy of multiculturalism was announced in Canada in the early 1970s, its aim was to legitimize the place of ethno-cultural groups in Canadian society. As a political ideology, it has provided Canada with an identity. As a policy, multiculturalism implies consensus within the rhetoric of a 'just' society where there is to be 'unity within diversity'. Multiculturalism as a policy has two objectives: first, is to assist all cultural groups in developing the capacity to grow and contribute to Canada; second, is to help minority groups overcome cultural barriers so as to enjoy full participation in Canadian society (Ghosh, 2004).

The review of different governance trends on the policy making in Canada ensures that despite the proliferation of many more policy-capable players in each policy sector - interest groups, think tanks, Aboriginal communities, visible minority groups, non-governmental organizations and international organizations - the fulcrum of power among major actors inside and outside government has not changed (Howlett & Lindquist, 2004). The case of educational administration and policy making in different Canadian provinces may be an example that mirrors this governance trend of policy making in Canada.

In each Canadian province, The Department/Ministry of Education, headed by the minister of education, is the central educational authority. The minister of education is an elected member of the provincial legislature and appointed to the education ministry/department by the premier (Young, Levin, & Wallin, 2008). Each provincial department of education, with the political minister of education supported by the permanent staff of the public service, maintains strong control over the vast enterprise of public schooling. The roots of the arrangement lie at the turn of the 19th century, when provincial officials gradually established powerful regulations to assert their authority in the field. This policy legacy, transformed Canadian education from a fragmented operation into 10 hierarchically integrated entities overseen by powerful

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political leaders exercising individual ministerial responsibility who could answer for education in each of the provincial legislatures. Marginal administrative powers are parceled to local boards made up of elected trustees advised by provincially appointed superintendents, but local control is heavily circumscribed by extensive provincial rules and regulations (Wallner, 2011).

This paper argues that although Canada is a liberal- democratic and multicultural society, where the public have different effective tools to express their opinion in public affairs, there are no equivalent tools for the public to participate in making educational policies at the provincial level. According to Howlett (2009) “evidence at the provincial, territorial and local levels- although much less extensive than at the federal level- suggests that policy analytical capacity at these levels is much weaker and leads to a short-term focus in many policies and programs adopted at these levels” (p. 167).

Purpose & Significance: In the context of the phenomenon of pluralism and cultural diversity in Canadian society, the current study investigates the process of educational policy making and the administration of the public school systems in Canada. The paper proposes to achieve the following objectives: (1) analyzing the process of educational policy making in Canadian provinces; (2) identifying major administrators and policy makers in the public school systems in Canadian provinces; and (3) evaluating the extent to which different cultural groups and individuals participate in educational policy making.

The case of educational policy making in Canada and its decentralized administration the public school systems, regardless of its weaknesses, is still a model for the developing countries to reform its educational administration Countries Such as Egypt are in need to reform their centralized administration of the school systems. This study offers educational policy makers in Egypt an additional approach to think about the development of educational administration structures and practices, especially after the Revolution of January 25th.

Methodology & Procedures: to achieve its purposes, the study will: (1) analyze

the process of educational administration and policy making at the provincial level in Canada, with a specific focus on Manitoba as an example; (2) describe the role of the major administrative and policy making bodies at the provincial level; (3) evaluate the public participation in educational administration and policy making, and (4) suggest some recommendations to promote public participation in educational policy making, especially in developing countries.

Educational Policy Making in Canada

Educational policy making is a complex subject, with thousands of participants working in a staggering array of structural settings. It is laden with its own cultural history, its own legal precedents, its own financial and political arrangements, and its own jargon. The study of educational policy is further complicated by the fact that the educational process itself is marked by multiple objectives and ambiguity about goals in most institutional settings (Coombs, 1983).

Models of public policy study can be divided into normative and descriptive models. Normative models prescribe how decisions should be made; thus, a normative model is an ideal model of how a particular theorist feels that the policy process ought to work. Descriptive models attempt to explain how decisions are made in practice. The formulation of a descriptive model involves the study of how a number of policies have been made and some generalization about how the system works. Some public policy models purport to be both normative and descriptive (Kernaghan & Siegel, 1991).

According to Canadian theorist Michael Howlett (2010) in most recent work, a five-stage model of the policy process has been posited. These five stages of this model are agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation and policy evaluation. In this model agenda-setting refers to the process by which problems come to the attention of governments; policy formulation refers to how policy options are formulated within governments; decision-making is the process by which governments adopt a particular course of action or non-action; policy implementation relates to how governments put policies into effect; and policy

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evaluation refers to the process by which the results of policies are monitored by both state and societal actors (Howlett, Ramesh & Perl, 2009).

1- The Role of the Federal Government:

In Canada, there is no federal department/ministry of education and no integrated national system of education. Within the federal system of shared powers, the Canadian Constitution Act of 1867 asserts, in section 93, that “In and for each province, the legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Education.” Thus, in the different thirteen Canadian jurisdictions, provincial departments or ministries of education are responsible for the organization, delivery, and assessment of education at the elementary and secondary levels, for technical and vocational education, and for postsecondary education. Some jurisdictions, have two separate departments or ministries, one having responsibility for elementary-secondary education and the other for postsecondary education and skills training (CMEC, 2008).

As education grew in importance in Canada, the federal government began to play a more important role and it continues to have a substantial role in education, despite the constitutional provision of section 93. However, this involvement of the federal government occurs through many federal government agencies and departments. Some educational programs are run directly by the federal government, while others are collaborative ventures run jointly with the provinces or other education authorities (Young, Levin, & Wallin, 2008).

In Canada, many federal departments oversee a unified delivery of services to citizens in different provinces and territories. This is however, is not the case for educational programs, because each province independently establishes and administers its own educational system. Without a national ministry of education and without federal government policy, that Specifies goals and standards in this area, it is difficult to talk about Canadian education as a homogenous entity (Irwin, Charles, Grauer, Kindler & Macgregor, 1996).

Although different jurisdictions have an education act specifies who is entitled to attend schools, and many jurisdictions have clauses in, or dedicated, legislation and directives that state a more specific context for inclusive education (CMEC, 2008). However, in the Canadian context, there is a number of groups are the most at risk of exclusion from successful completion of secondary school and transition to the workforce or postsecondary education institutions. The groups considered most vulnerable to exclusion are; Aboriginal students, students with physical or mental challenges, newly arrived immigrant students, visible minority students, and students from lower socio-economic groups (CMEC, 2008).

2- The Role of the Provincial Governments

The current study will adopt this five-stage model of Howlett ⁽¹⁾ to analyze the process of educational policy making at the provincial level. Because education is completely a provincial responsibility in Canada, according to its constitution, the study will focus on examining the provincial role in policy making process in the Canadian province of Manitoba as an example.

A- Agenda Setting: It is the first and perhaps the most critical stage of the policy cycle. It is concerned with the way problems emerge, or not, as candidates for government's attention. What happens at this early stage of the policy process has a decisive impact on the entire subsequent policy cycle and outcomes. At its most basic, agenda setting is about the recognition of some subject as a problem requiring further government attention. The policy making agenda is usually created out of the history, traditions, attitudes, and beliefs encapsulated and codified in the discourses constructed by social and political actors (Howlett, Ramesh & Perl, 2009).

In the formal study of agenda setting, a distinction is made between the systemic or unofficial public agenda and the institutional or formal, official agenda. The systemic

⁽¹⁾ Michael Howlett is a professor in the Department of Political Science at Simon Fraser University (SFU). He is the author of *Canadian Public Policy* (2012), and *Designing Public Policy* (2011), and co-author of *The Public Policy Primer* (2010), *Integrated Policymaking for Sustainable Development* (2009), and *Studying Public Policy* (2009, 2003 & 1995).

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agenda consists of all issues that are commonly perceived by members of the political community as meriting public attention and as involving matters within the legitimate jurisdiction of existing governmental authority. The formal institutional agenda consists of only a limited number of issues or problems to which attention is devoted by policy elites. The public agenda is mostly an agenda for discussion while the institutional agenda is an agenda for action, indicating that the formal policy process dealing with the problem in question has begun (Howlett, 2010).

In democratic political systems, political parties may play a crucial role in making public policies. However, because of the competitive nature of democratic political systems, organizations, such as interest groups and the civil service, also shape the policy process (Guy, 1990). According to Howlett, Ramesh & Perl (2009) the following sets of policy actors exist in most liberal-democratic capitalist countries and exercise some influence over policy processes and outcomes: elected politicians; the public; bureaucracy; political parties; interest groups; think tanks; and the mass media.

In 1988, Gary Filmon and his Progressive Conservative Party squeaked into power in Manitoba forming a minority government at a time when neo-conservative governments and policies were enjoying increased national and provincial success. During the Filmon years, public education in Manitoba experienced a great deal of government intervention, characterized by a seemingly continuous stream of policy initiatives. The policy documents that shaped the province's educational agenda during the 1990s outlined the PC government's six priority areas for action, including: essential learnings; educational standards and evaluation; school effectiveness; parental and community involvement; distance education and technology; and teacher education (Sutherland, Hilaire & Anderson, 2007).

In September of 1999, Manitoba voters replaced the progressive government with a New Democratic Party government. The educational mandate of this new government was to rebuild the strained relations with the province's educators. In June 2000, Minister of education Drew Caldwell identified six priorities that formed

the basis of Manitoba Educational Agenda. These priorities are :improving outcomes strengthening links among families, schools and communities; strengthening school planning and reporting; improving professional learning opportunities for educators; strengthening pathways between secondary education, postsecondary education and work; and, linking policy and practice to research and evidence (Sutherland, Hilaire & Anderson, 2007).

B- Policy Formulation: Studies of policy formulation have emphasized the importance of the kinds of actors interacting to develop and refine policy options for government But unlike the agenda setting, where the public is often actively involved, in policy formulation the relevant policy actors are restricted to those who not only have an opinion on a subject, but also have some minimal level of knowledge of the subject area, allowing them to comment on the feasibility of options put forward to resolve policy problems (Howlett, 2010).

Once a government has acknowledged the existence of a public problem and the need to do something about it, policy makers are expected to decide on a course of action. Policy formulation involves identifying and assessing possible solutions to policy problems or exploring the various options and alternative courses of action available for addressing a problem. The proposals may originate in the agenda-setting process itself, as a problem and its possible solution are placed simultaneously on the government agenda(Hawlett, Ramesh & Perl, 2009).

The precise sources of proposals are many and varied. The sources for proposals from outside the government may include interest groups and associations; clientele groups; citizen groups; political parties; and the media. From within government, one may expect proposals to emanate from the following persons and groups, either singly or in combination:

- Political executives and their appointees may generate proposals, but more commonly they stimulate, commend, or direct others to do so.
- Many bureaucrats are career planners, but some of them may also become involved in formulating proposals as an outgrowth of their administrative work.
- Consulting groups are very active in the early stages of policy development.

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They may do much of the research that is required, in addition to identifying options for treating the issue at hand.

- Research agencies, such as universities and private research institutions, and their research product usually used as a base for policy proposals.
- Legislators and their staff, as they have ideas about what ought to be done to solve a public problem (Jones & Matthes, 1983).

It is worthy to mention that the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS) is one of the most influential associations that may generate policy proposals. The MTS is the collective bargaining and professional development organization for all of Manitoba's 15,000 public school teachers. Founded in 1919, the Society provides assistance to local associations in collective bargaining, offers professional development workshops and lobbies government on legislation that affects education, students and teachers (Manitoba Teachers Society, 2012).

C- Decision Making: When governments adopt a particular course of action or non-action. It can involve the adoption of one, none, or some combination of the solutions remaining at the end of the formulation stage (Howlett, 2010). Decision-making is a cognitive process that guides human thought and action. Regardless of when, where or by whom a decision is made, a number of common elements define this process. Driven by the need to eliminate the dissonance created by a problem or perceived inconsistency, decision-making consists of the following activities: data search, data collection, data analysis, data synthesis, and multiple inferential leaps. These activities usually occur in contexts defined by varying levels of uncertainty and risk (Johnson & Kruse, 2009).

Policy decisions usually produce some kind of formal or informal statement of intent on the part of authorized public actors to take, or not to take, some action, such as a law or a regulation. Some political systems concentrate decision-making authority in the elected executive and the bureaucracy, while others permit the legislature and judiciary to play a greater role. Parliamentary systems, such as Canada and its provinces, tend to fall in the former category and presidential systems in the

later (Howlett, Ramesh & Perl, 2009).

In the Canadian parliamentary system, the provincial Cabinet is responsible to the legislature and dependant on the support of a majority of its members. It is the key planning and directing agency of government. It determines what legislation is brought forward by government, as well as formulates policy and supervises its implementation in education and all other areas of provincial jurisdiction (Young, Levin & Wallin, 2008).

D- Policy Implementation. In this stage governments put their decisions into effect This involves the use of some combination of the tools of public administration to alter the distribution of goods and services in society in a way that is broadly compatible with the sentiments and values of affected parties (Howlett, 2010). Policy implementation often relies on civil servants and administrative officials to establish and manage the necessary actions. However, non-governmental actors who are part of the policy subsystem can also be involved in implementation activities (Howlett, Ramesh & Perl, 2009). The widened heading for implementation research has several consequences: (i) with the distinction between government and governance, the difference between structures and processes, and between actors and activities, has become important, (ii) explicit attention is given to the layered character of the political- administrative system and (iii) the act of management is taken seriously, more or less a new feature in the implementation research (Hill & Hupe, 2009).

Provincial governments can implement policy in a number of ways; these ways are policy tools or policy instruments. A policy statement describes what is being sought; the tool or instrument is the method by which the desired outcome is pursued. A number of aspects of governance can be described as policy tools. These include legislation, regulation, Orders in Council, guidelines, standards, procedures, programs, grants, subsidies, taxes and crown corporations (Smith, 2003).

E- Policy Evaluation: This is the final stage in the policy process. It involves both state and societal actors monitoring the results of policies, often leading to the reconceptualization of policy problems and solutions in light of experiences encountered with the policy in question (Howlett, 2010). Policy evaluation refers

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broadly to the stage of the policy process at which it is determined how a public policy has actually fared in action. It involves the evaluation of the means being employed and the objectives being served. It assesses the effectiveness of a public policy in terms of its perceived intentions and results (Howlett, Ramesh & Perl, 2009).

The concept of policy evaluation mentions to maximizing benefits minus costs. That tends to be the overall criterion for judging alternative public policies. It is the overall criterion because maximizing it tends to maximize the favorable change in society's net worth or its assets minus its liabilities as a result of adopting one policy rather than another. Other criteria that are sometimes also considered include: efficiency, effectiveness, cost saving, equity, elasticity, public participation, and predictability. Policy evaluation methods tend to fall into five categories: benefit-cost analysis, decision theory, optimum level analysis, allocation theory, and time optimization models (Nagel, 1983).

Educational Policy Makers in Canada

Like the United States, Switzerland, and Australia, Canada is a federal state. A federal state has two levels of government, national and state/provincial. The role of the national government is to promote the best interests of the whole country, to offset the diversity and chaos that could be created if each province or state sought its own best interests. Canada, mostly, has two major forms of government, federal and provincial, built on a parliamentary model with a constitutional monarchy. The Canadian North American Act of 1867, and the Constitution Act of 1882, established the governance domains for both the federal and provincial governments (Graham, Swift & Delaney, 2012).

Historically, the administration of the public education systems in Canadian provinces and territories by the public authorities has been exercised at three administrative levels: the provincial authority level, the intermediate authority level, called a school board or a school district level, and the individual school level:

A- The Provincial Departments/Ministries of Education:

It resides with the central authority to define the orientations and the priorities of the provincial system, as well as the education services that people demand in the province. This authority creates, grants power and regulates the local levels. Historically, the involvement of the provincial authority has varied but at a minimum. The authority has a tendency to outline the curricula goals, formulate norms for student progress and establish the means for assessing students and approving their studies. The provincial authority also establishes the policies and norms for other education services offered to students, notably specialized services for special needs students and approving their studies. All these norms are to be found in various official provincial documents (Lassard & Brassard, 2009).

The department responsible for education is headed by a provincial minister who is almost an elected member of the legislature and appointed to the position by the government leader of the jurisdiction. Deputy Minister, who belongs to the civil service, is responsible for the operation of the department. The ministry provides educational, administrative, and financial management and school support functions, and they define both the educational services to be provided and the policy and legislative frameworks (CMEC, 2008).

According to section 3 of the Educational Administration Act of Manitoba, The minister has specific roles including: (a) establishing and operating, or providing for the establishment and operation of technical, vocational, agricultural, summer, residential or any other schools; (b) providing advice to school boards with respect to the dimensions, equipment, style, plans, furnishing, decoration, heating and ventilation of school buildings and for the arrangement and requisites of school premises; and (c) approving courses of study, including correspondence and other courses, and approving textbooks to be used.

B- The Local School Boards:

Local governance of education is usually entrusted to school boards, school districts, school divisions, or district education councils. Their members are elected

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by public ballot. The power delegated to the local authorities is at the discretion of the provincial and territorial governments and generally consists of the operation and administration of the group of schools within their board or division, curriculum implementation, responsibility for personnel, enrolment of students, and initiation of proposals for new construction or other major capital expenditures (CMEC, 2008).

The School Board is administered by a council of commissioners elected by the population of the district and it exercises powers given to it by law. The school board has the power to deliberate and make decisions, and until recently in all cases, the board had the ability to tax. One of these primary responsibilities is to ensure that all students in its jurisdiction receive the services to which they have the right, in conformity with the orientations, the prescriptions and the frameworks defined and imposed by the provincial authority (Lassard & Brassard, 2009).

In Manitoba, restructuring of education governance was prompted by several factors, including provincial outmigration and a decline in the student population in recent years. This is in addition to the concerns about improving educational opportunities in rural areas and the possibility of redirecting savings from governance and administration into classrooms. In that context, the government established a Boundaries Review Commission in 1993 to study the school districts reorganization and to design a system allow for quality education to be delivered to students using available funding and minimizing duplication. The commission recommended reducing the province's 57 school divisions to 21, and after further public consultation proposed changes to the boundaries of three of the 21 divisions, as well as the creation of one additional division, for a total of 22 divisions to be established in the province (Fleming, 1997).

According to section 41 of the Public School Act of Manitoba, every school board shall perform specific roles including: (a) provide adequate school accommodation for the resident persons who have the right to attend school; (b) erect and maintain upon the school building or on the school grounds a flagstaff and shall cause the national flag of Canada; and (c) authorize the disbursement of any moneys that are to

be expended or have been expended.

C- The Individual Schools:

There have been attempts in most Canadian provinces, including Manitoba, to strengthen the role of the local voices, especially of parents, in education system. This has been done by giving a legal status to a variety of parent advisory committees, such as school councils and orientation committees at the school level, in influencing the ongoing life of the school (Young, Levin & Wallin, 2008). School councils are an important part of the structure of education in Canada in general. They are usually made up of parent volunteers, teachers, non-teaching staff, community members, and sometimes students who provide recommendations to the school principal and, in some cases, the school board. Many school councils are also active in organizing social events and fundraising (Robson, 2013).

According to section 3 of Regulation 54/96 of the Education Administration Act of Manitoba, an advisory council may be established for each school. Each advisory council has specific roles including: (a) advising the principal about school policies, activities and organization. (b) advising the principal about fund-raising and participate in fund-raising activities, (c) advising the school board about the process of hiring and assigning principals, (d) advising the principal and the school board about an annual, budget for the school, (e) participating in developing an annual school plan, and, (f) participating in any review of the school that the minister or the school board has directed to be carried out.

Public Participation in Educational Policy Making

According to pluralist theories, the appropriate role of government in democratic society is to produce public policies that represent interests of the electorate, resolve conflicts, reflect reasonable compromises among competing perspectives, and ensure the continued stability of the collectivity along with its preferred economic and cultural characteristics. Pluralism tends to assume that good public policies are produced through a political process that has certain democratic or quasi-democratic characteristics (Schneider & Ingram, 1997).

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In the last several decades, the issues of belonging and of active participation have become important for Western nations with advanced welfare states, as various groups have identified themselves as 'excluded' from society and its opportunities. Social exclusion and social inclusion have consequently become useful concepts in contemporary discussions of the meaning of citizenship (Graham, Swift, & Delaney, 2012).

Despite its theoretical and practical appeal, the idea of participation is highly contested and problematic. Citizen participation in Canada, as in other representative democracies, is intended to supplement representative governance. As such, citizens do not have authority over policy decisions and essentially perform an advisory role. As a democratic tool, participation is therefore a contradictory process in which the state encourages citizen to become involved but then leaves them dependent on government officials for access, information, and action (Woodford & Preston, 2011).

Three legal documents confirm the equality among Canadian citizens: (i) the Citizenship Act which provides that all Canadians, whether by birth or by choice, are entitled to the same rights, powers, and privileges and are subject to the same obligations, duties, and liabilities; (ii) the Canadian Multiculturalism Act which provides that the Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, color and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians; (iii) the Canadian Human Rights Act, and it was put in place to give effect to the principle that all individuals should have equal opportunities. In this Act, discrimination is prohibited on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, age, sex, marital status, family status, disability, and conviction for which a pardon has been granted (CMEC, 2008).

With regard to educational policy making, the Canadian constitution assigns education, with few exceptions, as a provincial responsibility with ultimate authority

residing with the provincial legislature. Thus, at one level it is possible to argue that 'the public' in this case consists of all provincial citizens eligible to vote and that their control is properly exercised through provincial elections. However, in exercising their constitutional authority in education, all provinces, including Manitoba, have created some form of local educational bodies, usually called school boards with legally defined powers, as mentioned, delegated to them by the province. In the last two decades most provinces, including Manitoba, have also legislated some requirements for School councils to exist at the individual school level, although their role has been largely advisory (Henley & Young, 2008). Historically, Canadian school boards have been regarded as democratically elected organizations which give the public a say in elementary and secondary education. School boards meet regularly throughout the school year and the public are often invited to attend these meetings (Robson, 2012).

Over time, Canadian public education has seen many shifts in terms of the size, structure and functions of school boards in response to changing economic, social and political developments, but for most of the twentieth century they remained strong and effective institutions of community voice and of the localism central to the democratic process. Over the last two decades every province, including Manitoba as mentioned, has engaged in some form of school board amalgamations as well as a centralization of control of public education through curriculum frameworks and province-wide student assessments. Most provinces have also witnessed the centralization of authority in important governance issues such as collective bargaining and educational funding away from local school boards to the provincial government (Henley & Young, 2008).

Currently school boards find themselves in a difficult and conflictual situation between strong centralized authorities of provincial governments and opposed decentralized pressures from public, parent councils, and site based management. Furthermore, they are faced with responsibility for setting school budgets at a time when the public expectations are very high yet provincial governments increasingly determine not only how much money is available but also how it can be used (Young,

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Levin and Wallin, 2008).

Municipal autonomy presupposes sufficient financial autonomy for municipalities to exercise their powers and satisfy their needs. In fact, power without the ability to finance is theoretical power at best. Financial responsibility must therefore balance the political role of the municipalities (L'Heureux, 1985). A fundamental problem facing local governance bodies' finances has been that the revenue sources under the control of municipalities have been increasingly inadequate in meeting their greatly expanded expenditures (Tindal & Tindal, 1995).

Prior to the 1930s, local governments both raised and spent more revenue than the provincial governments. By the 1980s, net expenditures per capita by local governments were about one third those made by provincial governments. As a result, the provincial governments' role grew most in areas of education, health and welfare. These functions have evolved from areas of predominantly local to primarily provincial responsibility (Kitchen & McMillan, 1985).

Conclusions

The study examined the educational policy making process in Canada in general, and in Manitoba in particular. Its purpose was to recognize the administration model of the public education systems and the extent to which public groups and individuals from different cultural backgrounds participate in the policy making process. The study shows that there is a historical and an important tool for the public to participate in educational policy making in Canadian provinces, which is the local school board. These democratically elected boards used to have some powers to play an active role in educational policy making process at the local level, and to respond to local and public needs. However, the powers of these bodies have declined, especially during the last two decades, which led to weakening the boards' ability to respond to the public needs and interests. There was a movement towards centralizing the educational decision making authority at the provincial level. As a result, the provincial departments of education became the major and the dominant educational policy maker. However, the Canadian model of educational administration is still a

decentralized one, as the education administration is completely a provincial responsibility without any meaningful intervention from the federal government

Recommendations

At a fundamental level, cultural diversity challenges the concepts, assumptions, and structure of the Canadian social policy framework, including conventional ideas of the need. In the developing neo-conservative/neo-liberal context, the idea of need is increasingly personalized and attached to individual problems and failings, in the tradition of the Poor Laws. An alternative and useful way to think about social policy and cultural diversity is related to the concept of 'thick' and 'thin' needs. A thin need is characterized as objective, universal, and abstract. Programs flowing from this idea are socially supported because of the presumed universality of the needs they were intended to meet. Thick needs, in contrast, represent needs within a particular cultural context (Graham, Swift, & Delaney, 2012).

Citizens from different cultural backgrounds, in any multicultural context, can participate in the policy making process in many ways. In a democratic country, people have a right to participate in issues affecting the public interest and the common good. The question is how to motivate people to participate. Some suggest that the principal of affected interest is a major issue in promoting citizen participation. According to this principal everyone who is affected by the decisions of a government should have a right to participate in that government in term of three criteria: (i) personal choice: It reflects the degree to which a person wants to be involved; (ii) competence: It suggests that some decisions are accepted because experts made them because experts made them; and, (iii) economy: It suggests issues of efficiency, rationality and preservation of scarce resources (Graham, Swift, & Delaney, 2012).

Smith (2003), in his work on public policy and public participation, provides an overview of some techniques for public participation in policy making, including:

- Publications: All consultations produce some type of published material, which may describe the process, define the problem, issue or situation; suggest

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options; or request direct feedback from readers on their views, interests or alternatives.

- **Open house:** An open house usually communicates information about a project or proposal through a series of displays. Staff supposes to be present to answer questions and provide clarification. Public are asked to register their views before leaving.

For stakeholder engagement, one technique is the public policy dialogue. It involves in-depth, detailed work with a variety of stakeholders in a committee or workshop format, usually to achieve consensus on diverse views, interests and values. A second technique is appreciative inquiry. It focuses on the positive aspects of a situation and builds on existing strengths. Appreciative inquiry is a very effective way to get people to think about their demonstrated abilities, instead of listing and dwelling on problems or challenges (Smith, 2003).

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