



by Danielle Carrière-Paris

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Édith Dumont

The Unconventional Journey of a Female Leadership Role Model Dedicated to Education and Her Community

For nearly 30 years, Édith Dumont has worked tirelessly and with great enthusiasm for the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario (CEPEO) in Ottawa. Since March 1, 2012, she has been director of education and secretary-treasurer, managing an organization that serves nearly 16,500 students across 43 French-language schools spread out over a territory of 40,000 km², including Trenton, Pembroke, Ottawa, Hawkesbury, and Cornwall. She oversees both staff and a financial budget of approximately \$250 million¹.

While she greatly enjoys the administrative and interpersonal aspects of her position, pedagogy remains her true passion. Even as she supervises and implements school expansion projects, she manages to support innovative teaching and learning initiatives. She rarely misses an opportunity to visit schools and congratulate educators for their dedication to young people, and to recognize students' commitment to learning and making a difference in their school and community.



March for a Bilingual City of Ottawa, with students, on May 31, 2017. CEPEO Collection

¹ Mario Pitre, « Édith Dumont, pilier du fait français dans l'Est ontarien », *Journal Saint-François*, 7 décembre 2017; CEPEO, « Qui nous sommes », <https://cepeo.on.ca/a-propos>.



Édith Dumont with representatives from secondary school diversity committees. CEPEO Collection, 2016.



Le CEPEO affiche ses couleurs! Ottawa Pride Parade, 26 August 2018. CEPEO Collection.

One might think that Édith Dumont found her way into education through a conventional path, given how perfectly the profession suits her. Yet, nothing initially suggested that the daughter of Lise Lacelle and Réal Dumont, who was born in 1964 in Valleyfield, Quebec and spent many summers on her mother's side of the family at her great-uncles' and great-aunts' farms in Eastern Ontario², would one day pursue a career in education. Her time at the convent of the Sisters of Sainte-Marie de Namur in Vankleek Hill, where she completed Grades 7 and 8, stands out as a formative experience in this Francophone area of Ontario. She completed Grades 9 through 11 in Valleyfield, and Grade 12 in the Northwest Territories, in Frobisher Bay (now Iqaluit, Nunavut), where her parents worked for over five years. Her college and university studies took her to Joliette, Gatineau, Montreal, and Ottawa. Her first work experiences were in the humanitarian field, in the Dominican Republic and Rwanda.

2 Denis Gratton, « Édith Dumont est en mission », *Le Droit*, 3 février 2012.

It was clinical psychology—specifically, the study of how the brain functions—that first sparked her interest in education³. As she began exploring how young people with learning difficulties acquire knowledge, she discovered a specialized area of study known as “orthopedagogy”; it appealed to her because it focuses on supporting learners who experience, or are at risk of experiencing, learning difficulties⁴. She pursued a bachelor's degree in this field at the Université du Québec en Outaouais after earning an initial degree in psychology from the University of Ottawa—and before completing her master's in psychopedagogy at the same institution⁵.

Thus, in 1988, she began a long professional journey dedicated to education, which was paused for four years—from 1995 to 1999—so she could balance family life with her career. During this time, she was raising three children: her first, born in Ottawa; her second, born in South Africa; and the youngest, born in France. While she cared for her young family, her spouse, Tony Viscardi, held positions as a telecommunications and IT engineer with Sofrecom, the international subsidiary of France Télécom.

During this period, her growing passion for education remained ever-present, and she generously volunteered in the early childhood education sector, all while completing her master's degree.

These international experiences had a profound impact on both her personal and professional lives. She emerged deeply enriched and inspired by the people she met, the diversity she encountered, the challenges involved in fostering inclusion, and the sense of community created when the common good takes precedence over individual ambition. She often speaks of how the great Nelson Mandela's leadership and wisdom left a lasting imprint on her. Through these experiences, she developed a leadership style that fits her perfectly—marked by authenticity and a deep belief that we live not only to grow and flourish, but more importantly, to contribute uniquely to making our communities better.

3 Sébastien Pierroz, « Le chemin d'Édith Dumont jusqu'à l'Ordre d'Ottawa », #ONfr, 18 novembre 2017.

4 Orthophonie Réadaptation Outaouais, <http://orthophonieroutaouais.com/orthopedagogie>.

5 Pierroz, *op. cit.*

Following her sabbatical, enriched by her professional experience and the knowledge gained abroad, she resumed her career at CEPEO. Over time, she has held various roles within the organization: orthopedagogy, instructional coach, school principal, superintendent of education, and currently, director of education.

But her commitment extends much farther. She is also deeply involved in a wide range of educational, community, and social initiatives at the provincial, national, and international levels. She has served as president and member of several professional organizations, including the Ontario French-Language Public School Boards' Directors of Education Council, the Franco-Ontarian Centre for Pedagogical Resources, the National Federation of Francophone School Boards, and the Regroupement national des directions générales de l'éducation (a Canadian association representing senior school system administrators in French-language school boards). From 2014 to 2016, she also sat on the board of directors of Télévision française de l'Ontario (TFO), to which she contributed her unique pedagogical expertise and unwavering love for the arts—important attributes, as they “[...] allow a society to continually reinvent itself for the benefit of those who come after us⁶. ”

She is also a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Social and Emotional Skills National Steering Committee and serves on Ontario's Ministry of Education's Equity and Inclusion Committee. In addition, she sits on the board of Crime Prevention Ottawa. Under her leadership, CEPEO—whose motto translates as “The right schools, the right school board”—adopted an approach focused on excellence, student-centred service, and accessibility. She proudly states that “CEPEO is recognized as a true partner to our communities⁷. ”

Her reputation extends well beyond Canada. She participates in numerous expert roundtables about pedagogy, social inclusion, school administration, and preserving the French language in minority settings, and she has delivered talks on governance, school climate, student well-being, and women's entrepreneurship in countries such as Morocco, Haiti, France, and Romania.

⁶ CEPEO, communiqué de presse du 10 février 2014; <https://tinyurl.com/NominationED>.

⁷ Pitre, *op. cit.* (propos d'Édith Dumont).



Édith Dumont receives the Order of Ottawa medal on 16 November 2017. CEPEO Collection.



Édith Dumont joined Sophie Grégoire Trudeau and Brigitte Macron during their visit to De La Salle School in Ottawa on June 6, 2016.



Édith Dumont is not only present in her school communities but also actively engaged in the broader community to promote Francophone culture. She has a special affinity for the arts community, including the Ottawa theatre company Nouvelle Scène, which is a valued partner for the schools. “Conquering the Stage!” benefit evening, June 6, 2018. CEPEO Collection.



CEPEO, partner of the Académie d'Aix-en-Provence, Marseille et Nice.
Collection CEPEO, 2016.



When her schedule allows, she enjoys spending time with students.
CEPEO Collection, with students participating in an entrepreneurial competition with TFO, 2018.



Visiting Francojeunesse School. CEPEO Collection.

In recognition of her many impressive accomplishments, she has received the Conference Board of Canada Fellowship and the City of Ottawa's Citizen's Medal, and has been named a Knight in the Ordre des Palmes Académiques by France. As a recipient of the 2017 Order of Ottawa, she was described in her citation as "a champion of women's rights and linguistic minorities." The citation adds, "Known for her deep commitment to school communities and youth, her passion for education makes her an exemplary ambassador⁸."

Thank you to this trailblazer, who stands out in the education sector for her expertise, inspiring leadership, exceptional dedication, and extraordinary commitment to reimagining schools that are open to the world and genuinely contribute to the well-being of communities—better meeting the evolving needs of both students and staff.

Thank you, as well, to this remarkable woman for inspiring a fresh wave of leadership among the emerging generation. Her journey deserves to be highlighted as a source of inspiration for everyone, but especially for young girls who need accessible role models to envision themselves taking their place within the most influential organizations in our societies.

Édith Dumont clearly expressed during her speech at the French Embassy:

"Schools must create an environment where the presence of women is not optional, but mandatory! How do we instill courage in our young girls to confidently engage in the kind of decision-making that is most crucial in this world? Political, economic, scientific, and artistic life—every sector of human activity needs women as much as men. Women can offer complementary, and sometimes even divergent, perspectives. Yet too few of us participate in the world's most strategic and influential fora. Issues of equity, inclusion, and diversity are also tied to this unfortunate reality. Let us encourage in our daughters the desire to take part in conversations and decisions that drive the evolution of our societies. It is in school that their voices are learned and found!"

⁸ Les Elles du Nord, "Édith Dumont, Recipient of the Order of Ottawa 2017," November 10, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/ED-Ottawa>.