

## BOUNDING PRIVATE EDUCATION

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Devins, Neil E., ed. *Public Values, Private Schools*. London: Falmer, 1989.  
Glenn, Charles L. *Choice of Schools in Six Nations*. Washington: U.S. Department of Education, 1989.

Haertel, Edward H., Thomas James, and Henry M. Levin. *Comparing Public & Private Schools*. Vol 2. New York: Falmer, 1987.

James, Thomas, and Henry M. Levin. *Comparing Public & Private Schools*. Vol 1. New York: Falmer, 1988.

Provenzo, Eugene F., Jr. *Religious Fundamentalism and American Education: The Battle for the Public Schools*. Albany: State University of New York at Albany, 1990.

Rose, Susan D. *Keeping Them Out of the Hands of Satan: Evangelical Schooling in America*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Van Brummelen, Harro. *Curriculum: Implementation in Three Christian Schools*. Grand Rapids: Calvin College, 1989.

Walford, Geoffrey, ed. *Private Schools in Ten Countries: Policy and Practice*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Only from time to time does private schooling receive scholarly attention. Various reasons intertwine. Not only do the bulk of children attend public schools across North America, but a state system almost inevitably generates more accessible primary data than do disparate, oftentimes unregulated, private institutions. The patterns making broader generalizations possible are sometimes difficult to discern, and the generalizations themselves appear to be of limited interest to other researchers. It is thus a special treat to sit down with not just one but an armful of recent monographs concerned with aspects of private education and with the boundaries between the private and public sectors.

While none of the studies is specifically historical in its disciplinary approach, all are deserving of notice by historians of education, in part due to the general paucity of studies, in part because their content deals with aspects of the past as well as the present. Some kinds of private schools, notably those in the conservative Christian tradition, are so recent in impetus that no truly "historical" studies can be expected to appear for some time. The various monographs are also useful for their diverse approaches to a difficult research area.

Two of the studies are interesting for their very impetus, which is to determine within an international context exactly what is private education. In Geoffrey Walford's edited *Private Schools in Ten Countries*, scholars knowledgeable on England, Scotland, the United States, Canada, Australia,

France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Japan separately examine policy and practice. In *Choice of Schools in Six Nations*, Charles Glenn interprets opportunities for family choice, primarily within the private sector, in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Britain, Canada, and Germany. The most obvious conclusion to emerge from these two volumes is the great extent to which the boundaries between private and public differ from country to country. The extreme case is the Netherlands, where over seventy percent of children attend private schools, but private schools that are almost completely government funded, each child being given an annual education voucher equal to the per capita cost in the local public school. According to Estelle James, an economist at the State University of New York at Stonybrook, the Dutch schools are nonetheless private in terms of their "independence, flexibility and differentiated product" (Walford, p. 187).

John Bergen of the University of Alberta, author of the Canadian chapter in the Walford volume, briefly discusses the history of education in Canada, private-school growth, differing levels of provincial support for private schools, and choice as a public issue. Glenn, who authored the second comparative volume, is primarily concerned with comparisons with the United States, not unexpectedly so given that his study was published by the U.S. Department of Education. Yet he does a better job interpreting the Canadian situation. Glenn found surprising the "far greater diversity and parent choice in Canada," which he attributes to "fundamental national laws" that "give many parents a right to denominational public schools and pose no impediments to funding of private schools" (p. 145). In order to make best sense of Canadian complexities, Glenn summarizes the availability of choice by religious affiliation, by language, and by province.

One of the principal reasons private education is finally beginning to receive some attention is the intriguing rise of conservative Christianity and the consequent growth of Christian schools. Indeed, three of the recent monographs have this as their subject. In *Keeping Them Out of the Hands of Satan*, Susan Rose, a sociologist at Dickinson College, profiles two Christian schools in what is a useful counterpoint to Alan Peshkin's much praised ethnography of a single school.<sup>1</sup> Rose sets the scene with an historical overview of conservative Christianity in the United States and a discussion of the growth of Christian schools over the past quarter century. For two years, Rose joined in the life of two different communities and their schools in upstate New York, each of which she evokes from the inside. The middle-class charismatic Covenant Fellowship was primarily concerned that its children internalize values, and Rose is at her best in describing the meaning of the school's evolving curriculum for parents and the community. "While the Covenant members see themselves as pioneers, forging ahead to create a new, better world out of the old, the Lakehaven Baptists see themselves as guardians of the past, preservers of traditional values and lifestyles" (p. 99). Rose explains sensitively and sympathetically why this second, working-class community opted for Accelerated Curriculum Education, a pre-

packaged, individualized learning programme. Given that ACE is used in Christian schools across Canada, this section might well be made required reading for Canadian scholars and students of education alike. Rose goes on to infer at length from these two profiles, and in this she is somewhat less successful, having a tendency to paint with a broad sociological brush.

Harro Van Brummelen's *Curriculum: Implementation in Three Christian Schools* usefully reminds us that the world of Christian schooling is not as neatly conceptualized as Rose would have it appear. Van Brummelen, who heads the Education Department at Trinity Western University in British Columbia, repeatedly visited three middle-class Christian schools in the same community over a three-year period. In contrast to Rose's findings, it was the Baptist school among the three that developed its own curriculum whereas the ACE school was affiliated with a charismatic fellowship. Over the three years the latter did, however, slowly break away from what the principal perceived as an uncritical, overly simplistic approach to learning. The third school was in the Dutch Calvinist tradition and used the core public school curriculum supplemented by biblical studies as a subject. Van Brummelen's slim study is particularly effective in describing the difficult and sometimes tortured process of curriculum change at the school level and in making comprehensible and even sympathetic the Christian critique of public education.

Rose's and Van Brummelen's portraits of Christian communities from the inside usefully set the scene for Eugene Provenzo Jr.'s *Religious Fundamentalism and American Education*. Provenzo, an educational historian at the University of Miami, is primarily concerned with the impact of conservative Christianity on American public schools, only secondarily with the growth of Christian schools. This is because he interprets the central goal of conservatives in the United States as being to redraw the boundaries of the public system rather than to retreat into their own private schools. After briefly reviewing the history of Christian fundamentalism, Provenzo summarizes its interpretation of American educational history. To counter the "secular humanism" that conservative Christians see as dominant in public schools, they have sought particular changes including censorship of offensive educational materials, more suitable textbooks, introduction of creationism into the curriculum, and support for the family and family values within the school. In examining each of these thrusts, Provenzo emphasizes local initiatives, which from time to time come close to being anecdotal rather than exemplary of the larger debate. Although he concludes that some of the conservatives' concerns may be justified, consistent with families' First Amendment rights, his larger intent appears to be to alert both the public and educational scholars to the challenge posed to the public system. Provenzo's desire for a dual audience is to some extent his undoing. The volume, while useful, falls between the popular and the scholarly, doing neither as well as it might.

In marked contrast to Provenzo, the three edited volumes in the Stanford Series on Education & Public Policy are very serious, at times to the point of

tedium. The editors of *Comparing Public & Private Schools* seek to reshape American educational policy, which will in their view occur effectively only when the long-standing scholarly neglect of the private schools educating one in every eight students is rectified. The first volume compares institutional contexts, teaching forces, and student bodies; the second reassesses to no single conclusion the aggregate achievement data used by James Coleman and others at the beginning of the 1980s to compare public and private schools.<sup>2</sup> The contributors are mostly in educational administration or policy studies and prefer numbers to make their points. Some of the essays are worth reading, such as the analyses of changing enrolment patterns between kinds of American private schools by Bruce Cooper of Fordham and by James Catterell of the University of California at Los Angeles, and the comparison of teachers' salaries between private and public schools by Jay Chambers, a consultant on educational finance. The bibliography in volume one is a good introduction to the field.

*Public Values, Private Schools* is, of all the monographs here considered, the most explicitly concerned with the issue of bounding private education. Deriving its impetus from the growth of conservative Christian schools, it seeks to determine how unlike public schools private schools can become before governments have a responsibility to step in. Among the intriguing arguments put forward are that private schools by definition cannot serve the public or common good through promoting such values as religious and racial tolerance but rather must serve the particularistic good of a discrete portion of the larger community, for otherwise they would not have existed in the first place. Despite the pedantic tone of some of the essays, most of them written by experts in law, government, and public policy and filled with detail particular to the United States, they are well worth reading and pondering.

Hopefully, these diverse approaches to private education and to its boundaries with the public system presage greater interest by scholars. Other signs are hopeful, such as the appearance just at the University of British Columbia alone of several recent graduate thesis and major papers on diverse aspects of private schooling, including the growth of Christian schools, the culture in an elite school, and the consequences of provincial funding for Catholic schools.<sup>3</sup> *Private School Monitor*, published quarterly by the private education interest group of the American Educational Research Association, continues to place itself at the cutting edge of new developments. It is only as attention quickens and as more research appears that we will begin to understand issues critical for the history of education as a whole such as the motives which have impelled families to opt out of their local school, the actual as opposed to imagined differences between the schooling received in public and private institutions, and the effect that such differences have had on individual adult lives and so on larger societies.

## NOTES

1. Alan Peshkin, *God's Choice: The Total World of a Fundamentalist Christian School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
2. James Coleman, Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore, *Public and Private Schools* (Washington, D.C.: National Centre for Education Statistics, 1981); and James Coleman, Thomas Hoffer and Sally Kilgore, *High School Achievement: Public, Catholic, and Private Schools Compared* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).
3. Gordon C. Calvert, "Growth of Non-FISA Christian Schools in British Columbia, 1975-1985" (M.A. thesis, Department of Social and Educational Studies, University of British Columbia, 1987); Elizabeth J. Thomas, "The Importance of School Culture in School Improvement: A Case Study" (M.Ed. paper, Department of Administrative, Adult, and Higher Education, University of British Columbia, 1988); and Frank J. Dragojevich, "The Funding of Roman Catholic Schools in British Columbia: Issues and Implications" (M.Ed. major paper, Department of Administrative, Adult, and Higher Education, University of British Columbia, 1989).