

Opposition to Reform

The Ontario Government recently gave school boards one hundred million dollars to buy textbooks. Yet the boards were not permitted to spend the money on phonetic readers or sequential math texts. Why?

The reason is that the province's largesse had strings attached — it could be spent only on approved Canadian texts. And, of course, there are no Canadian phonetic readers or sequential math texts in print.

Alert readers will be wondering why the Minister excluded non-Canadian texts. The decision was made, unfortunately, on the basis of political, not educational, considerations.

The Minister had in fact tried to expand the conditions of eligibility in the past, but he was attacked so savagely by opposition MPP's that he had no choice but to back down. The trouble with democracy is that governments have a tough time bringing in even the most beneficial reforms if the opposition parties take a notion to balk.

The irony is that, in preventing school boards from buying phonetic readers and sequential math texts, the opposition MPP's are actually making it more likely that disadvantaged children will fail in school.

A solid body of research confirms that whole language and child-centred learning are poison to poor kids. Without strong instruction, disadvantaged kids are likely to remain disadvantaged and class distinctions perpetuated.

It would be helpful if Ontario OQE members with Liberal or NDP MPP'S were to explain these issues to their representatives. If the opposition to American texts were withdrawn for a little while, allowing school boards to start purchasing American phonetic readers and sequential math texts, it wouldn't take long for Canadian publishers to jump on the bandwagon.

Forced to compete with American publishers, they would have to bring out better texts — or lose market share. Surely Canadian publishers are not so inept that they are in permanent need of protection?

Schools are not the only institutions that stand to benefit from competition!