



CANADA-ASIA AGENDA

Canadian Overseas Schools: A Unique Approach to the Export of Canadian Education

By Lia Cosco

The demand for Canadian education is rising, most visibly in Asia. An important and growing, yet relatively unexplored, dimension of Canada's overseas education engagement is its offshore and international schools. Canada's provincial accreditation of overseas schools is one of the most innovative international initiatives in education. However, a lack of transparency, oversight and support for the accreditation and operation of Canadian overseas schools puts Canada's international education standards at risk.

Canadian policy in overseas schools accreditation is fast becoming one of the country's most unique engagements in international education, yet remains one of the least understood or supported.

There are currently 70 Canadian overseas and international schools around the world, 77% of these are located in the Asia-Pacific region. It is estimated that the average population for a Canadian overseas school is around 800 students per school.¹ Taking this average and multiplying it to all 70 of the Canadian international and offshore schools gives a total figure of approximately 56,000 students in Canada's offshore and international programs around the globe.

To put this into context, Prince Edward Island's total grade 1-12 student population for 2009 was 21,148. Thus the population of students studying at Canadian international and offshore schools is over double that of Prince Edward

Island. There is essentially a Canadian province of global students paying for a Canadian curriculum overseas. This school cohort is also larger than the majority of public school districts in British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba.

The demand (especially in China) for Canadian curricula continues to grow as the widespread perception in many Asian societies is that acquiring a western degree is the ultimate symbolic capital.² In 2008, the total value of education as a Canadian service export was estimated to be at least C\$5.5B, of which most flowed from countries in the Asia-Pacific region.³ The promise of enhanced prestige and status, a steppingstone to post-secondary education in Canada, and opportunities for immigration has spurred the demand for Canadian high-school diplomas.

Canada is the only nation in which provincial governments have developed a fee for accreditation structure to officially



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certify overseas schools with the right to use public curricula, retaining responsibility to inspect schools annually to maintain certification agreements. Although Australian, British, German and American schools exist overseas for example, none of these governments are involved in the accreditation and certification of schools on a fee-paying basis.⁴

This report is based on a recent study of the provincial accreditation and certification of overseas schools, a fast growing and innovative internationalizing initiative in education undertaken at the provincial level in Canada.⁵ Based on wide ranging qualitative interviews, the study finds a strong desire among key education stakeholders to maintain a high quality of Canadian curricula overseas. However, there are tensions in the accreditation of overseas Canadian schools due to a lack of dialogue and transparency. Understanding the accreditation context, acknowledging the needs of Canadian educators overseas, and developing stronger partnerships among the various parties, are vital to chart a sustainable course for Canadian international and offshore schools.

International School
Overseas schools originally servicing expatriate communities, offering curricula of the 'home' country to facilitate the potential re-integration of expatriate children. Student bodies tend to be highly multicultural.
International schools have experienced increased interest from local parents wanting to place their children into an international school setting, and many keep extensive waiting lists to accommodate this demand
Offshore School
Overseas schools which are run for profit and service citizens of the local society in which it operates. Student bodies are almost always made up of local citizens (100% Korean or Chinese students for example). The end goal is to graduate local students with a Canadian high-school diploma.
Canadian Overseas School
In this context, a term used to encompass both provincially accredited international and offshore schools at the K-12 level.
Canadian Provincial Accreditation
The certification process stipulated by Canadian provincial education ministries, detailing the requirements and ongoing regulations to allow schools to offer the provincial curricula overseas. Accreditation requirements are the same for both international and offshore schools

An Overview of Canadian Overseas Schools and Provincial Accreditation

- Canada is the only nation where the provincial government accredits, regulates, inspects and garners fees for the use of provincial curricula overseas;
- 77% of Canada's overseas schools are located in the Asia-Pacific region;
- 63% are located in China, Hong Kong SAR and Macao;
- At least nine more Canadian schools are being planned in China in the coming years;
- The student body engaged with Canadian curriculum overseas is larger than the majority of public school districts in British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba and over double the size of PEI's total grade 1-12 cohort;
- Canadian educational practitioners overseas desire stronger linkages, support and integration with Canadian strategies in international education.

There are 70 Canadian accredited international and offshore schools as of January 2011. Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador are not involved in the accreditation process, although each province has its own objectives for international education.⁶ Many of the schools, especially those in the Asia-Pacific region, have opened in the last 15 years:

There are seven provincial ministries of education engaged in the accreditation and inspection of overseas schools. Each province defines the accreditation of overseas schools as part of broader economic strategies in international education. As Manitoba's International Education Strategy articulates, "offshore education enterprises serve as flagships not only for the Manitoba education system, but also for trade, immigration, political and cultural co-operation."⁷

Each province determines their own regulatory procedures for accreditation, with overall objectives aligning with broader strategies in international education. Some examples of areas under regulatory purview are: (a) local government approval requirements, (b) financial requirements and fee structures, (c) accreditation requirements, (d) costs and requirements of annual inspections, (e) course content and dissemination, (f) graduation requirements, (g) transfer credits, (h) teacher housing and support, and (i) facilities maintenance.

British Columbia	Alberta	Manitoba	Ontario*	Nova Scotia	New Brunswick	PEI
China 17	Macao 1	China 2	China 7	China 9	China 5	Japan 1
Korea 1	Hong Kong 1	Japan 1	Italy 1	Egypt 1	St. Lucia 1	
Thailand 1	UAE 1	Thailand 1	Netherlands 1	UAE 1		
Egypt 1	Bermuda 1	Egypt 1	Hong Kong 2			
India 1		Ghana 1	Singapore 1			
Qatar 1			Egypt 1			
<i>Some School Districts are currently looking to start new schools in China</i>		<i>Ministry is currently looking to begin a school in Korea</i>	Dutch-Antilles 1	<i>Five more schools are being considered in China for 2011 - 2012</i>	<i>Two schools are slated to open in China and one in Bangladesh. The aim is to open 5 schools in China over the next five years</i>	<i>The Ministry is looking to expand their overseas schools engagement in the next few years</i>
			Japan 1			
			West Indies 2			
			Switzerland 1			
			Malaysia 2			
22	4	6	20	11	6	1
TOTAL 70						

*The Canadian International School in Vietnam is not included in this count. The school, which markets itself as an Ontario curriculum school, was established in partnership with the Niagara District School Board but is not officially accredited of the Ministry of Education (the province has been under a moratorium on accrediting any new overseas schools since 2005). Branksome Hall, an independent girls' school in Toronto Ontario, operates an overseas campus in Jeju Island in South Korea. This school is also excluded because it is not officially accredited by the Ministry of Education.

New Brunswick's model maintains government accountability for overseas education strategies. In 1997 the government established Atlantic Education International Incorporated (AEI Inc.), a crown corporation to oversee accreditation structure. Representatives from education and other government ministries sit on AEI's board to direct the corporation's international mandate. In essence it granted this crown corporation the authority to, "...do government work at the speed of business."⁸ AEI receives a request every two weeks to start a new overseas school, mainly from China.

British Columbia is the only province that allows individual school districts to act as fee-based service providers. Delineated as the 'central plank' of the BC government's effort to bring marketisation to the public education system, in 2002 the School Amendment Act (or Bill 34) was introduced to allow public school districts to create independent for-profit business entities to engage in starting overseas schools and other international education strategies.

Many Canadian educators and government representatives are concerned that BC's school district legislation, which permits school districts to create private business companies, perpetuates inequality between districts. Such a structure pits larger districts (with more means) against smaller districts in international ventures. Critics also question the

Start of Overseas Engagement	Defining Characteristic of Overseas Accreditation
BC 1995	2002 Bill 34 School District Model
ALBERTA 2001	Overseas accreditation part of defined international education strategy
MANITOBA 2001	
ONTARIO 1995	Accreditation moratorium since 2005
NEW BRUNSWICK 1994	1997 Atlantic Education Inc. Crown Corporation
NOVA SCOTIA 1996	Accreditation structure in place - international education strategy to be determined
PRINCE EDWARD IS. 1997	



wisdom of encouraging entrepreneurialism within public boards to generate alternate revenue streams in lieu of provincial funding.⁹ On the other hand, the business entities of school districts points to the benefits of the BC model. Many worry that a change in legislation could adversely affect current activities and long-term objectives.

Maintaining Quality

Inspections are an important part of maintaining regulatory oversight and quality assurance of international and offshore programming. It is also an important mechanism through which to maintain operational compliance with provincial standards and requirements, as each provincial ministry first and foremost articulates the importance of maintaining quality in their overseas schools.

All Canadian private schools, including international or offshore schools, are subject to yearly ministry inspections. A comparison of Alberta and Ontario's evaluation reports offers some interesting insights into different provincial inspection processes. Alberta's inspection includes a check for: satisfaction of provincial requirements, fulfillment of accreditation agreements, evaluation surveys and interviews with students, parent, teacher and community members, financial audits, and overall administrative effectiveness.¹⁰

In comparison, Ontario's inspection focuses solely on evaluating the academic program overseas. The inspection begins with a check of whether previous recommendations were met in a 'satisfactory manner,' then moves to evaluate: compliance with the accreditation agreement, school policies and practices, student achievement levels, and record keeping.¹¹ Based on this review, an action plan is set delineating the schools priorities over the next year. In Ontario's case, on-site inspections occur once every two years and inspectors change from year to year.

It is the inspection process that extends credibility to Canadian programs and curricula overseas and as such, inspections should be as full and rigorous as possible. There is concern about the inconsistency of inspectors and in turn inspection processes. There is room for improvement and continual reassessment of accreditation and inspection requirements, to ensure that schools are of the highest standard and are able to respond to unforeseen changes in the local market. Distance already challenges the operation of Canadian provincial curricula overseas, and inspections remain the sole 'face-time' for Canadian educators with overseeing provincial government representatives. The necessity of strong linkages and support to and from Canada is vital to the day-to-day operations and sustained high-quality of the schools.

Snapshot: Canadian Schools in East Asia and Linkages

to Canada

Within local societies and contexts, provincially accredited schools are viewed as Canadian spaces where Canadian values are disseminated, Canadian education taught, and Canadian citizens engage with global communities and people. Provincial regulation requires that all teachers and administrators in overseas accredited schools must be officially certified to teach in Canada. In some instances, Canadian architects have been used to help design an environment to replicate a 'Canadian' school experience. Canadian summer school programs and practicum opportunities for Canadian teachers are common through many of the overseas schools. Textbooks and supplies are ordered from Canadian manufacturers and educational service providers. These schools also connect and establish networks with larger Canadian Diaspora communities and it is often common for the Canadian Ambassador to attend graduation ceremonies.

A significant proportion of overseas students flow directly into Canada's post-secondary system. Graduate flows are much higher in the offshore model as this pathway is an important objective in marketing and strategies of the schools. However, all schools encourage and promote Canadian post-secondary options for their graduates and all host no less than three Canadian universities per year eager to recruit international students with scholarships in hand.



Canadian teachers interviewed for this research were extremely positive about their decision to teach overseas. They view their experiences as having accorded them a valuable global understanding, which they look forward to sharing back into their Canadian milieus. Many Canadian provinces have full-time hiring freezes and minimal opportunities for on-call or substitute positions. Being able to provide hundreds of full-time Canadian curriculum teaching positions is a significant opportunity for new teachers. For example, the Maple Leaf Education System claims to hire close to 100 new teachers every year to work in their BC accredited schools in China making this overseas BC 'school district' the fastest growing BC education program in the province.

These schools have the potential to strengthen ties and opportunities for Canadian communities abroad, and com-

munities back home. These schools are active conduits through which social and economic opportunities and potential partnerships are built between Canada and Asia.

Challenges Facing Canadian Overseas Schools

“As an offshore school we are on the front lines of recruiting international students and potential long-term immigrants to Canada, and we are doing it completely unsupported at the federal level. The offshore program is huge and we need to make sure that the product we are delivering is supported and sustained and not just filling seats. We need to make sure everyone understands what we are doing and how we need to move forward.”

*Canadian Principal, BC Offshore School
Seoul, Korea*

Canadian administrators of overseas schools face numerous challenges, one of the most commonly expressed is the perceived lack of support of overseas programs within Canada.¹³ The eligibility of the Imagine Canada brand (administered in overseas locations by Canadian missions and coordinated through a central office at DFAIT in Ottawa) is one example of this point. Eligibility requirements reveal that only institutions in Canada qualify for its use. For all that this initiative is focused on marketing efforts for in-Canada schools; in essence the label acts as an ad-hoc means for quality assurance. Leaving out a substantial group of provincially accredited and inspected schools overseas that are involved in the same recruiting and education process, negates an opportunity for such schools to adhere and qualify for another ‘Canadian’ quality assurance structure. As one Canadian principal lamented:

“We need to know about Canada’s international education strategy – we receive no benefit from the Imagine brand. We have had no contact from that office. Canada’s overseas K-12 schools need to be a part of this because our students are assets to any Canadian university and Canadian educational strategy.”

In addition, Canadian administrators challenged the negative notion of students getting “a free ride” into Canada post-secondary schools. Administrators argue such opinions do little to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of students, while perpetuating a lack of understanding of overseas programs. It also fails to recognize the hard work of Canadian teachers overseas, who are dedicated to helping their Canadian curriculum students achieve their educational goals.

The concern over negative public image is a valid one as Canadian schools continue to increase their presence overseas and provincial ministries continue to accredit new schools. In such a growth industry, principals were quick to acknowledge that questionable local ownership and lack of regulatory oversight in some cases have led to poor quality Canadian schools in the past.¹⁴ This has negatively affected the Canadian ‘brand’ of education overseas. Ensuring quality mechanisms are in place is vital to long-term sustainability.



Beijing Education Expo 2010 –Imagine Canada Brand – Recruiting for International Students

Critical Issues: Addressing Responsibilities for Oversight

Questions remain as to who should take responsibility for the oversight in the accreditation and operation of Canadian overseas schools.

Increasing transparency and stimulating dialogue is vital to assuring Canada’s participation in international education remains competitive and of high quality.

At the federal level, the ‘Imagine Canada’ initiative has become a measure of quality for all Canadian institutions accorded the privilege of using it. There is room for reassessment in brand eligibility and federal support for international education activities, particularly with respect to the inclusion of overseas schools under a federal branding initiative. At the provincial level, increased inter-provincial dialogue could strengthen support for smaller ministries with the goal of tightening quality control of overseas operations. Increased transparency and dialogue could also help assuage public opinion and increase support for provincial strategies in international education. At the local level, Canadian administrators and educators’ overseas need to be aggressive advocates to ensure support in federal branding strategies, for example, and to lobby for necessary changes to assure provincial accreditation and inspection structures remain relevant as local contexts change.

The accreditation of overseas and offshore schools must be understood and embedded within both short and long-term provincial and federal strategies in international education. At a minimum, these schools create new education pathways, exchange opportunities and long-term socio-eco-

conomic partnerships for Canada, full-time jobs for Canadian teachers and educators, and chances for post-secondary programs to partner with schools for educational programs and international student flows. However, a lack of understanding and connection with Canadian overseas schools create barriers to supporting the real potential of this initiative, raising awareness about the potential of these schools, and ensuring that high education standards are maintained.

Seizing the Education Opportunity to Enhance Canada-Asia Ties

Expanding educational ties reveal growing and important dimension of the Canada-Asia relationship. As found in this research, 77% of Canada's overseas schools are located in the Asia-Pacific region and growth is expected to come predominantly from the region. This bond between foreign students and Canadian education will significantly impact the future of Canada's people-to-people ties with Asia.

This research tells the story of a little known angle within Canada's international education activities by illuminating the

overseas schools. The latest assessment for BC alone reveals international education is a leading sector for trade and investment; contributing C\$1.8B annually to the provincial economy.¹⁵ As demand for Canadian public curriculum grows, our education ministries and educators are keen to respond.

Provincial accreditation and certification of overseas schools is one of the most innovative internationalizing initiatives in Canadian education.¹⁶ Canadian overseas schools educate a student body that are poised to enter Canadian post-secondary institutions. More must be done to understand this demand (especially in Asia), to support the policies and procedures for Canadian overseas schools and to assist Canadian educators. A serious effort needs to be made to increase transparency and dialogue among various players to ensure a high quality of Canadian education is maintained overseas.

For a copy of the full research report on Canadian Overseas Schools, please follow the link here.

<http://www.asiapacific.ca/research-report/canadian-overseas-schools-unique-approach-international-educ>

¹ This was determined from the total student populations (included projected enrollment of the Ontario school in HK) from the 16 school administrators who participants in this research. Interviews with the Maple Leaf Education System in China confirmed 8,250 students are enrolled in their 22 'Canadian' schools, with 4,000 of those as part of their BC accredited offshore and international schools.

² December 2010 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings had Canadian high-school students at 6th in the world (above the OECD average) in reading, mathematics and science.

³ Roslyn Kunin and Associates. Economic Impact of International Education in Canada. DFAIT, July 2009. Executive Summary p. vii. This value is only for total education exports to the top ten Canadian international student source countries.

⁴ The uniqueness of Canada's model was determined through research and interviews. Interviews with a representative from the US Department of State, Office of Overseas Schools, November, 2010 also confirmed the US engagement.

⁵ Waters, Johanna L. Emergent Geographies of International Education and Social Exclusion. Antipode. Blackwell Publishing 2006, pg. 1056.

⁶ The Department of Education in Newfoundland and Labrador acknowledged that because of an unfortunate previous incident with a school in China, they decided not to renew accreditation for the school, and have not been involved in offshore schools since. There are no current plans to reconsider this, although the Ministry eluded that if more resources were available, they may reconsider. (Interview September 2010)

⁷ International Education Strategy, Manitoba Education 2009 -2013

⁸ Interview with AEI Inc Director and former NB Ministry of Education Staff, September 9th 2010. See <http://www.aei-inc.ca/Index.html>

⁹ Interviews conducted in fall of 2010 with the BCTF. See also, Kuehn, Larry "School District Business Companies" British Columbia Teacher's Federation (BCTF) September 2003. <http://bctf.ca/publications/NewsMagArticle.aspx?id=9064>.

¹⁰ Garnered from evaluation report shared by overseas Alberta certified school for June of 2010.

¹¹ Garnered from evaluation report shared by offshore Ontario certified school in October 2010.

¹² This was determined from the total student populations (included projected enrollment of the Ontario school in HK) from the 16 school administrators who participated in this research. Interviews with the Maple Leaf Education System in China confirmed 8,250 students are enrolled in their 22 'Canadian' schools, with 4,000 of those as part of their BC accredited offshore and international schools.

¹³ The Federal Government allocated \$5M over five years for this project beginning in 2007. This office is mandated to coordinate marketing efforts and speak to quality assurance, promoting the use of Canadian curricula overseas. In comparison the U.K. government has reinvested in the promotion of its Education UK brand with approximately £27 million (\$50 million CDN) over two years through the Prime Minister's Initiative (This is in addition to core funding for the British Council, its main promotion organization.). In Australia, the government has increased funding for marketing activities to approx. \$20 million CDN per year for its main education promotion.

¹⁴ Many provincial Ministries have closed down schools due to poor quality. For those provinces that administer and accredit schools and have established high-regulatory standards (such as New Brunswick or Manitoba), they acknowledge that many initial inquiries do not pass the first stage of applications because of financial or regulatory requirements ensure viability and quality control measures which many interested parties cannot satisfy.

¹⁵ Kunin, Roslyn. Economic Impact of International Education in British Columbia. Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc. 2011.

¹⁶ Waters, Johanna L. Emergent Geographies of International Education and Social Exclusion. Antipode. Blackwell Publishing 2006, pg. 1056.

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