have been more robust had the book adopted the "ideological model"[6] of literacy as social practice, for example—especially since several chapters explicitly sought to understand nationalism as ideological languages. More intentionally defining and theorizing literacy might have opened new avenues to consider how language and texts function in social practices that make up certain kinds of subjectivity, citizenship, and national identities.

Overall, I highly recommend Fox and Boser's (2023) *National Literacies in Education: Historical Reflections on the Nexus of Nations, National Identities, and Education*. I found this book an insightful and engaging read, and I plan on drawing upon its chapters and reading more work from its contributors as I pursue historical interests related to white Christian nationalism in the US.

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Lauren Bialystok and Lisa M. F. Andersen

Touchy Subject: The History and Philosophy of Sex Education

The University of Chicago Press, 2022. 232 pp.

Why are folks so hot and bothered about the provision of sex education in schools? Lauren Bialystok and Lisa M.F. Andersen's book *Touchy Subject* opens with a series of controversies. Parents in Nebraska, clutching pearls, and shrieking, "I have five daughters! Five daughters! Who's going to keep them pure?" (1). But, it's not just America, as the authors highlight; it's happening in Germany too. And Ontario.

And at this moment, alarming conservative incursions on sexuality education are unfolding broadly. In Canada, the conservative provincial governments of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and New Brunswick are anxiously trying to censor sex education curricula, and far-right groups are organizing national anti-queer and anti-sex ed protests across the country.[7] And then, perhaps fortuitously, as I was reading this book in May 2024, New Brunswick premier Blaine Higgs railed against the provision of sex education by sharing a screenshot of a sex education workshop in a New Brunswick high school. The screenshot showed an image of a slide from the sex ed workshop, that includes four questions presumably asked by young people such as "do girls masturbate" and "is it good or bad to do anal?" Blaine Higgs responded with handwringing, tweeting:

6 B. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1984); J. P. Gee, *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (Taylor & Francis, 1990).

7 Kendall Latimer and Laura Sciarpelletti, "Critics alarmed as Sask. government scales back sexual health education," CBC News, August 23, 2023, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/sex-education-saskatchewan-1.6944443; Jacques Poitras, "Higgs greets marchers opposing LGBTQ policies," *CBC News New Brunswick,* September 20, 2023. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/higgs-marchers-lgbtq-1.6972813

> A number of concerned parents have shared with me photos and screenshots of clearly inappropriate material that was presented recently in at least four New Brunswick high schools. To say I am furious would be a gross understatement. …Children should be protected, and parents should be respected.[8]

Touchy Subject seeks to make a case for the provision of what the authors call "Democratic Humanistic Sexuality Education," which encompasses a "historically and philosophically informed approach to sex education that aligns with democratic and humanistic aims and responds to the salient features of young people's worlds, including the inequities that put some students at much higher risk of sexual harm than others" (5)—a lofty and important goal given this political moment. And yet also, as the authors contend, "even when sex education delivers crucial information, sexuality eludes the institutional structures and rational deliberation presumed by most formal education as well as public health promotion…[yet] where does this leave the mystery, the excitement, or perhaps the sacredness of sexuality?" (8). This question reminded me of one posed by sexuality scholar Jen Gilbert in her 2014 book, "What place might sexuality have in education? Where will it arrive and in what guise?"[9] Through two distinct sections, one that centres the history of American school-based sexuality education (chapters 1–3), and another that takes up sex education as a philosophical inquiry (chapters 4–6), Bialystok and Andersen take up these important questions.

In chapter 1, the authors highlight that historically in US-based sex education, "when it came to sex, the path of least resistance was to teach late, infrequently, and superficially. Teachers were accountable to local communities in ways that national reform associations were not" (32)—this seems to be an enduring challenge in teaching sexuality education in the US and beyond. Throughout the chapter, I kept thinking, *le plus ça change*, especially as they highlighted that in the 1920s in the US, "sex education was not thorough; it skewed heavily toward patchwork measures such as meetings with individual children, the distribution of pamphlets, or presentations by visiting lecturers" (24). These very practices endure in school-based sexuality education, where teachers engage DIY methods to meet their students' needs, while simultaneously negotiating conservative community standards.[10]

Chapter 2 explores the way sex education changed over time, 1920–1970. As Andersen notes, in looking through archival materials and old textbooks, she noted "a pattern of absence" (33). This reviewer was particularly delighted by the inclusion of a list of "don'ts" from a citizen committee who were charged with providing curriculum expectations for a Family Life course in postwar Washington State. Teachers under no circumstances should include in their instruction the following:

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8 Blaine Higgs (@premierebhiggs), "A number of concerned parents have shared with me photos and screenshots of clearly inappropriate material that was presented…" Twitter (now X), May 24, 2024. https://twitter.com/premierbhiggs/status/1794133375390818307.

9 Jen Gilbert, *Sexuality in School: The Limited of Education* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 81.

10 Casey Burkholder and Melissa Keehn, "'In Some Ways They're the People Who Need it the Most': Mobilizing Queer Joy with Sex Ed Teachers in New Brunswick, Canada," *Journal of Queer and Trans Studies in Education* 1, no. 2 (2024): 1–15, https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/jqtsie/vol1/iss2/1

a. information on details pertaining to coitus;

b. approval of masturbation;

c. approval or discussion of homosexual relationships;

d. discussion of religious interpretations pertaining to any phase of the course;

e. discussion of any type which would have a tendency to approve or advocate divorce;

f. birth control and contraceptives;

g. approval of pre-marital or extra-marital sexual relations (46).

It strikes this reviewer, that those "don'ts" make up the majority of what is currently included in both school-based sex education, as well as contemporary challenges to what might be taught.

The final historical chapter focuses on the opportunities provided to peer education in the 1970s in New York City. Later, amidst the HIV/AIDS crisis, Andersen points to the example of YELL (Youth Education Life Line) where young HIV activists (affiliated with ACT UP) engaged in sex education, advocacy, and activism, including within schools: "knowingly or not, such students extended the logic of earlier gay liberation politics, demanding recognition that did not cost them their sexual autonomy, and in fact using sexual expression to create political leverage…Given that schools still remained the location where large groups of teenagers could most easily be found, YELL urged schools to distribute condoms through school clinics" (73).

The fourth chapter begins to highlight the complexity of teaching sexuality education in a democratic space, including the challenge of pluralism. However, Bialystok notes that "sex education should be evidence based and also be a type of ethics education, in which young people learn to reflect on and articulate their own values" (86–87). Bialystok suggests that "rather than attempt to purify the curriculum of the controversy that surrounds it" (109), educators might instead highlight an ethics-forward sex education that promotes values like "self-care, truth-telling and mutuality" (92).

In chapter 5, Bialystok thinks through who should be responsible for the provision of sexuality education: parents, schools, policy makers, public health officials, youth themselves — "who has the right to override disagreement with other stakeholders and decide what children learn?" (111). Later, after detailing the complexities of making any single stakeholder in charge of sex education, Bialystok suggests, "the one conclusion that can be easily drawn here is that there should be no single 'boss' when it comes to sex education" (130).

Chapter 6 offers some thoughts on the aims of schooling in general, and Bialystok structures her argument around six of them: "democratic citizenship, humanistic or individual flourishing, economic success, social reproduction, social transformation and public health and population control" (139). In this chapter, I found myself asking again and again, what about racialized and queer and trans and intersex and disabled

and asexual youth (and of course the young people who occupy multiple identities), and the sex education that they themselves might particularly desire — can those desires be met in sanitised, heteronormative, ableist public school spaces? Ultimately, Bialystok argues, "the kind of sex education that young people need, and that schools can provide, is comprehensive without trying to be exhaustive, factual without being heartless…rather than try to teach young people everything there is to know about sex and sexuality as though in preparation for some cosmic multiple-choice test, schools should focus on equipping young people to be literate members of the sexual world and ethical participants in all their relationships" (160–161).

The authors close the book by arguing, "everyone needs and deserves good sex education, but good sex education is also an equity issue of paramount importance" (167). Throughout the book, I found myself underlining and annotating moments that reminded me of the current state of sexuality education in New Brunswick, where I have found myself teaching comprehensive sex education methods to pre-service teachers, as well as researching the supports and barriers to sexuality education with teachers in the system over the past few years. One such moment is reflected in rhetoric about parents. Andersen suggests that mid-century American "school administrators, in turn, tended to assume that an angry phone call was the harbinger for an angry mob, whether the initial phone call came from a district parent or someone in a whole other state" (57). Last spring in New Brunswick, the education minister and premier publicly proclaimed that they received "hundreds of emails" complaining about gender and sexual diversity and inclusivity in schools, which later turned out to be, in fact, three emails.[11] *Le plus ça change.* Given the current climate, increasing parents' rights discourses, and moral panicking from Canada, the US, and elsewhere, *Touchy Subject* is required reading.

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Brian Simon and the Struggle for Education

University College London Press, 2023. 191 pp.

The third iteration of Canadian History of Education Association/Association canadienne d'histoire de l'éducation met jointly with the American History of Education Society in Vancouver in 1983. Brian and Joan Simon were among the attendees, and Brian's essay "Can Education Change Society?" was included in the post-conference

11 Jacques Poitras, "Minister tells Moncton school district he's repealing its gender identity policy," *CBC News,* April 26, 2024, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/district-education-council-gender-policy-1.7186501