

2008 Expert Roundtable on Canada's Experience with Pluralism

## **Educating for Pluralism: The Role and Limits of Schooling in Canada**

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### **Summary**

This paper examines the relationship between pluralism and public school education in Canada. The author considers three relevant aspects of the social mandate of schooling: production and reproduction of language and culture; selection and allocation of future human resources; and formal and informal socialization to shared values. In an ideal education system all three of elements of schooling's social mandate would be achieved. Minority and majority languages and cultures would be represented fairly, all students would access academic opportunities equally, and local and ethnic communities would feel comfortable with the school's values. The author considers the performance of schools in Canada through two issues: heritage language instruction and the accommodation of religion in schools. For both issues, school standards and practices vary significantly across the country. The results of these efforts are also mixed. The author highlights the need to balance respect for minority identities and cultures with an imperative to protect individual rights. While educating for pluralism is a work-in-progress in Canada, the country remains ahead of most other countries in this area.