

The Lamar University Electronic Journal of Student Research  
Spring 2007

# **Religious Education in Government –Run Primary and Secondary Schools in Poland and Canada (Ontario and Quebec) – An International Focus**

**Teresa Ann Hughes, PhD**

**(First Recipient of PhD at PVAMU, December 2006)**

**Dissertation Chair: William Allan Kritsonis, PhD**

PhD Student in Educational Leadership

College of Education

Prairie View A&M University

Klein Independent School District

Klein, Texas

**Dr. Norman L. Butler**

Lecturer in English

AGH University of Science and Technology

Cracow, Poland

**Mary Alice Kritsonis, EdD**

**National Research and Manuscript Preparation Editor**

NATIONAL FORUM JOURNALS

Houston, Texas

**William Allan Kritsonis, PhD**

**Professor and Faculty Mentor**

PhD Program in Educational Leadership

Prairie View A&M University

Member of the Texas A&M University System

**Visiting Lecturer (2005)**

Oxford Round Table

University of Oxford, England

**Distinguished Alumnus (2004)**

Central Washington University

College of Education and Professional Studies

**David Herrington, PhD**

**Assistant Professor**

Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling

Prairie View A&M University

---

## ABSTRACT

**The purpose of this article is to compare the teaching of religion in government –run primary and secondary educational institutions in Poland and Canada (Ontario and Quebec). The theoretical framework for this work is supplied by the general idea that the school is an organization and social institution. It is concluded that religious instruction in schools is a contentious matter in both Poland and Canada.**

---

### **Purpose of the Article**

The purpose of this article is to compare religious instruction in government-run Polish and Canadian primary and secondary educational institutions. The comparison is limited to the school systems in Canada's two most populated provinces: Ontario and Quebec.

### **Primary and Secondary Education in Poland and Canada**

Unlike Poland, Canada does not have a national system of education each province and territory has its own system of schooling. One advantage of having separate school plans in a country as large as Canada is that regional needs are more likely to be dealt with. Conversely, a single system of schooling might strengthen Canadian identity.

Polish and Canadian educators are sensitive to the linguistic needs of minority groups. Generally speaking, the language of instruction in Polish schools is Polish, but there are provisions for Slovaks, Ukrainians, Jews, Germans, Byelorussians and Lithuanians to be taught all subjects in their own language (Janowski, 1992, p. 49). Likewise, "minority language education" (English or French) is provided for in Canada (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada).

Both Poles and Canadians are committed to the notion of compulsory education and public (state) schooling. Poles start school at age 7 and can leave at age 18; Canadians are expected to begin their studies generally between 5 and 7 years of age depending on the province or territory and remain in school until they are 16 or older (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada).

As a matter of fact, there are guarantees in both countries for private schools and special education.

Perhaps, the main feature of Polish and Canadian education respectively is: 1) the studying of West European languages at an early age<sup>1</sup> which are of benefit to Poles in the European Union and 2) religious tolerance (Johnson 1968, p. 5). For example, in some Canadian provinces, there are separate school systems based upon religious preference, Ontario and Saskatchewan.

## Motivation for the Study

The motivation for this work is Poland's deputy education minister's recent (October, 2006) call for a discussion about the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution in Polish schools (<http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20061014/scafp/polandeducationsciencereligion061014145504>)<sup>2</sup>. Mr. Mirosław Orzechowski is, of the opinion, that the 19<sup>th</sup> century British scholar's view is false. His remark underlines the conflict between religious and scientific explanations about the origin of man given to Polish students.

The theoretical framework for this work is supplied by the general notion of the school as an organization and social institution.

## Religious Instruction in Canadian and Polish Schools

In Poland, primary and secondary school students receive instruction in faith based religion or ethics (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51573.htm>)<sup>3</sup>. Parents can ask for instruction in any of the legally registered religions, and the instructors are paid by the Polish Government, (During the Communist Period religious education took place outside of the school system). Given that most Poles are Roman Catholics most of the classes in religion are taught by representatives of the Catholic Church: clergy and non-clergy.

Younger learners might find the study of religion difficult because teaching by subject does not take place in Polish schools until junior secondary school (Kucińska, 23, February, 2000).

In Ontario, there are publicly-funded public and Roman Catholic schools. Other Christian denominations and religions do not obtain such financing which is unfair ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_canada)). Government-funded faith based schools ought to be available to all citizens of Ontario, however, it might be difficult for educators to implement such a policy. Furthermore, parents are not required to send their children to Roman Catholic schools, and single faith religious education is denied to learners in public primary and secondary educational institutions (<http://christianity.ca/education/christian-schools/2003/06.003.html>).

An optional "course in ethics or religious culture" will take the place of religious instruction by 2008. That suggests that scientific (and not religious) explanations concerning the origin of man are important to educators in the Province of Quebec. Parents and Roman Catholic Church officials in the Province are understandably upset by the government's current program claiming that it undermines Quebec's Christian heritage.

Interestingly, relatively more learners (17%) attend private schools in Quebec than in any other Canadian province (<http://www.ourkids.net/quebec-private-schools.php>). This suggests that many parents are dissatisfied with their province's public educational system.

## Concluding Remarks

Religious instruction is a contentious issue in both Poland and Canada. Religion has not been taught to students in Quebec schools since June 2005 where Darwin's theory of evolution must be instructed to learners – even to those attending private educational institutions.

## Notes

1. Starting in the late 1940's, the Russian language was adopted as the primary foreign language to be instructed to all students from the age of 11 and upwards, regardless of the kind of institution (Janowski, 1992, 43). A "West European language" was offered as a "second foreign language" only to pupils attending full secondary school in other words, institutions leading to a school leaving certificate (Janowski, 1992, 43). From the 1989-90 academic year onward the learning of Russian ceased to be compulsory, and, at about the same time, the Polish government began to encourage the widespread teaching of West European languages in schools (Janowski, 1992, 50). Fifty-five new teacher training colleges have been opened throughout Poland in support of the government's policy (Janowski, 1992, 51). From 1991 to 1992 two foreign organizations endorsed this new training initiative by sending volunteers to Poland: 1) Solidarity Eastern Europe, a Canadian company and 2) the American Peace Corps. The author has first-hand knowledge about the activities of these organizations. In 1991 he was recruited by Solidarity Eastern Europe to teach English at The Technical University of Rzeszów, and while he was there he got to know one Peace Corps worker.
2. On 23 October, 2006, the author asked 33 of his students at AGH University of Science and Technology what they thought about Darwin's inclusion in the school curriculum. All of them agreed to it. That means that evolutionary theory is important. Nevertheless, teaching Darwinism might be disturbing to Polish learners given that most Poles (96%) claim to be Roman Catholics (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51573.htm>)
3. According to some of my students a choice was not available to them because they were not offered a course in ethics, and they felt pressured to attend religion classes.

## References

- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2005). *International religious freedom report-Poland*. Retrieved November 28, 2006, from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51573.htm>
- Christianity, CA (2003). *Religious freedom and education-The Bal case in Ontario*. Retrieved December 2, 2006, from <http://christianity.ca/education/christian-schools/2003/06.003.html>, Retrieved
- Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (1998). *Report on education*. <http://www.cmec.ca/reports/nec98>

Janowski A. (1992), Polish education: Changes and prospects. In Johnson, F. (1968) *Oxford Studies in Comparative Education*, 2(1). *A brief history of Canadian education* (pp. 41-55.5). Toronto, Canada: Mc Graw Hill Company of Canada.

Life Site (2005). *Quebec eliminates religious instruction in schools*. Retrieved December 1, 2006, from <http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2005/sep/05090903.html>

National Post (nd.). *Evangelical schools ordered to teach Darwin*. Retrieved December 1, 2006, from <http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=c5715990-a9eb-45f2-9c66-26d3ea3c56fa>

Our Kids (nd.). *Quebec private and independent schools*. Retrieved December 2, 2006, from <http://www.ourkids.net/quebec-private-schools.php>

The Warsaw Voice (2006). *Keep Darwin's lies out of schools: Education official*. Retrieved October 23, 2006, from [http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20061014/sc\\_afp/polandeducationsciencereligion\\_061014145504](http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20061014/sc_afp/polandeducationsciencereligion_061014145504)

Wikipedia (nd.). *Education in Canada*. Retrieved December 2, 2006, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_canada)

## **Interview**

Kucińska, Teresa, (MA), Deputy Director of the Department of Post-Primary Training and Permanent Education, Ministry of National Education and Sport in the Republic of Poland. Interviewed: 23 February, 2000 in Cracow