

the twentieth century for citizen-building projects and, while not a central part of Mason's work, assessing how these efforts differed or converged through the lens of age and concern about citizens-in-the-making could be most fruitful.

Home Feelings is an excellent interdisciplinary study that fills an important niche in the history of education and literary cultures in Canada. Mason smartly positions the book in the context of debates around citizenship education most recently embodied in the tensions and controversies around the 2009 *Discover Canada* citizenship guide released by the Conservative government of Stephen Harper. Through the compromises within citizenship discourse and the persistence of the vision of the individual as one "who exists within an intimate rather than a collective construction of social relations" (234), Mason provides excellent points of engagement. This book would make excellent reading for graduate or senior undergraduate students in a range of disciplines interested in education, literacy, literature, labour, and gender history.

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Paul W. Bennett

The State of the System: A Reality Check on Canada's Schools

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020. 256 pp.

Paul Bennett's 2020 "reality check on Canada's schools" will strike the right notes with some readers disposed toward school reform. In *The State of the System*, Bennett argues that public schools "have lost their way and have become largely unresponsive to the public they still claim to serve" (3). Bennett's is a "plan to reclaim them for students, parents, teachers, and communities alike" (3). Well-written and referenced, this check on Canada's schools is a sophisticated appeal to populism that will resonate with those who believe that education is an urbanized, bureaucratic, centralized system that has triumphed over students, parents, teachers, and the engaged public.

The State of the System follows a path that Bennett has traveled before.¹ That he is familiar with both popular and scholarly literature and is an able writer will be no surprise to those who have read his prior work or his blog.² Bennett has employed the theme of a Manichean, David and Goliath struggle between state schooling and local, community-based education at least as far back as his 1990 doctoral thesis.³ For Bennett, reformation of public schooling is principally about wresting

1 Paul W. Bennett, "Consolidation, Bureaucracy and the Public Schools: The Formation of the Modern Bureaucratic State, 1920 to 1993," *Canadian Issues* (2014):16–22; Paul W. Bennett, *Vanishing Schools, Threatened Communities: The Contested Schoolhouse in Maritime Canada, 1850–2010* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2011).

2 <https://educhatter.wordpress.com/>

3 Paul W. Bennett, "'Little Worlds': The Forging of Social Identities in Ontario's Protestant School Communities and Institutions, 1850–1930," (Phd diss., University of Toronto, 1990).

control from technocratic and managerial elites who control education from the top. “Regaining control over our schools, rebuilding social capital, and revitalizing local communities” (237) are the aims of reform, while meeting the needs of children and acting in their best interests are the core mission of schooling.

Bennett is inclined to Rousseau’s concern for the individual in society, in contrast to Locke’s respect for empiricism and the social contract. For Bennett it is meeting the needs of children, revitalizing local communities, and building the social bonds among the members of those communities. Such beliefs are in contrast to a purpose of education that is not indifferent to meeting the needs of students or forging social bonds, but also focuses on the larger society, fostering social cohesion, and equipping the next generation for socially responsible citizenship. Bennett sees school board centralization and consolidation as evidence of the cult of efficiency and accountability, and the desire to reduce the managerial “span of control” (67). The target for Bennett is bureaucracy at the provincial and school board levels. He favours school-community governance and is enamoured of school-based management as practiced in Edmonton. He believes that community-school governance will foster parental engagement, humanize education on a “student scale” (230), and produce teaching-centred classrooms in which teachers are free to set the curriculum, unfettered by external assessment. Equity of outcomes—the primary reason for board or provincial assessments—receives no attention from Bennett.

Bennett’s inclination toward Rousseau is evident in his veneration of small communities and his apparent approval of provincial funding for faith-based schools under the ambit of public choice. Bennett does not explicitly reject socially responsible citizenship, but his prose casts aspersions upon it. In a section of his book headed “Curriculum Fads and Passing Fancies,” he writes:

Large political and social goals, such as expanding the reach of the K-12 system, embracing diversity and inclusion, and raising graduation rates have been major drivers, even when they may compromise the schools’ capacity to produce a quality education for students (137).

I am frankly troubled by the juxtaposition of diversity and inclusion versus quality education. The implication is that, in learning together with persons who differ from us, the quality of our schooling may be diminished. It seems like a contradiction from someone who professes to be a populist.

Bennett is selective in his use of examples, one of which mischaracterizes the effort of People for Education to broaden assessments to include the arts, social and emotional learning, and citizenship. Bennett implies that these efforts (with which I was involved) were “anti-testing” (153). A casual reader might miss the contradiction between the desire to broaden the measurement of success and being anti-measurement. Although well-versed in the history of Canadian education, Bennett neglects to mention that British Columbia introduced provincial assessments of numeracy and literacy at grades 4, 7, and 10 when I served as Deputy Minister.

Does such mischaracterization and oversight warrant ignoring Bennett’s book?

Absolutely not. *The State of the System: A Reality Check on Canada's Schools* is a well-written and cleverly argued populist treatise seemingly designed to diminish a system designed for the public good and refashion it for private benefit. Few readers will be deceived by Bennett's *argumentum ad populum*—appeal to the people.

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Catherine Gidney

Captive Audience: How Corporations Invaded Our Schools

Toronto, ON: Between the Lines, 2019. 248 pp.

Because I study education privatization, Catherine Gidney's *Captive Audience: How Corporations Invaded our Schools* caught my eye when browsing my university's bookstore. I hoped I might learn something new about this phenomenon and confirm I had not overlooked any key studies in my own research. I was not disappointed. Based on an extensive review of primary and secondary sources, *Captive Audience* offers a unique and detailed history of corporate involvement in Canadian schools. It also illustrates foundational ideas about policy that I aim to teach in my classes. Finally, as a scholar striving to persuade the general public to resist education privatization, the book provides an excellent example of how research can be mobilized to a broad audience as part of efforts to strengthen democracy in Canadian schools.

Captive Audience makes a unique contribution to knowledge about education privatization in Canada. Policy scholars Stephen Ball and Deborah Youdell have identified two types of education privatization: "exogenous privatization," which sees the private sector taking on roles once provided by the public sector; and "endogenous privatization," which involves making the public sector more like the private one.¹ Gidney focuses primarily on exogenous forms of privatization by examining how corporations have sought to benefit through their involvement with schools. With its Canadian focus, this book makes an original contribution to the international literature on educational privatization while offering new knowledge to the growing body of research on the phenomenon in Canada. By demonstrating that corporations have actively engaged with Canadian public education systems for close to 100 years, the book can help scholars understand how and why the trend toward education privatization across Canada continues. However, it also shows that education privatization has always been contested—sometimes successfully. Further, *Captive Audience* challenges the common assertion that education privatization is an outcome of neoliberalism, although Gidney acknowledges that corporate

1 Stephen J. Ball and Deborah Youdell, *Hidden Privatisation in Public Education* (Brussels: Education International, 2007), https://pages.ei-ie.org/quadrennialreport/2007/upload/content_trsl_images/630/Hidden_privatisation-EN.pdf