

## **Tory's hard lessons make him logical choice for a commission on education**

**JOHN BARBER – The Globe and Mail  
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**John Tory never became himself better than in his failure, for the second time, to win a prize that his blue blood and careful training had brought so tantalizingly close. But fate re-forged his silver spoon into a ball and chain.**

**It looks good on him today - just as it did when he lost the mayoralty to David Miller with the largest number of votes cast for an unsuccessful candidate (251,000) in Canadian history. Public sympathy will well up as Mr. Tory's chains drag him down and out of politics, where he will likely thrive.**

**If I were Dalton McGuinty, I would already have the job description written and the contract at hand. I'd use all my influence to persuade Mr. Tory to lead a royal commission on the future of public education in Ontario.**

**Of course this is blind optimism. The Liberals will likely do everything in their power to rebury the sleeping giant Mr. Tory helpfully awoke with his education policy. Believers will contend that Mr. Tory's political *seppuku* settled the matter. Partisans will complain that even if a big education rethink is justified, Mr. Tory's previous advocacy of a spurned policy would taint any commission he might head.**

**But who understands the volatile mood of the Ontario public on this matter better than Mr. Tory, or paid a higher price for the wisdom gained? The least he deserves is some recognition of the great service he performed by exposing the huge, unresolved contradictions that are steadily undermining public education in post-Christian Ontario.**

**They're not for burying now.**

**More than anything else, Mr. Tory proved that the great concern of Ontarians today is identity, not economics or ideology, and schools are its focus. Those who opposed him will betray their own cause if they remain content to declare victory today. If the public system fails to adapt, the social fragmentation so many voted against yesterday will happen of its own accord.**

**As a hotheaded believer in evolution, I will go so far as to suggest that Commissioner Tory make it his first order of business to read the**

**article on education Preston Manning published in Tuesday's Globe and Mail. Here he can belatedly discover the rational outline of what could have been a successful conservative reform, emphasizing the undeniable virtue of choice in education - and promoting it without particular regard for creed.**

**In that light Mr. Tory's mistake was to define choice in religious terms only, increasing paranoia while failing to enlist non-partisan support for private or "independent" schools. But the important lesson is choice. A public-school system that hopes to survive as the necessary glue of a fractured society will need to provide much more of it.**

**This is something at which the Toronto school system, in its wealthy and independent heyday, excelled. Alternative schools once thrived. Heritage language programs satisfied immigrant parents while, on the other side of the tracks, French immersion arose as a competitive response to private education. Prior to amalgamation, Toronto school boards experimented freely with specialized offerings to minority groups.**

**That innovation stopped with the new century and the emergence of an alternative, conservative strategy for promoting choice. But one thing that didn't change is the public appetite for more choice - and frustration with the status quo. The same politics that once banned black-focus schools from the public system just now condemned private Muslim schools. Nobody is happy.**

**But now we have the impetus to make serious change in the public interest - as revealed so clearly with this vote. Thanks to John Tory, everything is now possible - including a constitutional amendment to eliminate all formal religious control of public education in Ontario.**