

*Book Review*  
*Understanding School Choice in Canada*

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Bosetti, L. & Gereluk, D. (2016) *Understanding School Choice in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 178 pages, hardcover, ISBN: 978-1-4426-4308-6, \$ 39.95 CDN.

In *Understanding School Choice in Canada*, Bosetti and Gereluk state three primary aims. The first is to provide a philosophical background to situate the current school choice controversies within; and secondly, they aim to "situate and examine school choice debates within the unique historical, political, and legal contexts of Canada" (p. 8). The final aim is to examine the research regarding the impact of particular school choice policies in order to provide "guiding principles for school districts to consider in deciding whether to approve or decline requests for specific school choice provisions" (p. 9). These aims are met throughout the course of the book, with the primary focus of the text being the second aim.

Canada's history has created unique cultural and political situations that are reflected in our educational systems. Specific reflection on national minority groups is completed in depth in a chapter co-written with David Scott. National minority groups are distinguished from those who have immigrated to the country, and include the First Nations, Metis and the Inuit, and the Quebecois. This historical context laid the foundation for the protection of cultural heritage through both official languages (French and English) and religion (Roman Catholic and Protestant); ideals that shaped the provision of school choice and remain entrenched across much of the country today. Discussion of the inequitable treatment of the Aboriginal peoples is thorough and examines the disparity in provision of educational opportunity and choice, the traumatic impact of the residential schools, and the slow process of reconciliation. It is noted that severe inequities remain for Aboriginal students and that First Nations leaders are still calling for significant reforms to the current educational paradigm for Canadian First Nations students. By carefully examining school choice within the context of Canadian history, the authors assist

the reader in developing clear understanding of the foundation of our current context.

The historical provision of choice based on religion and language has shaped an educational system that has been largely responsive to the multicultural growth of our country. Although early school systems worked to assimilate minority immigrant cultures, multicultural principals became entrenched in our federal policies in the 1960s and 1970s, and as a result school choice options for minority languages, cultures and faiths have slowly increased. The authors demonstrate to the reader that these options are very regionally dependent, as education is a provincially regulated authourity. Tables are presented in the text to facilitate understanding of the financial support that faith-based schools receive across provinces. The province of Quebec receives particular attention, as it stands alone as an example of interculturalism, compared to the multiculturalism of the rest of the country.

The historical background of the majority of the text is placed within a context of understanding the various philosophical frameworks that have shaped school choice in Canada, and the controversies that continue to swirl around this topic in various regions of the country. By grounding the reader in conceptual frameworks of communitarianism, liberalism and neo-liberalism, the authors assist the reader in developing a more nuanced understanding of the forces that both shape and curtail school choice in the country. The authors do not take a stance on either side of the school choice debate, but seek to educate their reader on the complexities that are involved. The philosophical background provided would be of particular interest to policymakers who wish to enhance quality education while enabling families to exercise choice in order to meet their children's learning needs.

The work concludes with a chapter regarding ethical principals to guide school choice in Canada, again directed primarily toward those who have the opportunity to influence policy and programming within our educational systems. Throughout the text it is clear that the provinces vary widely in the provision of choice, with Alberta offering the widest degree of options including public and separate boards, private schools, charter schools, and funded homeschooling while the Atlantic provinces have the most limited options, with only public and private schooling being offered in Newfoundland. As a result, the final chapter may be of interest particularly to educators and policymakers in provinces where the provision of choice may not be as fully entrenched, although generally it is understood that

most educators believe that parents should have options regarding the location of their child's school and types of programs it may offer. The authors state their understanding that the provision of school choice remains controversial, and aim to provide ethical and moral principles for guidance rather than as an intent to defend any particular policy. This chapter effectively ties together the philosophical framework with the historical and current contexts to develop principles that would assist educators in making decisions regarding school choice policies and programs to enhance the quality of education for all students.

This text provides a strong framework of the unique Canadian context in school choice. Although some areas have been covered in the authors' own previous work, the synthesis of the contents provides the reader with a clear background in the various elements of this complex debate which has resulted in diverse choice opportunities across the country. *Understanding School Choice in Canada* presents the reader with a well-researched overview of the complexities of the varied school choice policies across the nation, underpinned by a sound philosophical understanding of the current school choice debate.

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