“Let’s Keep Ontario a Province of Opportunity for All Kids:”

The Hall-Dennis Report, Ernie Checkeris, and the Question of Equality in Northern Ontario

Masters Essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts.

Department of History

Laurentian University

Sudbury, Ontario

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**Introduction**

On May 10, 1965, the Rolling Stones first recorded their soon-to-be number one hit “*(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction*,” meanwhile in Ontario, an education report was commissioned in the provincial legislature. Published in 1968, the report was officially titled *Living and Learning: The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario*, but quickly adopted the names of the chairmen, Lloyd Dennis and Emmett Hall, and became known as the Hall-Dennis Report. In accordance with the times, the final report would attempt to respond to the second verse of the Stone’s iconic song “and the man comes on the radio, He’s telling me more and more about some useless information, supposed to fire my imagination.” The members of the Hall-Dennis Committee believed that the education system was no longer satisfying the needs of Ontario citizens. They argued that traditional models of education were not working on this larger and more child-focused generation of students. The Rolling Stones’ hit had captured the mood of the largest generation of children in Canadian history as they grew dissatisfied with society. The Hall-Dennis Report sought to be the educational remedy for this growing discontent among the population of students in Ontario, and would mark a controversial phase in the history of the province’s education system. One member of the Committee, a businessman from northern Ontario named Ernie Checkeris, made sure his opinions were reflected in the Report and was deeply influenced by its progressive recommendations. This essay will demonstrate the impact of the Hall-Dennis report on Ernie Chcekeris' life in order to understand how he shaped the themes of multiculturalism, Indigenous rights and French-language schooling as they came to fruition in Ontario’s education system.

This paper will not assess the impact of the Hall-Dennis Report on the education system but rather explain how the Report was influenced by Checkeris and how his experiences on the Committee would reappear in other areas of his professional life. The first line of the Hall-Dennis Report explained that “the underlying aim of education is to further man’s unending search for truth. Once he possesses the means to truth, all else is within his grasp.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Ernie Checkeris also remembers Lloyd Dennis explaining that this sentence came with the warning for the committee members “to be candid and express your thoughts as you see the truth from your own experience.”[[2]](#footnote-2) This paper will demonstrate Ernie Checkeris’ own truth, as he dealt with several different educational and multicultural issues over the course of his professional career in northern Ontario. His truth was influenced by the general atmosphere of the late 1960s that produced the civil rights movement, Trudeaumania and the moon landings, but was nonetheless unique when compared to that of other intellectuals during this period, for it was also based on his past experiences. These influences would have different effects at various periods of Checkeris’ life, but his ultimate desire for Ontario’s society to become more equal and his attempts to pursue this aim will be explained in their historically specific context.

I will adopt the approach of intellectual history to describe the impact of Ernie Checkeris’ life in northern Ontario. Checkeris was an unique type of intellectual who was influenced by a variety of socio-economic factors that helped shaped his decisions towards education. However, he would continually prove throughout his fifty-year career in public education that ideas matter, and when put into action, can create significant change in people’s lives. However, the change caused by his decisions was, at times, not warranted or effective in implementing helpful polices for some minority groups. By implementing an intellectual history approach and examining how his ideas influenced real world action, this essay will explore the successes and failures of Ernie Checkeris’s philosophy in public education as he attempted to create his vision of equality. Checkeris was one of the first to advocate for Indigenous rights and multiculturalism policies, while at the same time ignoring attempts by French-language groups for more access to public schooling in their language.

Historian Josh Cole has found evidence of what he calls a unique type of “organic intellectual” who arose in this period, to act in opposition to settler colonialism and the unfair treatment of Indigenous peoples. Cole explains that these intellectuals arose from the “subaltern classes…[to] become cultural and political leaders in their own right by constructing what Nancy Fraser calls ‘subaltern counter public spheres’ in which ‘members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Cole’s description of an “organic intellectual” fits the ideological and social profile of Ernie Checkeris. As a Greek immigrant and businessman from northern Ontario, Checkeris can be viewed as an “subaltern class,” who stood up for Indigenous peoples and minority groups as he understood their needs. This perspective on Checkeris’ philosophy helps distinguish and contextualize the difficulties he would have in implementing reform for a variety of complex reasons.

To demonstrate how Ernie Checkeris’ ideas managed to impact Ontario society, I will rely on the methodological approach developed by S.F. Wise, A.B. McKillop and Terry Cook. In *Contours of Canadian Thought,* McKillop determines that in 1968, S.F. Wise made the first conclusions about Canada’s intellectual history in his article, “Sermon Literature and Canadian Intellectual History.” Wise wrote that “Canadian intellectual history must be concerned, almost of necessity, with the kinds of ideas that lie between the formal thought of the philosopher or the political theorist and the world of action, and probably closer to the latter.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Building from these ideas was Terry’s Cook influential article in 1980, “Nailing Jelly to a Wall: Possibilities in Intellectual history” which described the externalist perspective towards conducting this type of history. He wrote, “ideas are deemed significant according to their consistency, originality, or influence on subsequent ideas. In short, the externalist searches for the connection between thought and deed, between the ideas of a few people and the actions of many.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Checkeris’ life is the perfect candidate for this methodology, as he continually influenced the provincial government’s direction towards multiculturalism policies and Indigenous rights by serving as a private citizen on several different councils. However, Cook also cautions that “people do not react to raw events or cold facts, but rather their *perception* of those events and facts.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Checkeris’ perception of his impact on various groups and reality did not line up in several instances. Thus, this paper also will connect the links between Ernie Checkeris’ unique philosophy and the reality of his actions and decisions that would unfold over the course of his professional career.

In 2014, Ernie Checkeris attended the Canadian History of Education Association conference in Sudbury, Ontario, and spoke on a panel titled “The Hall-Dennis Report at 40: Timely, Time-Bound or Timeless?” along with other members of the committee. He said that “Hall-Dennis was the most wonderful experience I ever had” and fondly remembered working on the Report nearly fifty years after being first appointed.[[7]](#footnote-7) In numerous letters, speeches and written correspondence, Checkeris’ involvement with the Hall-Dennis Report stands out as his greatest educational achievement. In a speech to Widdefield Secondary School in North Bay, Ontario on the 29th of January, 1970, Checkeris attempted to summarize the efforts the Hall-Dennis members made in the creation of *Living and Learning*. He said in the process of making the Report:

They captured a mood, a conviction that transcended petty differences and individual bias. This mood stemmed from the idea that learning is a personal, and sensitive experience that has one supreme end – the attainment of those characteristics that are found in the noble and compassionate man. Small wonder then that our report is so preoccupied with learning experiences that arise out of exploration, discovery and individual purpose. Small wonder too, that they plead for a learning environment that is warm, exciting, provocative and empathetic. As a group of citizens, they rejected the traditional idea that school is a place of solemn, utilitarian purpose, and espoused the theory that a school is an arena where men of tomorrow come to search for the truth, to find and live by that conviction.[[8]](#footnote-8)

This paper will also explore why Checkeris became so fond of the Hall-Dennis Report and how it became the greatest experience of his professional life. Checkeris would go on to become chair of Ontario’s first Advisory Council on Multiculturalism, lead the first Task Force on Native Policy in Ontario, and chair the Rainbow District School Board before he retired in 2000. Throughout these occupations the impression of the Hall-Dennis Report and its recommendations played a significant role in making Checkeris’ decisions. This paper will demonstrate where those ideas became influential, and explain how Checkeris attempted to implement the Report’s most important goal, that of creating educational and social equality.[[9]](#footnote-9) This process was not always seamless and did not include the needs of Francophones in northern Ontario creating a major question with his version of equality.

**Chapter 1: Historiography of Education in Ontario, 1957-2016**

The history of progressive education in Canada has been examined by numerous scholars over the past five decades. Two periods of education reform have attracted the attention of most historians: first, the adoption of progressive curricula in Ontario and Alberta during the 1920s and 1930s; and secondly, the revival of progressive education pioneered by the Hall-Dennis Committee in Ontario during the 1960s. Both periods need to be fully understood to uncover the significant role played by Sudbury businessman, Ernie Checkeris, on the Hall-Dennis Committee. While there is no specific work that pertains directly to my topic, several other books will provide a basis for my research. The historiography for this paper will consist of national, provincial and localized studies of education. The authors of these books have provided arguments that shed light on Ernie Checkeris’ views towards several different issues. Checkeris was a product of his time and reflected the attitudes and perceptions of many Progressive Conservatives as well as his own personal biases towards education. His views regarding education for northern Ontario were incorporated into the Hall-Dennis Report, and, once contextualized, can help us understand the motivations for these sentiments. Checkeris’ life is also an excellent window into the historiography of education in Ontario as his actions inherently influenced the history of the province and affected his own career. The developments in the historiography of education largely represent his changing perspectives of the education system. He was a rookie trustee when the first history of education in Canada was published in 1957, *The Development of Education in Canada[[10]](#footnote-10).* By the time Checkeris was fighting for multicultural and First Nations rights, the first social histories concerning ethnicity were being published in the mid-1970s. In the late 1990s, scholars such as Carol Anne Wien, Curt Dudley-Marling, Jon Young and Robert J. Graham warned the various provincial governments about the dangers of adopting outcome-based learning and reverting to traditional methods of learning. In Sudbury, Checkeris decided against their judgment, and as chair of the Rainbow District School Board during these years helped implement the recommendations of the Mike Harris provincial government. In the final years of Ernie Checkeris’ life, several innovative works emerged from Theodore Christou, Kurt Clausen, Rosa Rosa Bruno-Jofré, George (Skip) Hill, Will Kymlicka, José Igatura, C.P. Champion and Steve Paikin who have offered new insights into the progressive theories of Ontario’s past. Checkeris’ work in education mirrored the larger historiography unfolding in the background, and this study will place his views on education in northern Ontario within the historical context of the last four decades of the twentieth century.

The first attempt at creating a national history of Canada’s education development was published in 1957 by C.E. Phillips. *The Development of Education in Canada* was a comprehensive work that began its study with the French Regime of 1604-1706 and traced the development of education in Canada throughout different provinces. Phillips demonstrates the significant changes over time with the scope, curriculum and practices of various Departments of Education in Canada. The encyclopedic nature of the work provides pictures, plenty of sources and detailed sections on topics such as “The Languages,” “Written Examinations,” and “Other Forms of Punishment.”[[11]](#footnote-11) I will refer to Phillips’ book to as a primary source to describe the nature of schooling before the implementation of the Hall-Dennis Report. Phillips concludes his study by offering some positive comments about the direction of education heading into the 1960s:

Achievements during the short period our history have been encouraging, to say the least. They should be even more impressive during the next stage of Canadian development. New understanding is being gained from psychological and sociological studies. New generations of better educated parents have a keener and more enlightened interest in the educative process. It is reasonable to expect that they will become more insistent on teachers of higher and higher ability. With such teachers we need not worry very much about what type of education thought and practice is better or in what direction education is likely to move. Better teachers, better young people, and better parents will give the only convincing answer to these constantly recurring questions.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Phillips would accurately predict that more interest into the educational process creates even more innovative approaches to teaching students in Canada. This process would unfold over the next ten years and culminate in the publication of the Hall-Dennis Report.

Robert Stamp’s instrumental study, *The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976*, focuses on Ontario’s schools since the post-Ryerson era all the way up to 1976. Published as part of the Ontario Historical Studies Series in 1982, the book was the first all-encompassing history specifically focusing on the developments of Ontario’s education system. Stamp traces the political, economic, and pedagogical changes of the education system over one hundred years. In his attempts to decipher the massive ideological and cultural changes that take place during this time, he invokes the metaphor of a pendulum.[[13]](#footnote-13) Stamp argues that a shift in ideology is the result of different pressures affecting the education system, including politics, budgetary restraints and two World Wars. Moreover, he demonstrates that schools in the 1950s were still conservative, despite the progressive reforms of the 1930s. He argues that the 1968 Hall-Dennis Report was the first significant shift towards this new progressive ideal. In this research essay, I am influenced by Stamp’s metaphor of the swinging pendulum to describe why progressivism took hold in the Department of Education during this period. In addition, I will make use of Stamp’s quantitative data on school attendance and the number of schools and teachers to help frame the development of education in the twentieth century.

Robert Stamp and Paul Axelrod have chronicled their experiences in Ontario schools during the 1950s, and I will rely on these personal accounts to frame the actual reality of schooling in this period. Stamp’s article “‘Growing Up Progressive?’ Part II: Going to High School in 1950s Ontario” dismisses the notion that Ontario schools were progressive in the 1950s because of the 1937 curriculum. Rather, Stamp suggests, a focus was on memorization and passing difficult exams because life was challenging and school should be too.[[14]](#footnote-14) Stamp also argues that schools seemed to exist in a vacuum, divorced from the outside world, as no current events were ever discussed in class.[[15]](#footnote-15) Axelrod’s article “Beyond the Education Debate: A Profile of Toronto Schooling the 1950s” echoes this sentiment. He went to a very conservative school and his most dominant memory is that of fear.[[16]](#footnote-16) He remembers the schools of the 1950s as orderly and closely relating to military discipline with strict corporal punishment.[[17]](#footnote-17) Axelrod stresses the influence of Christianity on the schooling system and how it left no acceptance for other cultures. He remembers as a Jewish student being worried he would forget one of the New Testament Biblical passages he was expected to memorize.[[18]](#footnote-18) Other cultures were expected to conform to English Canada’s dominant Protestantism that placed “honesty and Christian love” as a central tenant of the 1950 Hope Report on Education in Ontario.[[19]](#footnote-19) However, Axelrod is lenient to the instructors in charge, stating “merely coping with the influx of the baby-boom children, and recruiting teachers, consumed much of the administrators’ and educators’ time.”[[20]](#footnote-20) All the developments of the Hall-Dennis Report stood in contrast with the type of 1950s schooling described by Stamp and Axelrod. The justification for implementing this Report was to shift the Ontario school system away from those traditional models of learning to a more progressive ideal. Ernie Checkeris also must have understood the problems of the 1950s schools from a first-hand perspective as a student in Toronto, and it is interesting to speculate on his personal interests in serving on the Hall-Dennis Committee.

*How Schools Worked: Public Education in English Canada, 1900-1940* was published by R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar in 2012. Gidney and Millar narrow the focus of their study to the first half of the twentieth century. This book attempts to trace, in meticulous detail, the realities of the classroom. These two historians have been leaders in the field of Canadian history of education since the 1970s, and their most recent study encapsulates a wide variety of approaches and methodologies. This book probes questions of culture and identity, attempting to show why and how people became teachers, school administrators and students in Canada. The book extends over five hundred pages and each chapter focuses on one of many different themes, including money, patterns of attendance, the examination system and teachers’ work.[[21]](#footnote-21) Along with the earlier overview by Stamp, this wide-ranging study will provide the necessary background to the education system in Ontario before the development of the Hall-Dennis Report. The general structure and culture of schools in this period continued well into the post-war period. The developments of the 1960s would occur largely as a reaction to the methods of schooling between 1900 and 1940, and therefore this period needs to be fully understood.

Robert Gidney is on equal footing to Stamp and Axelrod in the historiography of education in Ontario. His award-winning work, *From Hope to Harris: The Reshaping of Ontario’s Schools*, covers the period between 1950 and its publication in 1999, during which the education system in Ontario underwent drastic changes. This book is rooted in an analysis of the economics and politics of the education system that began to feel the burden of the baby boom. Gidney argues that the rise in population in schools led to the consolidation of rural boards into larger bodies.[[22]](#footnote-22) He also concludes “the much-contested doctrines of progressivism had been promoted vigorously by curriculum guidelines, by the Hall-Dennis Report, and by the influence of senior ministry officials.”[[23]](#footnote-23) This book is the most systematic review of Ontario’s education system in the last fifty years, and I will refer it extensively as it provides most of the background on the political concerns of this period. Moreover, Gidney does an excellent job of contextualizing the different developments that led to the Hall-Dennis Report in Ontario.[[24]](#footnote-24) This work most closely aligns with my topic and I will use it to grasp a better understanding of the rise of progressivism and its ramifications throughout the education system.

The concept of progressivism in education is hotly debated and several authors' perspectives will be utilized to help frame the type of progressive ideology that Ernie Checkeris developed. Theodore Christou’s *Progressive Education: Revisioning and Reframing Ontario’s Public Schools, 1919-1942* was one of the first books that attempted to accurately describe what progressivism is and how it became popular in the interwar years. He analyzes two education journals written for teachers and illuminates three themes, which he determines are progressive ideas. He examines *The School* and *The Canadian School* journals to demonstrate the perspectives of teachers who were reading these documents. He concludes that the three terms – child study, social efficiency and social meliorism – can be traced throughout teachers’ journals during the decades following the First World War.[[25]](#footnote-25) Christou argues that the rise of these three perspectives is translated to the public and becomes a part of the progressive reforms of Ontario’s 1937 curriculum.[[26]](#footnote-26) This curriculum never comes to ultimate fruition in Ontario due to several factors, including the Second World War. However, this progressive 1937 curriculum is the foundation on which the progressive ideas of the 1960s develop. This book will be a useful tool in understanding the varied perspectives in implementing progressive education reforms nearly thirty years before the Hall-Dennis Report. Christou’s work, published in 2012, shortly before the death of Ernie Checkeris, reflects a new “revisionist” perspective that is emerging in this field.

Two recent articles by Lynn Lemisko and Amy von Heyking provide good examples of this new scholarship in the history of education. In identifying Ernie Checkeris’ progressive beliefs, I will rely on Lynn Lemisko’s article “Turning the Inside out: Presuppositions of Alberta Educational Leaders Promoting Progressive Reform,” published in 2016.[[27]](#footnote-27) Lemisko argues that differences in the definition of progressivism and the ways in which different political groups committed to the new movement allow for varying representations of the term.[[28]](#footnote-28) She traces the positive perspectives of conservatives, liberals and collectivists towards progressivism as it fit various needs for each group. This ideology, Lemisko maintains, thus allows extremely diverse groups to adopt progressivism for their own views. This intellectual historian’s viewpoint will clarify how Checkeris could fit progressivism into his unique political, business and northern Ontario perspective.

Amy von Heyking’s 2012 article, “Implementing Progressive Education in Alberta’s Rural Schools” describes the methods used to extend progressivism into all rural classrooms during the 1930s. Alberta had adopted an enterprise approach to schooling that reinforced project-based learning during the middle of the Great Depression.[[29]](#footnote-29) Other scholars have argued that these reforms were never seriously implemented in rural Albertan schools due to the large number of inexperienced teachers and low funding that was available in these areas.[[30]](#footnote-30) Von Heyking argued the exact opposite in this article, stating that “many rural teachers, though they faced considerable challenges in fully implementing progressive curriculum reforms, made use of teaching practices they saw as relevant and useful for the students in their classrooms.”[[31]](#footnote-31) She reverses the traditional view, suggesting that rural schools were better suited for progressivism reforms due to smaller class sizes and flexible school structures.[[32]](#footnote-32) This issue of implementing progressive education in rural schools would also affect Ernie Checkeris thirty years later. I will apply von Heyking’s perspective regarding the agency utilized by rural teachers to the attempts made by Checkeris to implement the Hall-Dennis Report in the remote schools of northern Ontario.

Kurt Clausen has begun to reexamine the authors, actors and influences of the Committee members as they worked to produce the Hall-Dennis Report. In the last four years, Clausen has published two significant articles based on the archival history of the Committee’s work. In “Ontario’s Plowden Report: British Influence on Canadian Education in the 1960s” Clausen traces the journey of some members of the Hall-Dennis Committee to Britain to learn more about progressive education. While he concludes that the Hall-Dennis Committee had already mastered the progressive material being taught to them in Britain, their visit reaffirmed the belief that they were on the right track.[[33]](#footnote-33) Clausen also argues that “their British counterparts inspired them to act: to include more radical recommendations than what they may have put forward had they not been emboldened by the weight of the empire.”[[34]](#footnote-34) In addition, this article provides the context and logistics of the Hall-Dennis Report’s inception, committee work and inspiration. While Ernie Checkeris never travelled to Britain, this article sparked my interest to examine the “tour files” in the Ontario Archives. I will utilize these files to show how Ernie Checkeris was inspired by his tour of northern Ontario to pursue some of the progressive recommendations laid out in the Hall-Dennis Report. Moreover, the rest of Clausen’s article has filled in the missing pieces of the Committee’s actual work and the major players.

Clausen’s subsequent article, “Educational Reform in Ontario: The Importance of Pleasant Avenue School, 1962-1975,” narrows the focus to one private progressive school located in Toronto. This work closely aligns with Deborah Gorham’s article, “The Ottawa New School and Educational Dissent in Ontario in the Hall-Dennis Era,” which focuses on an Ottawa progressive school during the same period. Both schools used “radical” methods of teachings that included team-teaching, flexible class structures, no corporal punishment and child-centred education.[[35]](#footnote-35) Both schools were funded by private money and operated as alternative options for upper-middle class parents. Gorham has direct experience in the Ottawa New School as her own child attended for the three years that it was open.[[36]](#footnote-36) The schools follow a similar trajectory, beginning in the 1960s with some support of visiting Hall-Dennis Committee members, then in the 1970s running out of money and closing their doors. These experimental private schools were the ultimate example of progressive education in actual classroom, and together these articles provide the context of what progressive Committee members were witnessing across Ontario as they tried to make recommendations for the Hall-Dennis Report.

The private progressive schools were much different than the typical early 1960s schools as described by Paul Axelrod and Robert Stamp. Axelrod specifically has explored the use of corporal punishment in this period and the reasons for its slow removal from the education system in his article, “No Longer a ‘Last Resort’: The End of Corporal Punishment in the Schools of Toronto.” The Hall-Dennis Report called for the removal of all corporal punishment from schools as it was the main technique used by “traditional” methods of learning to discipline a child. Three years later in 1971, the Toronto District School Board was the first region to abolish corporal punishment.[[37]](#footnote-37) However, it took until 2004 for the last school board to eliminate corporal punishment.[[38]](#footnote-38) Axelrod explains how some school boards rallied to save corporal punishment as they believed it promoted moral virtues for a strong Canadian society.[[39]](#footnote-39) Moreover, many teachers thought it was the only method of discipline that could make students behave, and, in rural areas, these problems could only have been exacerbated without fear of the “strap.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Although it is difficult to obtain accurate numbers regarding corporal punishment in schools, Axelrod concludes that in the 1960s, six percent of students received corporal punishment and “virtually every year, several students would receive the strap more than once.”[[41]](#footnote-41) I will use this article to frame the actual realties of schooling in this period and contextualize the recommendation of the Hall-Dennis Report to eliminate corporal punishment in Ontario’s schools.

For more general background information on the period of the Hall-Dennis Committee, there are detailed studies by Doug Owram and Steve Paikin. In *Born at Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom*, published in 1996, Doug Owram expertly details the complex history of the postwar years and of the 1960s in Canada. He attempts to follow this generation’s creation of its own identity, and in doing so greatly expands our knowledge of typical Canadians, and in particular of Canadian youth, during this period.[[42]](#footnote-42) Owram describes nearly every facet of the baby boom’s life cycle, and I will use his study throughout this paper for the large variation of statistics and information he has provided. Owram also describes the rise of progressivism in schools and the impact it had on the education system. He argues that since the baby boom’s inception, children and youth have become the focus of society. This child-centered society entered its teenage phase as parts of the baby boom “rebelled” in the 1960s, creating the well-known counterculture of this generation. With half the population in Canada under the age of twenty-one, Owram believes the focus had to be placed on the youth. Arguing that “schools reflected the aims, ideals and aspirations that support it” therefore, schools had to turn towards the more progressive education system.[[43]](#footnote-43) For these reasons, the progressivist recommendations, which focus entirely on child-centered learning, are at first heralded in the Hall-Dennis Report. However, Owram also comes to the same conclusions as other authors that “schools had to deal with masses of students who were captive by law until they reached age sixteen.”[[44]](#footnote-44) In addition, he discusses with the culture of the 1960s and its reflection in the schooling system, stating that “at times the rhetoric even tended towards a multicultural perspective, though the term had not yet been coined.”[[45]](#footnote-45) In my case study of Ernie Checkeris, I will analyze the emerging multiculturalist perspective of the 1960s. Owram’s contribution to this study is invaluable and an excellent history of this turbulent generation.

As education in Ontario is controlled by the provincial government, an understanding of the politics in this period also is useful. I will use the recently published biography on the life of Bill Davis by Steve Paikin to frame the political developments of the era. The provincial Progressive Conservatives never lost an election between the years of 1943 and 1985, earning the nickname of “The Big Blue Machine.”[[46]](#footnote-46) The elections of the premiers John Robarts in 1963 and later Bill Davis in 1971 are discussed in detail. Davis’s time as Minister of Education for Ontario from 1963 to 1971 cover the largest developments of the 1960s, such as the introduction of community colleges and French-language issues that erupted during this period. Bill Davis’ decision to enact the Hall-Dennis Committee is contextualized and his character behind other education decisions is explored. The politics are essential to understanding the reasons why progressivism caught on at this time, as the Progressive Conservatives had a strong majority government with excess cash to spend on education. Paikin writes that “the 1960s were a new decade of seemingly infinite possibilities, and both Robarts and Davis had a goal to make Ontario a laboratory of all sorts of education experiments and investments.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Paikin also explores Davis’s limited involvement with the Hall-Dennis Committee and the hostilities that developed between Lloyd Dennis and the Premier.[[48]](#footnote-48) This work is an important piece of the puzzle in contextualizing the early support and subsequent dismal of the Report by the Ontario government.

There were several critics of the Hall-Dennis Report and their perspectives need to be explained to contrast the highly utopian imagery and writing of this period. One of the largest critics of the Hall-Dennis Report’s recommendations was Dr. James Daly, a McMaster University history professor. In 1969, Daly published a small book *Education or Molasses: A Critical look at the Hall-Dennis Report* which became a large commercial success.[[49]](#footnote-49) The first page is a scathing review of the Hall-Dennis Report as “an assault on civilization as we know it.”[[50]](#footnote-50) Daly dismisses the Report as being “a bucket of molasses, sticky sentiment couched in wretched prose.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Paul Bennett’s recent article, “Up Against ‘Edutopia’: Dr. James Daly’s Crusade against the Spectre of Progressive Education,” frames the arguments in a more friendly and historically correct context. Bennett’s article argues that Daly “crystallized the gathering forces of resistance” and contends that he was a traditional conservative educator who wanted to “conserve and uphold the ideal of producing a truly educated person.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Moreover, Bennett captures the reaction of several competing stakeholders to the introduction of the *Report* and its at first positive, and then by 1970 largely negative reception. Bennett presents Daly’s most significant problem with the education system: “a large centralized, uniform system of public education, it is becoming increasingly clear cannot be responsive to the different demands and needs of the individual parents and students.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Bennett's article will be instrumental in viewing the opposite perspective of Ernie Checkeris and the comments that critics levelled at the Report. Moreover, Bennett provides insight into a period of hostilities that erupted between different education philosophies.

Invoking Robert Stamp’s image of the pendulum, in the 1990s the tide of education swung back towards the “traditional” model of schooling. Ironically, under the same Progressive Conservative banner that pushed for the Hall-Dennis Report during Bill Davis’s tenure, the Mike Harris government attacked the remnants of progressive education, introducing sweeping changes to centralize schooling and mandate standardized tests. Dr. Daly had warned about a uniform and centralized system that could fit parents’ needs, however this system in the late 1990s emerged from faith in a traditional style of education which emphasized accountability above all else. Carol Anne Wien and Curt Dudley-Marling explained the problems with Ontario’s new education system in 1998 in the article “Limited Vision: The Ontario Curriculum and Outcomes-Based Learning.” They argue that standardized tests would become the curriculum and tests dehumanized the ability to learn.[[54]](#footnote-54) The outcome based learning that needs to be accountable produces students who place too much emphasis on narrowly defined skills and cannot learn new complex ideas.[[55]](#footnote-55) As a result of these factors, students would see no value in learning something for one test, and teachers became efficiency experts with little motivation for learning outside the test.[[56]](#footnote-56) The province of Manitoba also went through similar changes to their education system in the 1990s. Jon Young and Robert Graham mirror the sentiment of other critics in “School and Curriculum Reform: Manitoba Frameworks and Multicultural Teacher Education,” published in 2000. They agree that the implementation of outcomes based learning and standardized testing produces terrible results.[[57]](#footnote-57) However, they push the argument further, explaining that standardized tests do not account for the “different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to write these tests.”[[58]](#footnote-58) Thus, teachers and students who come from multicultural backgrounds are at an immediate disadvantage, in spite of the fact that the education department of Manitoba adopted an official policy regarding diversity in 1995, stating that the system “is a mosaic of people with a diversity of cultures, languages, religions and other characteristics.”[[59]](#footnote-59) The authors argue that standardized tests inherently work against this diversity statement, yet the education department has continually given these examinations every year. I will use these two articles in my conclusion to frame the developments since the 1960s and provide background to demonstrate how Checkeris dealt with Mike Harris’ reforms of the 1990s.

Ernie Checkeris represented multicultural views in many aspects of his life and this will be one of the fundamental perspectives addressed in the paper. However, his perception of the term was contextualized in the Progressive Conservative mandate of the 1960s, which was recently explained by Rosa Bruno-Jofré and George (Skip) Hill in 2011.[[60]](#footnote-60) Bruno-Jofré and Hill’s article “Changing Visions of Excellence in Ontario School Policy: The Cases of *Living and Learning* and *For the Love of Learning”* contends that the version of multiculturalism enacted by members of the Hall-Dennis Committee was inherently flawed. They argue that the Report pushed all multicultural attempts through the binational version of Canada, thereby leaving out the “distinctiveness of the needs of different groups in society, for instance, women of colour, aboriginal peoples, and so on”.[[61]](#footnote-61) Moreover, Will Kymlicka has explained in, “Testing the Liberal Multiculturalist Hypothesis: Normative Theories and Social Science Evidence” that there are significant differences in how multiculturalism was viewed by various minority groups.[[62]](#footnote-62) Checkeris was a product of his time and these often conflicting views on multiculturalism in the 1960s need to be fully understood to analyze his perspective on these issues.

One facet of Ernie Checkeris’ multicultural approach clearly is reflected in the issue of funding French-language schools in northern Ontario. Matthew Hayday’s 2001 article, “Confusing and Conflicting Agendas: Federalism, Official Languages and the Development of Bilingualism in Education Program in Ontario, 1970-1983,” focuses on the issues related to development of French-language schools. Hayday explains that the Symons Commission had shown that federal money that was supposed to be going to French-language instruction of minority students was being diverted to anglophone second language instruction.[[63]](#footnote-63) Thus, the federal money in Ontario was going to benefit anglophone students to learn a second language while francophone minority students did without quality education in their first language. This issue erupted in Sturgeon Falls in 1972, when the 87 percent majority francophone population had to settle for a bilingual school due to resistance of the anglophone school board of North Bay.[[64]](#footnote-64) Hayday does an excellent job in demonstrating the variety of opinions on the issue from trustees, school administrators and the local population to encapsulate this tense period in Ontario’s education history. This article will frame Ernie Checkeris’ perspective towards French-language issues throughout Ontario during the 1970s. Moreover, it will provide information on the background and important players, leading up to the eruption of hostilities throughout the 1970s and the slow process of providing francophone education to Ontario.

As evidenced by the history above, Ontario was in a period of massive transformation after 1960 which occurred because of complex intellectual changes that transpired simultaneously across the province and country. C. P. Champion’s *The Strange Demise of British Canada, The Liberals and Canadian Nationalism, 1964-1968* demonstrates that although Ontario was changing, the region “did not seek to betray or abandon their British Heritage so much as to assign to it a new and less dominant role in national life.”[[65]](#footnote-65) He explains that English Canadians were still clinging to “Britishness” and it continued to play a significant role in their lives in a variety of ways including their national flag.[[66]](#footnote-66) José E. Igartua agrees in *The Other Quiet Revolution, National Identities in English Canada, 1945-1971* that English Canadians underwent an unnoticed but similar revolution to that of Quebec in the 1960s.[[67]](#footnote-67) However, Igatura believes that as a result of this revolution, “the British definition of Canada was quickly discarded” rather than held on to.[[68]](#footnote-68) Igatura also focuses on the Canadian flag debate arguing the new flag demonstrated that “Canada was no longer to be defined by its mother countries, but a new definition of Canada had yet to emerge.”[[69]](#footnote-69) These perspectives will help frame Checkeris’ position on the complex intellectual debates that occurred in the search for a Canadian identity.

Northern Ontario represents a unique culture compared to that of the rest of the province, and I will consult A *Vast and Magnificent Land*, published by Matthew Bray and Ernie Epp in 1985, to understand the realities of life in northern Ontario. This book is a collection of essays by various scholars on important themes such as mining, transportation or “the people and the place.”[[70]](#footnote-70) The book also contains a large amount of information regarding the demographics of the area and the unique northern culture that develops.[[71]](#footnote-71) The percentage of francophones who settled in this area is markedly higher than anywhere else in the province except in its eastern tip, contributing to the region’s diversity and bilingual nature. Since Ernie Checkeris was the only member of the Hall-Dennis Report to live in northern Ontario, he was the sole representative of these unique views. Therefore, northern Ontario’s history needs to be examined in this paper to determine Checkeris’ voice, which was inherently shaped by his regional surroundings.

The entirety of work published in this field occurred within the lifetime of Ernie Checkeris. His career as a public servant and school trustee encapsulates the main developments in the field and reflected many of his own perceptions towards education in the province. The “founding fathers” of Stamp, Gidney and Axelrod have built the base with massive works that cover the entire history of Ontario’s education system. However, there has been an increasing rise in the last five years towards a reexamination of progressive education. Fueled by scholars such as Christou, von Heyking and Lemisko, revisionist histories have attempted to show the actual realties of how schooling was practiced. Framing the entire picture is Owram’s aptly titled *Born at the Right Time* which summarizes the 1960s in detail and provides clues into the child-centered generation. Clausen narrows the focus back to the Hall-Dennis Report, while Rosa Bruno-Jofré and George (Skip) Hill provide insight into contemporary views of multiculturalism. These authors establish the educational environment of the 1960s of which Ernie Checkeris was a part. The articles by Matthew Hayday Paul Bennett, C.P. Champion and José Igatura, contextualize the difficult periods of Ernie Checkeris’ life as he dealt with the French-language issue and the fallout of the Hall-Dennis Report. The concerns regarding the changes of the 1990s expressed by Wien, Dudley-Marling, Young and Graham were echoed by Checkeris in his later life, and I will utilize them to make conclusions about our current system. Now that the only Hall-Dennis Committee member representing northern Ontario has passed away, this research paper attempts to contribute to the next development in the historiography of education.

**Chapter 2: Ernie Checkeris’ Cultural Influences**

The Hall-Dennis Report claimed that the cultural environment is essential to the development of any child in Ontario. The authors wrote: “to attempt to educate someone without some awareness of the nature of society and its cultural values would be totally unrealistic.” Inherently, these cultural values will “influence the climate in which the education of Ontario’s children takes place.”[[72]](#footnote-72) This section of the paper will deal with the cultural values, influences and perceptions that created Ernie Checkeris’ philosophy. It would be impossible to write this paper without explaining his deeply-rooted connection to his Greek heritage and the day-to-day cultural influences that affected him in northern Ontario. These were guiding forces in his life and inherently shaped his perspective towards education in the province.

Ernie was the son of Greek immigrants who were given the last name of “Checkeris” when they arrived in Toronto as refugees in the early 1920s. His parents had become refugees during the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1923 as Turkish forces took control of the Greek state of Anatolia.[[73]](#footnote-73) After the conflict was over, an estimated 264,000 Greeks and another 2.1 million Armenians had been killed by Turkish forces for ethnic or religious reasons.[[74]](#footnote-74) The conflict also forced the rest of the Greek citizens living in Anatolia (including Checkeris’ parents) to be exchanged for the same number of Turkish citizens, thereby creating thousands of refugees who were forced to flee their homeland. Checkeris was aware of these atrocities and later wrote an entire chapter in his memoir recounting the events that occurred in his parent’s hometown. The chapter in his book in entitled “Kataklysmos (Cataclysm)” and the impact of this event would influence his views towards minorities.[[75]](#footnote-75) He understood that dividing people along linguistic, racial, ethnic or religious lines could cause horrific atrocities to unfold and was extremely thankful his family had escaped this region of the world. His views towards incorporating, rather than segregating minorities, were deeply influenced by his parent’s horrific accounts of ethnic cleansing.[[76]](#footnote-76)

Despite his parent’s tough life as Greek immigrants in a new world, Checkeris fondly remembered his childhood in numerous speeches and papers, as well as throughout his self-published memoir. The working-class Greek community of Toronto and his parents’ regular lessons about life formed Checkeris’ cultural foundation. In one speech in 1975 to the Prince Edward Island Annual Education Conference, he stated, “I was born and raised in this country – but my parents are Greek. They came here to seek a better life in a new country – a free country in comparison to their own – a country with a future. I was born in beautiful downtown Toronto, where kids like me were foreigners and more often than not had to put up their fists to hold their own in a hostile environment.” And then penciled in the bottom of the speech, he wrote that his parents instilled into him the belief that “you must put something back, not just take! It was cheap rent to live in a free land.” Checkeris described the impact his immigrant parents made on his life, explaining, “One can only wonder what our lives would have been had our parents decided to settle, or be forced to settle in some other region in the world… I believe that our world as children growing up in English Toronto, and being raised in a Greek home, influenced our thoughts, ambitions and our lives.” This cultural influence was firmly etched onto Checkeris’ mind and he utilized this perspective in many different aspects of his professional life. He felt privileged to enjoy the many freedoms that were provided to him and worked tirelessly to realize his vision of equality in an effort to give back to the country that had provided his family with so much. These values were used as guiding principles throughout his life and a lens through which he would later perceive the struggles of other groups of immigrants in the Sudbury region.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Northern Ontario also played a major factor in the perspective Ernie Checkeris would develop towards education. After moving to Sudbury in 1945, to work as a manager of a local hardware company, he immediately gained the position of School Trustee. He was not a typical “outdoorsman” but enjoyed the natural beauty of the area and its collection of plentiful trees for his wood carving and artwork. He never moved south of Sudbury for the rest of his life.[[78]](#footnote-78) Northern Ontario has a unique culture when compared to the southern regions of the province. The isolated distance between city centres, scattered yet small population and harsh winters creates a different type of mentality, perceptions and experiences. In *A Vast and Magnificent Land,* Matt Bray and Ernie Epp suggest that northern Ontario citizens “perhaps because of deliberate choice, or perhaps simply because of historical accident, ethnic groups gravitated to particular communities and to particular types of work.”[[79]](#footnote-79) In Sudbury, a diverse group of immigrants which included Ukrainians, Italians, Finns and Greeks settled in the area during the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, northern Ontario included a significant population of French Canadians. Bray and Epp write: “French Canadians, who had gradually moved westward from Quebec, were located mainly in the lumbering, mining, and agricultural communities around Cobalt, North Bay, Sturgeon Falls, and Sudbury, bringing to Northeastern Ontario the vital duality characteristics of Canada at large.”[[80]](#footnote-80) The region’s many ethnic, cultural and regional differences continued to climb as more immigrants settled following the end of the Second World War. This significantly increased the population in the years between 1951 and 1961 when the population rose 26 percent to 722,000.[[81]](#footnote-81) In addition, the growing economy and desire for natural resources following the war, allowed the local mining companies to boom, increasing the workforce to 20 percent of the total population.[[82]](#footnote-82) Bray and Epp make this decisive comment on the nature of northern Ontario population: “its cultural diversity was strengthened in these years as the numbers of Ukrainians, Finns, Poles, Italians, Scandinavians, Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Dutch, and others swelled to about 30 percent of the total population. The remaining population was 42 percent British and 28 percent French, making Northern Ontario a replica-in-miniature of the Canadian mosaic and distinguishing it markedly from the rest of the province.”[[83]](#footnote-83) Choosing to live in this unique and culturally diverse area allowed Ernie Checkeris to develop progressive ideas towards multiculturalism that he would rigorously defend throughout his career. Checkeris also became a major policy advocate for anything related to the northern Ontario education system, and would continually argue for better schooling in the north during his time on the Hall-Dennis Committee.

From this culturally diverse and prosperous area Ernie Checkeris was highly cognizant of his privileged place in the world. His memoir repeats the title at the end of each chapter *Thanks Be To The Gods!* as a way to demonstrate his thankfulness for his good fortune in being able to live and work in a place such as Canada that was completely different from what his parents had left in Asia Minor.[[84]](#footnote-84) Ernie Checkeris embraced this background and used it to influence the work of the Hall-Dennis Committee and several other areas of his professional life. This perspective helped him with numerous decisions regarding multiculturalism and Indigenous rights, but as I will argue below, it also caused him to be unsympathetic to the implementation of French-language rights.

**Chapter 3: The Hall-Dennis Report: A Defining Moment in Ernie Checkeris’ Thought**

The members of the Hall-Dennis Committee adopted the view that a new age was upon them, characterized by rapid economic, technological and social change. The most important part of this new age was the ability to find and organize knowledge rather than just memorize material, therefore the fundamental purpose of school was to learn how to learn. Subsequently, they believed that children learn at different speeds, and there must be unique personal experiences that meet the needs of individual children as they progress. These beliefs culminated in the idea that all children are created equal and should all be given equal access to educational opportunities. Public schooling reflects, as Doug Owram explains, “the aims, ideals and aspirations of the society that supports it.”[[85]](#footnote-85) In the decade of the 1960s, children became the main priority of Canada’s society, as the largest generation of students in history entered the public education system. For those who grew up as part of the baby boom, Owram claims, “nothing here was conscious on the part of the children. They just lived in a world where they, collectively, if not individually, counted for a great deal.”[[86]](#footnote-86) Thus, educational practice changed to reflect this child-focused society, ushering in a new era of new progressive recommendations for Ontario’s schools.[[87]](#footnote-87) These ideas were formulated into the Hall-Dennis Report, more formally titled the *Living and Learning* document. Published in 1968, the Report was a product of the time, with colorful utopian images that called for sweeping reforms of Ontario’s education system to fit this new progressive model, one where the students were at the centre of the system and they could choose what and how to learn.

By the mid-1960s, Ernie Checkeris and other influential members of Ontario’s education community had adopted the ideas encapsulated in the philosophy of progressivism, and progressive education was the product. The Ontario government had first attempted to implement “progressive” practices in the 1937 revision of the curriculum, including the ability of students to have choice in their selection of classes in the upper years of high school. osa Christou argues that “in many respects progressivist thinking was a manifestation of existential angst, global warfare, mechanization, urbanization, immigration, depression and a multitude of developments in technology, communication and transportation have wrought great change on the world, rendering it almost unrecognizable.”[[88]](#footnote-88) This social context was extremely similar to that of the 1960s, except Ontario was now facing the largest period of economic growth, instead of a major depression. Like any philosophical term, there are several interpretations as to what it means to be “progressive” in regards to education. Therefore, it is difficult to define progressive philosophies as there are several different meanings attached to the term “progressivism.” Further making the definition of progressive ideology confusing is Lynn Lemisko’s and Christou’s assessment that various groups adopted the term “progressive” to fit different individual needs depending on the varying historical context.[[89]](#footnote-89) With these concerns in mind, Christou argues that “progressivist is a descriptor for the language and ideas of progressive education; it refers to arguments that schools need to provide individualized instruction, opportunities for active learning, and knowledge or experiences relating to contemporary life outside of the schools. The term relates to matters of pedagogy and rhetoric, not political or ideological trends of progressivism writ large in provincial or national contexts.”[[90]](#footnote-90) This definition encapsulates the term that was still present in the 1960s and will be utilized as the definition of progressive philosophy in this essay.

The Hall-Dennis Report was published in an era of stable governance and significant economic prosperity, which allowed for more innovative approaches to the education system. By 1965, the Ontario Progressive Conservatives had acquired the nickname of “The Big Blue Machine,” after winning seven straight provincial elections.[[91]](#footnote-91) John Robarts led the provincial government and allowed the Minister of Education and soon-to-be Premier, William Davis, full control of the Ministry of Education. Steve Paikin writes in the latest biography of Davis, that he “loved and cared about education. It would turn out to be the only cabinet job he would ever want or have, and he would have it for more than eight years.”[[92]](#footnote-92) Davis’ love for education translated into increased spending on education throughout his term, and research into different methods of instruction. This allowed the twenty-one members of the Hall-Dennis Committee to spend three years exploring nearly every aspect of the education system.

In the summer of the 1965, Ernie Checkeris was working as the General Manager of Wahnapitae Lumber Company, while also serving as the local school Trustee. He had been involved with education since the mid-1940s, when he had helped a school stay operational in Dryden and had been convinced to run for the open Trustee position. He maintained a local Trusteeship until his retirement in 2000, and by the mid-1960s was representing Sudbury. His twenty-year experience as a Trustee by the age of forty, and experience in the world of business, earned him the ability to chair Sudbury’s first Select Committee on Youth in 1965. This Committee made several recommendations that would improve the lives of youths living in Sudbury, including increasing funding to various programs and creating additional resources for children. Checkeris’ work on the Youth Committee made his name more prominent in the local community, and his background allowed him to become an emerging educational resource for the region.

Ernie Checkeris himself believed that his involvement with the Ontario Jaycees was the reason he was invited to serve on the Hall-Dennis Committee. The Jaycees is a worldwide youth organization that provides professional leadership skills to young adults by pairing them with experienced community members.[[93]](#footnote-93) In the early 1960s, Checkeris was serving as President of the Ontario Jaycees Chapter, advising youth on a variety of business and professional concerns. In *Thanks Be To The Gods!* Checkeris recounts the story of meeting William Davis after his work on the Sudbury Youth Committee and his attempts to entice the Premier into helping the Ontario Jaycees program. He writes “At the time I was president of the Ontario Jaycees, I had convinced the Ministry of Education to allow the Ontario Junior Chamber of Commerce to use the Lake Couchiching Leadership Camp near Orillia, for a long weekend training session in May.” The Premier joined the session, as he enjoyed the type of work the Ontario Jaycees were doing, and decided to stay for dinner and talk with over 140 young men from across the province. Davis also made a short speech stating: “I listened to the advice at one of your sessions that said ‘make your point quickly, and sit down!’ I am impressed with what you are doing here,” Davis said, and he sat down. After dinner, the executives continued to talk, and two weeks later Ernie Checkeris was invited to serve on the Hall-Dennis Committee.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Ernie Checkeris was an “outsider” when he first joined the Hall-Dennis Committee but soon came to remember this period in his life as one of most important in his career. At Queen’s Park, he felt even more like a foreigner, admitting that he sat with another member as they “were the only persons on the Committee with a high school grade 12 standing. All the others were PhD’s, Masters of Education, etc, etc.”[[95]](#footnote-95) Checkeris was also an “outsider” in the sense that he was a businessman on a committee intended to advise the provincial government on educational matters. Most of the other members of the Committee were comprised of people who had held full-time positions as former teachers, principals and administrators. The final piece that made Checkeris stand out was that he was the son of Greek refugees when most of the Committee consisted of Canadians without ethnic minority ties. He was cognizant of his strange situation and later wrote: “It seemed fair that I hit it off with a Steelworker Unionist, who was a Vice-President of the Ontario Federation of Labour, and editor of *The Miner’s Voice*, Mike Fenwick…As well, Mike was of Ukrainian parents and I of Greek refugees. We had much to talk about.” He maintains these differences were quickly pushed aside, however, and the Committee members were able to “hone our truth, and clarify what some of the complex briefs really meant.”[[96]](#footnote-96)

Two major themes are clear in the documents when Ernie Checkeris’ contributions towards the Hall-Dennis Report are analyzed. The first major theme is his advocacy of any issue related to northern Ontario. He took it upon himself to constantly defend or ask for more resources for the northern schools. This culminated in two separate trips made by members of the Hall-Dennis Committee. The first trip involved all members of the Committee and they were invited to Checkeris’ hometown of Sudbury, to interview students at a nearby school. The second trip was a “northern tour,” which Checkeris helped organize, that viewed schools in Chapleau, Ontario. He wrote notes on this trip and compiled a comprehensive report on the lackluster conditions in the area.[[97]](#footnote-97) The other major theme that emerges from Checkeris’ documents is the idea of equality for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity or religion. He got into several arguments over the true definition of equality, and over the rights of Indigenous children in particular, but this devotion to equality would hold true throughout the duration of the Committee and later in his professional career.

Ernie Checkeris’ utilized his position in Sudbury to influence the direction of the Hall-Dennis Committee by inviting members to northern Ontario helping solidify their opinions in real world scenarios. In December 1965, Justice Emmett Hall asked Ernie Checkeris to organize a meeting with local students and members of the Committee to “discuss the educational programmes in which they are enrolled.”[[98]](#footnote-98) Between the 18th and the 19th of January, 1966, all members of the Committee travelled to a school in Coniston, near Sudbury, to hear the aims and objectives of the education system in the eyes of actual students. It was Checkeris’ idea to interview students in the classroom and he offered the location of Sudbury as the place to conduct these recorded sessions.[[99]](#footnote-99) They attempted to create a somewhat formal study of the aims and objectives of students by asking them questions in a group setting. The interview was captured in over four hours of audio recordings, and was conducted with parents, teachers and students. Kurt Clausen has studied a similar trip that members of the Hall-Dennis Committee conducted in the summer of 1966 in Britain.[[100]](#footnote-100) Clausen arrived at the conclusion that the tour “validated many of the conclusions that they had already reached” as the members saw progressive practices in action. This reaffirmation allowed the members to make bolder claims once the Hall-Dennis Report was published, as they believed it was the right method of improvement.

The interviews at a local school in Sudbury clearly demonstrate the progressive perspective of the Committee and their attempts to view the reactions of students, parents and faculty as they presented these ideas. The interviews in Sudbury seem to have reaffirmed the beliefs of the Hall-Dennis members, as a laid-back and responsive atmosphere greets them in the schools. When the topic comes to homework, for instance, a student says, “I don’t think we should have homework because we do enough work in school, and in our classes we have a lot of spares and we do our work in class, besides when our fathers go to work and come home from the mines and do their day’s work, they don’t have to do anything extra,” provoking the parents, teachers and members of the committee into laughter.[[101]](#footnote-101) Another instance of this relaxed atmosphere occurs when a student reverses the interview and asks one of the Committee members about the sensitive issue of strapping students as punishment in classrooms, again erupting the audience into laughter.[[102]](#footnote-102) The audience agrees with most of the students who want the strap removed from classrooms, as one student stated: “I think the teacher should be more of an understanding parent to the pupil rather than punishing them.”[[103]](#footnote-103) The light-hearted reception and acceptance of the progressive idea of “no homework” and “no strapping of students” in a working-class mining town in northern Ontario would have affirmed to the members that they were on the right track. The interviews convey the spirit of the times, as more student-focused practices are suggested and approved by students and teachers alike. One Committee member asked: “grownups are the only people we have heard from so far… so do grades six, seven, eight students actually like school?”[[104]](#footnote-104) Gathering the input of students to make decisions regarding their education is one of the foundations of child-centered learning and the members were clearly trying to implement this idea. The Committee also asked students about the most “boring subject in school:” history.[[105]](#footnote-105) The students recommended several progressive solutions such as using movies and class discussions, and making history more relevant to their lives by learning about how societies were created rather than memorizing facts.[[106]](#footnote-106) This marked a shift away from the traditional model of rote memorization into a more effective and interesting form of active learning. In addition, students provided examples, such as having an interest in the justifications for the Second World War but the curriculum focused on the “old kinda history” that was “500 years ago” and did not have relevance in their lives.[[107]](#footnote-107) Ernie Checkeris would have had evidence from these interviews that his local and future constituents were in favour of moving towards progressive practices, affirming his belief in the Committee and the Report’s worth.

The second trip to northern Ontario in the winter of 1966 involved a contingent of members being sent to Chapleau, Ontario to investigate the conditions in the local school. Ernie Checkeris was the member who compiled the report of the visit, and his results were presented to the larger Committee at one of the main Hall-Dennis meetings. In addition to the Chapleau visit, between the 20th and the 25th of February, 1966, Checkeris travelled throughout the north taking detailed notes on problems that arose in these areas. In his report on the Chapleau tour**,** he noted some of the major disadvantages of students in the north, including poorly qualified teachers, outdated facilities, expensive school materials and long travel distances to school. Checkeris wrote to the Hall-Dennis Committee in 1966:

The problems of remote schools are not new nor, will it be easily resolved. Our changing society demands more skill and educational levels. Unless equal opportunity is provided for these young people the inequalities that we have observed will create additional problems and loss of human resources. Money alone is not the answer; the young people must be trained to live a useful constructive and happy life. It is our desire that the students we are educating today will some way be able to overcome the problems and difficulties encountered by their parents in these remote areas.[[108]](#footnote-108)

This quote comprised the last paragraph of his report to the Hall-Dennis Committee and indicates a significant statement of Ernie Checkeris’ philosophy.

For Checkeris, advocacy for northern Ontario was linked closely to his larger commitment to equality in education. His knowledge of northern Ontario’s schooling problems was apparent, but his desire for all students to access equal educational opportunities regardless of their location was his ultimate dream. He recommended that teachers with lower qualifications be paid to take a leave of absence to complete a university degree. In addition, he wanted to incentivize teachers to teach in northern areas and establish larger school boards to “loan teachers to remote schools without loss of pay or seniority.”[[109]](#footnote-109) These recommendations regarding teachers were not included in the Hall-Dennis Report but were realized through various pieces of legislation introduced by the Davis government within the next five years. Another recommendation made by Checkeris regarding northern Ontario students, however, did appear in a slightly different form in the final Report. His first proposal concluded that “there is a need to broaden the student’s outlook and to expand his awareness of people and life. There must be an opportunity, as part of his education, to see how industry and society exits outside of his immediate environment.”[[110]](#footnote-110) Checkeris recommended that all students in grades six, seven and eight have planned excursions to southern Ontario, and that they be exposed to educational radio and television to include “regular academic work, travelogues and how industry operates.”[[111]](#footnote-111) The Hall-Dennis Report would recommend “among somewhat older pupils such contemporary events and developments as riots, wars, rebellion, drugs, violence, and changing values should be openly discussed in school, so that young people can learn how to apply objective methods in approaching everyday problems that confront them.”[[112]](#footnote-112) This suggestion is rooted in the progressivist idea that educators should attempt to relate the real world to the classroom.

**Chapter 4: Early Attempts at Multiculturalism**

Although Ernie Checkeris is most well-known for his work on the Hall-Dennis Report, he influenced various other levels of provincial affairs as president of the Canadian School Trustee Association (life member, president for 2 years), and as chair of the Rainbow District School Board(1997-1999). He also had a successful professional career outside of education advising numerous boards regarding multiculturalism and Indigenous issues. I will argue below that Checkeris’ involvement in French-language rights, Indigenous rights and efforts to promote multiculturalism in Ontario are extensions of the Hall-Dennis philosophy, but were also shaped by his early influences and northern perspective.

Northern Ontario was a perfect ideological breeding ground for the implementation of multiculturalism that was thrust onto Canada’s national stage at the end of the 1960s. The movement was brought on by a myriad of different factors, ranging from an increase in immigration, the “hippie revolution” and a progressive and youthful prime minister who had quickly secured the vote with the first “Trudeaumania” in 1968.[[113]](#footnote-113) Northern Ontario, where a wide swath of peoples had settled and established cultural organizations, produced a favourable climate for the introduction of multiculturalism.

The Hall-Dennis Report also played a significant role in the incorporation of multiculturalism values in Ontario and Canada. Published at the height of this new progressive movement, the Report’s championed multiculturalism as a method to solve all the inequalities in the education system. Josh cole argues that “at a time when the country as a whole was engulfed in often bitter debates of bilingualism and multiculturalism… Hall-Dennis was among the first major voices to recommend an official recognition of ‘Canadian Multiculturalism.’”[[114]](#footnote-114) As the Report played such a significant role in Checkeris’s philosophy, he would firmly adopt this perspective towards a multicultural society throughout the rest of his life.

On October 8, 1971, Prime Minister Trudeau ushered in a new era of official government multiculturalism, announcing in parliament that “although there are two official languages, there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other. No citizen or group of citizens is other than Canadian, and all should be treated fairly.”[[115]](#footnote-115) Trudeau also announced that the government agenda would adopt “a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework” ensuring both official languages would be recognized as well.[[116]](#footnote-116)

Ernie Checkeris was at the height of his professional career as multiculturalism became official policy in 1971. His background and experiences in the north along with his progressive ideology fit the origins of multicultural principles. In every speech Checkeris gave on the Hall-Dennis Report, he quoted the document’s phrase “each human being is deserving of respect, identity, and the right to develop toward the fulfilment of his unique potential.”[[117]](#footnote-117) As a result, in October 1973, Checkeris was asked to serve as chair of Ontario’s first Advisory Council on Multiculturalism. This Council would inform the provincial government regarding “all matters relating to ethno-cultural groups.”[[118]](#footnote-118) In addition, the Council’s goals were to “serve on a rotating basis and advise the government of Ontario concerning policies and programmes with direct implications for Ontario’s cultural communities.” Serving as the first chair, Checkeris presided over several special committees and influenced the direction of the province’s first official policies regarding multicultural affairs. Moreover, the influence of the Hall-Dennis Report on Checkeris would determine the path that this Council would take in approaching several different issues.

After the announcement of the official multiculturalism policy, attacks and threats made towards minorities rose in the province of Ontario. By 1974, the Advisory Council on Multiculturalism asked the Attorney General, Robert Welch, to “stop the scurrilous attacks on the Black and Jewish communities in Ontario.”[[119]](#footnote-119) The Council issued a press release stating “the spate of anti-black and anti-Semitic literature which has been flooding Ontario in recent months…has caused the Advisory council on multiculturalism deep concern.” The attacks had been made by disrupting meetings, the posting of racist graffiti at public places and recorded telephone messages that were randomly sent to people’s homes. The Council published one of the recorded messages which came from the caller “white power.” The message explained that race equality was a plan of the “liberal and Marxist brainwashing through the education system,” stated that intermarriage should be illegal, and programs should be established for the improvement of white males.[[120]](#footnote-120) The Council under the leadership of Checkeris responded seriously to these messages. They wrote that the racist speech “is an evil which makes it more difficult for the understanding and acceptance of ethno cultural differences among Canadians. It also constitutes an incitement to violence.”[[121]](#footnote-121) To combat these acts, the Council recommended that any person caught disseminating racist propaganda would face the new 1970 amendments to the Criminal Code commonly known as the “anti-hate bill.”[[122]](#footnote-122) In the years following its implementation, Checkeris continued this fight for equality on the Advisory Council, despite claims the education system was “brainwashing” children into liberal or Marxist ideas.

The theme of multiculturalism continued into the 1970s as the federal government pushed for official policy. In 1975, the government ordered a national discussion on immigration that would be formulated into a Green Paper on the topic.[[123]](#footnote-123) he Green Paper made two major conclusions: first, that all immigration policy should be “nondiscrimination i.e., a universal approach to the selection and admission of immigrants”; and secondly, that new immigration policy should ensure the “careful selection of immigrations for the labour force to meet the present needs of the Canadian labour market”.[[124]](#footnote-124) In February 1975, Checkeris was sent a copy of the Green Paper by Sudbury M.P., James Jerome, as he had experience dealing with these issues and was a “leading member of one of Sudbury’s many ethnic communities.” Jerome also asked Checkeris for updated mailing lists of various cultural organizations in the city in order to spread the Green Paper to “Chinese, Dutch, German, Greek, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak, Spanish and Ukrainian” groups who had major organizations in the Sudbury region.[[125]](#footnote-125)

By the early 1980s, Checkeris was still serving on the Advisory Council for Multiculturalism, and he was now a regular member of the sub-committee for Education and Youth Concerns. The largest issue the Council was facing in 1982 surrounded the Ontario Heritage Language Program. In 1977, the provincial government had agreed to this program, which established English and French as the only legal languages of instruction during the school day. This was based on the condition that school boards were given the power to create third-language instruction after school or on weekends with government grants.[[126]](#footnote-126) Historian R.D. Gidney explains that by 1982 “some 82,000 students, representing more than fifty language groups were enrolled in heritage language classes.”[[127]](#footnote-127) Although a large number of students were receiving some instruction in a third language, different organizations wanted officially to incorporate the program into the school day or dismantle it all together. These arguments became heated and the Advisory Council on Multiculturalism warned that “intemperate and ill-advised statements and comments expressed by persons in positions of responsibility have encouraged a climate of confrontation and confusion to the detriment of the public interest.”[[128]](#footnote-128) Thus, the Council agreed to provide recommendations on Ontario’s Heritage Language Program to help solve the concerns surrounding this controversial issue. The Council spent most of 1982 researching and interviewing and meeting various stakeholders across the province, including students and teachers. As a member of a provincial committee, Checkeris stuck to the template that had produced the Hall-Dennis Report, inviting members to Sudbury to talk to local citizens. The final report states,

On August 27th and 28th, the committee held its meetings in Sudbury, in order to learn of educational concerns of the North. This, the committee found as one of the best learning experiences of the term. An Open Forum was held to give the Sudbury people a chance to submit briefs and air their concerns in general.[[129]](#footnote-129)

It is evident Checkers was still concerned about the educational needs of the north and continually utilized his unique position in northern Ontario to uncover the real issues facing these areas.

The Education and Youth Committee of the Ontario Advisory Board of Multiculturalism made several recommendations after its research was complete in 1982. The members were pleased with the establishment of the Ontario Heritage Languages Program and noted that it was received well by communities in Ontario.[[130]](#footnote-130) The Advisory Council has also recommended improvements in quality of teaching and teaching materials available to heritage language classes. At this time, the Ontario Advisory Council on Multiculturalism and Citizenship therefore wishes to express to the government of Ontario, school boards and the public, its serious concern regarding the deterioration in cooperation and good relations between members of the ethnocultural communities in the metropolitan area that has been generated by the recent controversy relating to Heritage Language Education.”[[131]](#footnote-131)

These recommendations were supported by a list of surveys from parents and teachers who also explained their concerns at the back of the report. Some of these surveys had been given to Sudbury citizens and provided accurate data on the issues rather than conjecture. Checkeris again played a significant role in influencing the development of effective polices that provided at least some education in a host of third languages. Following the Hall-Dennis Report, he utilized his position in the north to help move Ontario toward a more multicultural mindset.

**Chapter 5: Bridging the Gap: Creating Equality for Indigenous Students**

From his first experiences in public service until the end of his professional career, Ernie Checkeris advocated for the rights of Indigenous people. During the 1960s, many Indigenous people in Canada continued to live in awful conditions, however this period also presented the opportunity, as Alvin Finkel describes, to “[become] vocal in asserting their rights to practice their traditional ways, and to have control over their resources, schools, and health.”[[132]](#footnote-132) The reality of everyday life for Indigenous peoples is also noted by Finkel: “they lived only half as long as most other Canadians, and their lives were made miserable not only by dire poverty, but by systemic discrimination that denied them jobs, and in many regions, took their children away from them for ten months a year.”[[133]](#footnote-133) These conditions were particularly egregious in the northern sections of the country as isolation, harsher climates and poor food supplies contributed to the lack of care received by Indigenous children. Residential schools had been in operation for over one hundred years by this period and they acted as places of cruel conversion and assimilation into “Canada’s” culture.[[134]](#footnote-134) Thousands of Indigenous people have reported physical, sexual and emotional abuses by the staff employed by the Churches who operated these institutions, comprising a history of abuse that had been ignored by the federal government which was supposed to be protecting them.[[135]](#footnote-135) Despite the harsh conditions, by the 1970s the Indigenous rights movement had started to make significant progress in the assertion of First Nations’ political rights.

The Hall-Dennis Report reproduced the official assimilationist policy set by the federal government and general population towards Indigenous people, yet Checkeris himself stood in opposition to these views. Josh Cole argues that the “Hall-Dennis Committee… saw education as a means of adjusting Indigenous peoples to postwar Canada’s political and economic order. Ultimately, for all of its postwar ‘modernity’ and ‘progressivism,’ Hall-Dennis must be considered an extension of a much larger project of settler colonialism as an essential precondition of Canadian liberal state formation.”[[136]](#footnote-136) The public hearings and transcripts suggest that many members were not in favour of helping Indigenous peoples receive true equality. In spite of this majority perspective, however, Cole found evidence of what he calls a unique type of “organic intellectual” who arose in this period, to act in opposition of settler colonialism and the unfair treatment of Indigenous peoples. As previously mentioned, Checkeris embodies these characteristics and articulated the concerns of Indigenous people, becoming a strong advocate of their rights on the Committee and for the rest of his professional career.

In his first official report to the Hall-Dennis Committee, Checkeris left a section for the “Indian students” who attended Chapleau Public School. Checkeris noted that they appeared to have inadequate clothing for winter, their homes lacked running water and electricity and older students quit in search of work rather than complete their education. Coupled with the various other problems of northern schools, aboriginal students were severely disadvantaged. Checkeris recommended several progressive solutions. He wrote:

It is essential that these children attend integrated schools and become part of and contribute to society at large. Somehow the province must assume more responsibility and provide equal opportunity for parents and children. The Indian image in some primary grade readers tends to degrade and perpetuate the inferiority of the Indian to the rest of our society. We should promote Indian heroes and successful Canadians of Indian origin. Guidance programmes should be established to make use of their natural abilities. [And] when first attending an integrated school, remedial classes should be set up to raise their level of achievement and acceptance.[[137]](#footnote-137)

The goal of equal opportunity for all ethnicities is apparent in Checkeris’ quest for better schooling of Indigenous students, and he clearly believed that the removal of discrimination would facilitate their integration into mainstream Canadian society. Checkeris faced criticism for his comments on Indigenous peoples as in the margins of his report someone underlined the words “equality opportunity” and wrote: “For what, white students? What do you want? Why do you…?”[[138]](#footnote-138) As a member of a provincial committee, there was little Checkeris could do through the Hall-Dennis Report. Schooling for Indigenous students fell under the responsibility of the federal government, and at a time when the residential school system was just beginning to be dismantled, not all members of the Committee were receptive to the idea of integration.

Ernie Checkeris’ support for the integration of Indigenous children into public schools continued throughout his time spent on the Hall-Dennis Committee, despite the disparaging comments of some other members. In one Committee hearing held in Toronto during the summer of 1966, for example, Checkeris engaged in a debate over whether Indigenous children needed provincially run schools. One member remarked “what’s the point? I don’t think they even have paved roads in some areas.” Checkeris responded with, “What is it that we should do? And I’m not speaking about the provincial department or I’m not speaking of anyone, I am simply talking about children in school.”[[139]](#footnote-139) This quote epitomizes Checkeris’ thought, as he did not care about the race, origin or denomination of a person but whether they could access equal education which would provide them with a solid footing in the changing world.

Checkeris’ defense of Indigenous children extended far wider than the Hall-Dennis Report and was built on his past experiences and northern perspective. In a letter to the Department of Indian Affairs in 1969, regarding an “Indian teach-in” at a local school, Checkeris outlined his perspective towards Indigenous peoples. Checkeris explained that he was interested in “Indian as well as ethnic (if I may use the word) needs since my parents were Greek.”[[140]](#footnote-140) In addition he writes, “I believe somehow we must make it possible for the majority of Indians to become self-supporting and participating citizens and allow them to identify themselves as respectable and valid cultural identity in the Canadian fabric.” In the same letter, he stresses the importance of recommendation 123 of the Hall-Dennis Report which “encourage(d) at least one Ontario university to establish an Institute for Canadian Indian studies (I should like to see this at Laurentian university naturally-but!).” He also was angered that “there are various institutes and chairs etc. in everything from Ancient Greek to Islamic and Hebrew Studies, but our native people are left out, so here it is – how do we restore dignity and pride when all records are being lost or better yet ignored?”[[141]](#footnote-141) These views of Indigenous issues coupled with the experience of travelling to northern schools and seeing impoverished students, made Checkeris a consistent advocate for Indigenous people’s fight for equality in northern Ontario.

As we just saw, Ernie Checkeris also worked to even the playing field for Indigenous students in northern Ontario at the postsecondary level. In May 1968, as the Hall-Dennis Report was first published, Checkeris independently proposed a motion at the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews to establish “an institute of Indian studies in an Ontario University and said Sudbury would be a logical place.”[[142]](#footnote-142) This idea was taken to the Departments of Education and Indians Affairs which approved the plan, allowing Laurentian University to organize classes around the topic of “Indian studies.” Checkeris noted that the “Cultural and historical background of Canadian Indians has been played down and there is a double standard in advocating the existence of minority cultures in Canada while at the same time callously disregarding the Indian background.”[[143]](#footnote-143) In the winter of 1970, Laurentian requested Checkeris’ help to develop the new Indian studies program that would be operated from the University of Sudbury.[[144]](#footnote-144) Dr. Edward Newberry, a professor at Huntington College, became the architect of the program and would establish the first classes for the new Institute for Indian Studies in the fall semester of 1970.[[145]](#footnote-145) The push for Indigenous studies programs in Canadian universities had begun in the Hall-Dennis Report and these ideas were now turning into legitimate classes that would influence the next generation of university students. Laurentian received a $4,000 grant from the Donner Canadian Foundation to implement programs that they believe could show that “an appreciation of Indian insights may help to revive a feeling of confidence and worth in Indian people now struggling for a recognized place in national life, and further that such a synthesis may offer a point of joint involvement for Indians and non-Indians.”[[146]](#footnote-146) By the fall of 1970, the experimental program offered by the University of Sudbury had enrolled one hundred students including three “Indian workers at Nelson House, Manitoba who had been permitted to take the course by correspondence.”[[147]](#footnote-147) In addition, the University had approved a new Objibwa language course, created an Indigenous studies room and connected with the Wikwemikong All Native Cultural Centre to utilize their collection of oral literature on Indigenous history.[[148]](#footnote-148) Checkeris watched with pleasure as this Hall-Dennis recommendation became a reality, writing that students who had taken the new course offered by Laurentian “are most enthusiastic and have developed an insight of the Indian philosophy.”[[149]](#footnote-149)

As Checkeris finished his last engagements with the Hall-Dennis Committee in 1969, he began serving as Trustee on the newly formed Sudbury School Board of Education. In this capacity, he would make several recommendations that would benefit northern Ontario Indigenous students. In 1972, the Sudbury School Board entered into a joint agreement with the Department of Indian Affairs to provide educational services for 50 Indigenous students. The Sudbury Board agreed to provide room and board, medical examinations, free travel back to the reserves and to hire a full-time counsellor for the students who could speak Objiway. The Board of Directors and local Trustees invested $254,000 into building a new school and housing an additional 30 Indigenous students per year. This school was built south of Sudbury near the French River and named Monetville Public School. By 1980, eighty-two aboriginal students from various reserves were attending schools in the Sudbury School Board at the cost of the public education system. The Sudbury Board was one of the first in the province to integrate Indigenous students and ensure they had a support system in place to succeed. The early decision of the Board in 1972 followed the “strong reaction against the White Paper of 1969” when Indigenous groups formed the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) to acquire control over several fields, including education.[[150]](#footnote-150) Checkeris’ proposal to integrate Indigenous students occurred a year before the federal government “gave in and agreed, where Native communities so desired, to shift control over the schools in which Native children were educated to Aboriginal bodies.”[[151]](#footnote-151) Throughout the rest of the 1970s, several other public school boards also made arrangements with local Indigenous groups to incorporate them into public schooling. Checkeris’ proposal was informed by his experience on the Hall-Dennis Committee and his knowledge of issues that were affecting local Indigenous peoples.[[152]](#footnote-152) His guiding perspective on the Sudbury Board facilitated the early adoption of integrated public schooling for hundreds of Indigenous children in northern Ontario.

When Checkeris was asked to serve as the first chair of Ontario’s Advisory Council on Multiculturalism he began to use the platform as a method to help Indigenous people. At the first committee meeting in 1973, sub-committee appointments were voluntarily selected by members of the council. They had decided to organize the committee around five different themes which would include one convenor and at least two other members. The subjects were citizenship and the needs of newcomers, culture, education/language, human rights/media/government and the needs of native peoples.[[153]](#footnote-153) Unsurprisingly, Checkeris chose to become convenor of the subcommittee on the needs of Native peoples which would study “the needs of Ontario’s native people including also the needs of non-status Indians.”[[154]](#footnote-154)

Throughout the 1970s, Checkeris brought concerns regarding Indigenous issues to the highest levels of Ontario politics. In 1975, he wrote to Margaret Birch, the first women appointed to a provincial cabinet position and newly selected Provincial Secretary for Social Development. He was writing in his capacity as chair of the Advisory Council on Multiculturalism about an issue they had with the newly published booklet by the Ministry of Education entitled “People of Native Ancestry.” The original letter has not been recovered but Birch sent the concerns to the Minister of Education, Thomas L. Wells, who responded to the issue that Checkeris had raised. Wells defended the title of the textbook, “People of Native Ancestry,” and explained that he had received “a very positive response to this document by the native people, the department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and educators in provincial schools.”[[155]](#footnote-155) However, he also notes, “the need for resource materials to support this guide and other parts of native studies has been recognized [and] some initiatives to cover this situation have been adopted.” Wells proceeded to describe new contracts that were being arranged between various Indigenous groups and the Ministry’s attempts to assist native people to develop curriculum resource materials.[[156]](#footnote-156) However, he thanked Checkeris for bringing these ideas to his attention and promised to ensure that the Ministry continued its work into obtaining Indigenous learning materials. Birch also comments that she hopes Checkeris “will be happy with the positive approach that the ministry has taken in this particular area.”[[157]](#footnote-157) Checkeris regarded himself as an advocate for Indigenous rights at the provincial level, and believed that it was important to correct the negative stereotypes of Indigenous people who were “routinely portrayed as savages” in other school texts during this period.[[158]](#footnote-158)

In 1980, Checkeris was not satisfied with the type of representation Indigenous students were receiving in northern Ontario, and he recommended at the October Board meeting the “appointment of a representative of Indian pupils as a Trustee on the board.”[[159]](#footnote-159) He listed the various agreements the Board had already made with Indigenous groups and displayed statistical information regarding Indigenous Trustee representation in the province. Checkeris argued that since over 80 Indigenous students were now attending Sudbury’s schools they should have equal representation alongside other groups. He cited various educational acts and provided evidence that other boards had begun to adopt this policy as well.[[160]](#footnote-160) The Board instead decided to appoint an “additional education consultant to [help Indigenous children]… especially during the early period of adjustment to urban living in Sudbury.”[[161]](#footnote-161) This person would act as a mediator between the worlds of Indigenous students and that of Sudbury helping them “understand and respect the culture of both.” Although this was not what Checkeris intended, it was intended to help Indigenous students receive better support services as they transitioned away from the federally controlled residential schools.

In 1981, Ernie Checkeris’ advocacy of Indigenous issues culminated in him being appointed as the chair of the first Task Force on Native Policy in Ontario. He would make several recommendations to the province to ensure that Indigenous rights were protected and equal opportunities were provided. In the opening statement of the Report Checkeris wrote, “The task force recommendations are simple and we believe the Ontario government must provide the leadership in Canada. Native people in all walks of life do not require special favours – they require that free, equal opportunity we all have, but we must recognize that they do hear a different drummer.”[[162]](#footnote-162) The Report’s ambitious goals advised that the government create an Ontario advisory council on Native peoples with the participant of every treaty group available for consolations. In addition, the government should conduct more long range planning for native policy in Ontario rather than Band-Aid attempts at fixing problems. The task force also warned that the federal government was heading in a much different direction than Ontario’s ministries and that the Indian act required changes and updating by modern native groups.[[163]](#footnote-163) Checkeris realized these were lofty goals but stressed “the need for equal access to services for all communities as well as the need to treat all native people equally as full citizens of Ontario” should be the ultimate goal. Finally, the Task Force’s major conclusion was that Ontario needed to create a clear policy in regards to Indigenous people in order to provide equal services to these citizens. The impact of these recommendations on Ontario’s social fabric is impossible to determine, however, a recent study by the Urban Aboriginal Task Force published in December 2007 stated that the “1981 Task Force had a significant impact on the situation of urban Aboriginal people in Ontario, both in terms of policy formation and program development.” Moreover, the authors concluded that:

A great deal has changed, (since the report) particularly with the emergence of a range of Aboriginal organizations in the 1980s that were designed to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal people. It has been generally noted by Senior Executive Directors and staff of Aboriginal organizations that the 1981 Task Force report resulted in increased attention to urban Aboriginal issues, and that heightened awareness of urban problems and the growth of Aboriginal agencies formed to deal with them can at least, in part, be attributed to the 1981 report. For example, the 1981 task force reported that there were 14 Native organizations in Thunder Bay in 1981; however, there were 33 Aboriginal organizations reported in Thunder Bay in 2004.[[164]](#footnote-164)

The Task Force Report utilized a community-based approach which focused on key Indigenous urban areas that had developed in Ontario. Four of the five cities studied were from northern Ontario and included Kenora, Barrie, Thunder Bay and Sudbury.[[165]](#footnote-165) The Report’s conclusion was that Indigenous people had forged a middle class in urban areas in Ontario society but more work was still left to be done.[[166]](#footnote-166) Through his work on the Hall-Dennis Committee, the Sudbury School Board, and the Task Force on Native Policy, Checkeris embodies Josh Cole’s description of an “organic intellectual,” an outsider who challenged the assimilationist views of the majority to advocate for the rights of Indigenous people to access the same services as other ethnicities.

**Chapter 6: French-Language Schooling: A Step Backwards**

One of the most pressing issues near the end of the 1960s was the promised introduction of French-language public schooling at the high school level (grades 10-13). Before this time, francophone students could only receive public education in bilingual schools until grade nine. If they wished to graduate from high school, they needed to switch to an English school or pay tuition at one of the few private, French Catholic colleges of the province. Thus, in the 1960s the number of francophone students dropping out of high school in grade ten far surpassed other students who were being taught in English.[[167]](#footnote-167) With pressure from Franco-Ontarians and the “Quiet revolution” underway in Quebec, the provincial government realized it needed to help these students finish their education. Gidney explains, “the message of the ‘quiet revolution’ was simple: either recognize the existence of two founding cultures and languages, or risk the break-up of the nation.”[[168]](#footnote-168) As a result, in 1968 Ontario’s Premier John Robarts signed the landmark Schools Administration Act, allowing the establishment of French-language public schools where numbers warranted.[[169]](#footnote-169) These classes were mandatory when requested by a minimum number of ratepayers *and* when the board deemed it suitable to provide school services. This ambiguity would cause discrepancies in several localities during the next two decades as local leaders debated over the true number of ratepayers required to build French-language schools. To fund this initiative, the Ontario government agreed to a funding formula with Pierre Trudeau’s federal government for three years.[[170]](#footnote-170)

In common with most of the Hall-Dennis Committee members, Checkeris believed in the principle of having one school system, on the basis that a single system could best provide equal resources for all children. He disliked the idea of full funding for either French-language or separate Catholic schools because, in the Sudbury region, it could eventually add an additional two boards due to the large number of both French and English Catholic students. Checkeris was concerned that not enough money would be allocated to fund two additional boards (during this period, no French-Language boards had been proposed). When the issue came up in a Hall-Dennis meeting, Checkeris reacted strongly; in his own words, he “blows his top.” He later apologized in a letter to Premier Davis, writing, “I urge you, as I have others, to resist the temptation to extend these schools. Let’s keep Ontario a province of opportunity for all kids –… Lets have the best schools for everyone where the course of study allows them to recognize and enjoy, the different philosophy of others and avoid the division that many adults seem to have when it comes to the various ways there are to be Christian.”[[171]](#footnote-171) It is clear that Checkeris had a problem with dividing the education system along language or religious lines. For Checkeris, equality meant “sameness,” and living up to a standard of equality that did not recognize the challenges of minorities.

Ernie Checkeris’ perspective towards French-language schooling was rooted in his belief that everyone born in Canada was “Canadian” regardless of their race, ethnicity or religion. In one of his speeches he writes: “I keep referring to my Greek background but I am a Canadian – A Canadian Greek – not a Greek-Canadian – and there is a difference. Canada is my country – my home and native land – not Greece, or the province of Ontario.”[[172]](#footnote-172) This perspective is closely related to the idea for a “Just Society” that had been taking hold across Canada after the emergence of “Trudeaumania” in 1968. Pierre Trudeau had proposed “the Just Society will be a united Canada, united because all of its citizens will be actively involved in the development of a country where equality of opportunity is ensured and individuals are permitted to fulfill themselves in the fashion they judge best.”[[173]](#footnote-173) While a perfectly united country is excellent in theory, achieving those means can subjugate the needs of minorities in the quest for equality. For Trudeau, as for Checkeris, people were “necessarily Canadian because they possessed the spirit or values that are unchangeably Canadian,” and thus he could not see another ethnicity as being important to their identity. This removal of choice to identify as a particular ethnicity is a contradiction of Trudeau’s vision of fulfillment in the theoretically equal society, and denied the aspirations of Franco-Ontarians to preserve their unique identity and language.[[174]](#footnote-174)

Ernie Checkeris’ faith in a multicultural but united Canadian identity, led him to be hostile toward the efforts of Franco-Ontarians to preserve their language and heritage. His opposition to French-language schooling was demonstrated at a Hall-Dennis hearing in 1966. He stated:

When I first read recommendation No. 8 [of the Hall-Dennis Report], for people to be able to communicate in more than one language, my question was why? I am from immigrant parents and I learned Greek here, and I rebelled at the idea of learning another language, I would have preferred very much that they had taught me a lot more English to be able to communicate with my fellow man… I left Toronto and was in another place for eight years before I spoke Greek to another Greek. I went into a city where they were forty families who were all Greek, and joined a men’s club where their vocabulary was pretty bad. I am curious as to why we should learn another language?[[175]](#footnote-175)

Checkeris’ Greek heritage and its cultural influences, as well as his experiences with prejudice growing up in Toronto created his conviction that minority language schooling was not effective. Checkeris believed that more English-language education rather than schooling in a minority language would provide all students with equal opportunities to compete in the world. Political philosopher Will Kymlicka has described the discrepancies involved in Canada’s interpretation of multiculturalism, particularly in how different types of minority groups apply the concept to themselves. While national minorities who were present before the state was formed, such as Franco-Ontarians, pursued policies that sought to perpetuate the group – such as language rights and regional autonomy, other groups of more recent immigrants sought multicultural policies, such as religious accommodations, heritage language education, and affirmative action, whose first purpose was to dissuade discrimination. Adding to the mix were Indigenous peoples, who are also national minorities, who began in the late 1960s to demand policies that protected their treaty rights and land claims, but also some others to fight discrimination.[[176]](#footnote-176) Since Checkeris viewed the world through his immigrant lens, his perspective did not correlate with those of national minorities who were present before the state, helping form his opposition to the extension of French-language schools.

These beliefs led Checkeris to oppose the theoretical implications and funding formula of French-language schooling that was developed by the federal government under the direction of Pierre Trudeau. The proposed plan allowed the federal government to pay five percent of the fees per capita of students studying a second language and nine percent of the fees of a minority language student.[[177]](#footnote-177) The additional funds would be paid by the federal government to the provinces over the next five years and cost a maximum of 300 million dollars. This would theoretically pay for the additional costs required for instruction of minority language students. In 1982 the Symons Commission, however, showed that federal money that was supposed to be going to support the French-language instruction of minority students was actually being diverted to anglophone second-language instruction. Thus, the federal money in Ontario was helping anglophone students learn a second language while francophone students did without schooling in their mother tongue. Matthew Hayday concludes that “as a result, the demand from Franco-Ontarians for minority language education was largely overlooked by the anglophone dominated Ontario government, which funneled money into programs that benefitted anglophone children.”[[178]](#footnote-178) In doing so, the federal government was rewarded with the perception of helping French-language rights while ignoring the distinctiveness and real issues of the French Canadian population, especially in northern Ontario.

This issue came to a head in Sturgeon Falls in 1972, when the eighty-seven percent majority francophone population had to settle for a phase without a bilingual school due to the resistance of the anglophone school board of North Bay.[[179]](#footnote-179) During this period, Checkeris was serving and then presiding over the Canadian School Trustees’ Association. His organization argued that money for minority language should be given in longer than three-year term amounts to ensure better teaching training, curriculum planning and independence from government influence. The Trustees’ Association would continually lobby the federal government on these issues for the rest of the 1970s. Despite some success in Sudbury with the opening of Ontario’s first French-language secondary school, École McDonald-Cartier, the provincial and federal governments were still not accomplishing the goal of finally providing francophone minority students with instruction in their first language.

By 1977, French-language minorities were still fighting for the right to their own schools in southern Ontario. In Essex, Ontario the French-language advisory committee had wanted to implement a French-language secondary school in the district since 1969. However, after several unsuccessful attempts in the early 1970s the government could not persuade the Essex County Board of Education to build a school for French-language students. As a result, in early July 1977, the Ontario government enacted Bill 31 which legally forced the Essex County Board of Education, stating that “the public interest, and in particular the interest of such French-speaking secondary school pupils, requires that such as school be constructed.”[[180]](#footnote-180) The secondary school would be built in the district to accommodate the 750 French-speaking students. In addition, if the Board failed to build the school “provision is made for the Minister to do all things necessary to cause the school to be constructed and to recover from the board the expenses.”[[181]](#footnote-181) Essex County is 700 kilometers south of Sudbury, however, Ernie Checkeris’ perspective of this debate demonstrates his viewpoints towards the French-language schooling issue as a whole. Three months before Bill 32 was tabled, Checkeris sent a letter to the Minister of Education Thomas L. Wells, outlining some concerns he had with the Essex French-language secondary schools. The copy of Checkeris’ letter has yet to be found but the conciliatory reply from Wells sheds some valuable information towards his perspective on the issue. He writes:

Thank you for taking the time to share your concerns with me about the Essex French Language secondary school issue. From your own experience with the francophone community in Northern Ontario, I am sure you can well understand the very difficult situation that confronted us in Essex. No one is more conscious of the importance of the local board autonomy than I am. At the same time, however, we could no longer ignore the rights of the francophone minority in Essex county. After years of frustrating attempts to resolve the problem through discussion and negotiation, the time came when we finally had to make a stand. By now you will have heard that Cabinet is proceeding with legislation to ensure that a French language secondary school will be built in Essex… I certainly appreciate your insights on this issue, and hope that you in turn can understand and accept the reasons for our intervention in Essex.[[182]](#footnote-182)

This tone of writing from Minister Wells implies that Checkeris would not be pleased with the recommendations of Bill 32. From this perspective, it seems that Checkeris also is aware of the plans to build the high school but is concerned that the Ministry of Education is overstepping the local autonomy of the Essex County School Board. Checkeris’ grievances towards the separate schooling of French-language students is clearly apparent in his attempts to defend the school board despite repeated efforts by the Department of Education to make Essex county comply with Bill 32.

Ernie Checkeris maintained his opposition to the introduction of separate French-language schooling for the rest of his career. In 1988, Checkeris wrote a special letter to the editor of the *Sudbury Star* discussing the possible future of a francophone board of education. He was responding to a column about French-language schools and provided his own perspective on the issue. He wrote:

Jacques may not believe that segregation at the age of four years to 18 years will affect young people’s perception of society but I hold him wrong. If you separate at the top, the development of vested or proprietary interest is very hard to give up. Yes, there could very well be four or five boards of education yet! I believe that a multicultural society is not like an egg crate with little pockets for each of the many ethnic communities. Rather, it’s an open vessel in which all contents mix and form a distinct society within a society. It is a state of mind that, by interaction, acquires an appreciation and respect for the other person’s differences. It is a learning process of the similarities all of us have.[[183]](#footnote-183)

Checkeris’ view of education cannot fathom the reasons for French Canadians wanting to educate their children away from the traditional “Canadian mix.” Moreover, groups such as the French Canadians become targets of Checkeris’ opposition as they did not fit the traditional mold of blending into the “distinct society.” This philosophy justified his reasoning for viewing the French-language schooling issue in a negative perspective throughout the duration of his career.

The impact of the Hall-Dennis Report and its quest for social and educational equality also played a role in the evolution of Checkeris’ perspective of French-Language schooling. The “multiculturalism” that was professed by most members of the Hall-Dennis Committee has recently been exposed as faulty.[[184]](#footnote-184) Rosa Bruno-Jofré and George (Skip) Hill conclude that the Hall-Dennis Report’s version of multiculturalism pushed all attempts at equality through the binational version of Canada, thereby leaving out “the distinctiveness of the needs of different groups in society, for instance, women of colour, aboriginal peoples, and so on.”[[185]](#footnote-185) We can see these assumptions clearly in Checkeris’ own writing. In a 1988 article in the *Sudbury Star*, Checkeris maintained that the Hall-Dennis Committee worked extensively to help the francophone community of Ontario, ensuring, in his opinion, that both English and French views were published in the Report.[[186]](#footnote-186) He wrote:

I recall, we received a large number of reports several weeks prior to a three-day meeting in Toronto. One paper was by a professor of economics from the University of Ottawa. His study was on the relationship between education and economic returns. It covered many former high school students, students in industry and industry management. The report caught my attention… During my examination of these figures, it became obvious that the non-attendance or drop-out rate of Francophones was high after grade 9 in public high schools…I brought this to the attention of our chairman, Mr. Justice Emmet Hall, and the committee. We created a sub-committee of myself; Don Muir, of Hamilton; and Leopold Seguin of Cornwall.[[187]](#footnote-187) We interviewed Francophone students from French Roman Catholic Separate Schools… In Cornwall, Timmins and Sudbury especially, we found that large numbers of these students did not complete their high school term. In fact, very few attended grades 10-13. The reason given was they were could not cope with the language, which was English, in these schools, and failed educationally and socially. Thus they dropped out. The loss, as the economist pointed out, to the economy of Ontario was great. Worse still was the demoralizing effect on the students who were not prepared for the world of work. Our recommendation was ‘establish French language schools where there is a sufficient concentration of French-speaking students.’ In the backup to our report, we also recommended that they be public schools, and that English be a compulsory subject. The government approved our recommendation before the final report of ‘Living and Learning’ was printed... The success of our recommendation can now be found in the many graduates of Macdonald-Cartier, Hanmer, Rayside, the now closed Franco Jeunesse, and French River Secondary School – a dual stream school. These same students are found in the teaching profession, in government, in law offices and business. All are productive citizens of Ontario, yet still proud Francophones.

Checkeris believed that the Hall-Dennis Report’s early binational perspective had worked, and had been successful in alleviating the concerns of French-language schooling. The extent of his influence on the implementation of French-language schools has not been determined, but Checkeris himself was convinced that Franco-Ontarians were receiving fair treatment by provincial officials.

Ernie Checkeris maintained these attitudes about French-language rights well into his retirement, writing one article in 2003 entitled “No Reason to Fly Franco-Ontarian Flag.” In this letter to the editor, Checkeris congratulates the city of Greater Sudbury in its decision not to permanently fly the Franco-Ontarian flag at city hall. Checkeris argues that the Canadian flag should be the only flag flown at city hall and describes his time during the 1960s debating the “official flag for Canada.” He writes:

The single maple leaf was competing with a design with three maple leaves. The idea was that it would represent, in each leaf, the English, the French and the others. I recall the debate across Canada. It boiled down to, in effect, three leaves would be divisive because it ignored the contributions of the First Nations and the many immigrants who had helped build this nation. In fact, it seemed during the debate that the French and English were insulting the so-called others as third-class citizens, lumped into one maple leaf. In the end, the argument that we are all Canadians prevailed, and the support of one maple leaf would represent all citizens from seas to sea prevailed. That is our flag, and I am proud of it.[[188]](#footnote-188)

Checkeris’ comments on the 1964 flag debate indicate that he once again felt French-language groups were receiving plenty of attention from the province while Indigenous and other minority groups were “lumped into one maple leaf.” Checkeris also claims the maple leaf flag as being truly “Canadian” and this aligns with José Igartua’s argument that that Ontario underwent a similar Quiet Revolution as Quebec during the 1960s and emerged with a new Canadian identity. However, for Checkeris, this identity did not include space for collective rights afforded to any given minority.

Ernie Checkeris did not support the funding of French-language schooling for several reasons. His Canadian identity, rooted in his Greek heritage, did not allow him to understand the unique circumstances of francophones who had lived in this region before Canada was even founded and wanted to maintain their distinct heritage. Moreover, his belief that francophones were already receiving fair treatment from provincial officials when compared to other minority groups contributed to his opposition to these schools. Coupled with his commitment to one single school board and proper funding allotments, these ideas became the ideological pillars in his opposition to additional French-language schooling. His belief that English and French schools theoretically were the “same” or equal since the implementation of funding in 1967, however, is inherently flawed. This ignored the evidence that these schools were woefully unequal in teacher quality, educational prospects and money spent per student, and Checkeris clearly was aware of these issues. This negligence ignored the distinct needs of Franco-Ontarians and limited Checkeris’ attempts to create equality in northern Ontario.

**Conclusion**

Ernie Checkeris was a complicated and multifaceted individual whose perception of the world was directly shaped by his immigrant background, his unique experiences in northern Ontario and his service on the Hall-Dennis Committee. He was deeply influenced by the progressive ideas presented during the meetings of the Committee and utilized this philosophy for the rest of his life. His upbringing as a son of Greek immigrants also played a crucial role in his views on ethnicity. These influences were continually negotiated and assessed as Checkeris attempted to implement recommendations that he believed would make Ontario’s society more equal. Checkeris’ values played a significant role in promoting the idea of multiculturalism in Canada and the inclusion of Indigenous people into Ontario’s society. However, these same values pushed him to overlook the distinct issues that faced French-Canadians as they worked to gain access to schooling in their first language.

In the late 1990s, Ernie Checkeris was appointed to chair the Rainbow District School Board as his final educational position. The new Conservative government led by a former northern Ontario Trustee and businessmen, Mike Harris, had promised significant reforms of Ontario’s curriculum. This new type of Progressive Conservative swung the educational pendulum towards more accountability and standardized tests to make sure taxpayer money was being responsibly spent. These reforms were implemented in the last half of the 1990s under the “Common Sense Revolution” which cut educational programs to help offset Ontario’s deficit and introduced a series of new standardized tests that would become the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). Harris worked with Checkeris when they were both executives on the Northern Ontario Trustee’s Association and considered him a mentor.[[189]](#footnote-189) In 2017, Harris reflected on Checkeris’ career: “Ernie’s goals were to ensure the Sudbury School Board provided the very best educational and learning experience possible at an affordable price to the local taxpayers.”[[190]](#footnote-190) As chair of the Rainbow District School Board, Checkeris was tasked with implementing the Common Sense reforms in schools throughout the Sudbury region. In 1999, Checkeris wrote his semi-regular column in the *Sudbury Star* entitled “New Curriculum a Positive Change.” He listed the new elementary reforms including “ – Clear, detailed and rigorous expectations for students in each subject, in each grade; – Province-wide standards – the same curriculum in every school in the province.”[[191]](#footnote-191) However, the changes that Harris was implementing would work against Checkeris’ desire for a more multicultural society. Carol Anne Wien and Curt Dudley-Marling warned in a 1998 article, “Limited Vision: The Ontario Curriculum and Outcomes Based-Learning”:

Provincial and federal policies seek to create a multicultural Canada that makes a place for the diverse voices of its citizens. The coercion towards a standard curriculum in Ontario has a very different impact. School curriculum cannot be culturally neutral (James, 1994) and pretending that the Ontario curriculum is culturally neutral makes it impossible to create schools that are truly congenial to the range of human differences present in our schools. Nor can a standardized curriculum ever be a fair curriculum, for underlying the expectation that “all students will” is the assumption that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve. Nonetheless, serious cultural, economic, and linguistic differences are represented in Ontario's society.[[192]](#footnote-192)

The authors also argue that the new curriculum

will silence the cultures and languages of diverse groups in schools, [and] could someday be regarded as an implement of cultural repression. This is so counter to document’s stated policy intentions and to the Canadian value of multiculturalism that implementation of the curriculum requires careful consideration of the consequences for large groups of people in the province.

Numerous other studies since the 1990s also have noted the issues that minorities have with outcomes based learning, standardized tests and EQAO.[[193]](#footnote-193) It is unclear whether Checkeris fully supported the recommendations from the provincial government or if he was “following orders” in implementing the new curriculum as Board Chair. He retired from the Rainbow District School Board at Christmas in 1999, before any standardized tests were given and just four months into the implementation of the Ontario’s government’s new curriculum for elementary students.

\* \* \*

Ernie Checkeris always stressed the importance of Northern Ontario as a distinct region in all his public contributions and various professional roles. He stuck to his ethnic and northern Ontario roots and made effective polices on the Hall-Dennis Committee. This Report made a significant impact on his own life, and he would continually apply the principles conveyed by the document. Checkeris wrote another weekly column to the *Sudbury Star* in 1999 titled “31 Years later, changes finally made.” He detailed his time on the Hall-Dennis Committee and the many recommendations that had been accomplished that they “could be proud of for decades to come.” He also noted that on page 180 of the Hall-Dennis Report, under the title of Organization it reads:

‘Establish a continuum for public education consisted of a minimum of kindergarten and 12 additional years. Phase out the Grade 13, absorb its curriculum areas within the 12-year continuum as quickly as possible.’ Well, 31 years later, we are beginning the phase out of Grade 13. Four years from now, it will be complete. Was this a concept so radical that it wasn’t implemented until now? Hardly.[[194]](#footnote-194)

The Hall-Dennis Report continued to be a source of inspiration and reference for Checkeris long after its completion.

The Hall-Dennis Report helped form his perspective regarding minorities in Ontario while at the same time propelling him up the hierarchy of provincial affairs as he was continually given more responsibility on various committees. His vision of equality was shrouded in the belief that all cultures should have the same access to equal opportunities and education to compete in the world. This philosophy towards equality stemmed from watching his immigrant parents work towards a better future, the progressive beliefs of the Hall-Dennis Report and the general context of his life. However, he was also a product of time and believed in equality in the sense of “sameness,” as he trusted that only a united society could achieve true equality for its members. This belief compelled Checkeris to advocate for Indigenous rights and the needs of various minorities throughout his life, but also allowed him to overlook issues when it applied to French-language rights and standardized testing, because “the same curriculum should be used in every school in the province.”[[195]](#footnote-195) Sameness is achievable in theory but as evidenced in this paper, equality becomes more complex and difficult once the differences of real people unfold and the issue of equity is considered. Ernie Checkeris believed he was helping Ontario become a province of opportunity for more children in his professional career, but more work still needs to be done to achieve true equality in public education.

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