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Wallin, D., Young, J., & Levin, B. (2021). *Understanding Canadian schools: An introduction to educational administration* (6th ed.). University of Saskatchewan Open Press. 599 pages. ISBN: 9780888806673

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Understanding Canadian Schools: An Introduction to Educational Administration (2021) has become a touchstone, perhaps a runestone, for educational administration as a field in Canada. Tracing the textbook's evolution through six editions from 1998 through to 2021 provides insight into the overarching ideas, underlying assumptions, and prevailing anxieties about schools that have coloured our lenses in education over the past quarter century. Comparing and contrasting its six editions since the late 1990s can therefore become one source for writing an albeit superficial intellectual history of educational administration in Canada. How has the textbook changed over time from early versions as the commercial product of a Toronto publisher to a platform at the University of Saskatchewan open free of charge to anyone with a laptop and web locator? What has been its spirit in shaping the spirit of the age or climate of ideas surrounding schools?

Certainly, the authorial batting order has shifted over time, going from two authors to three. Dr. Jon Young is emeritus professor at the University of Manitoba whose interest is the role of "the public" (p. 23) in public education. He has had an indelible impact on Canadian public school sector policy, particularly in the realm of funding models, accessibility, and equity. Before the ignoble end of his career, Dr. Ben Levin was Deputy Minister of Education in both Manitoba and Ontario. It is fair to say that his educational experience was primarily in public administration rather than educational administration, but earlier he was a school trustee in Winnipeg. As a latecomer to this book and now lead author, Dr. Dawn Wallin is a professor in the College of Education and now Vice President of Research (Engagement) at the University of Saskatchewan. Having started as a teacher in the Kindersley School Division in Saskatchewan, she eventually moved to the University of Manitoba after her doctoral studies to become a co-author of the text in the early 2000s. Her career has encompassed informal and formal leadership positions with the Canadian Association for Educational Administration, the Canadian Association for Women in Education, and the Canadian Society for the Study of Education.

Nevertheless, the anticipated readership and linguistic register have remained constant over time. The primary audiences of *Understanding Canadian Schools* are undergraduate teacher candidates who receive an introduction to educational administration in Canada; graduate students looking into areas where there is no substantial or current body of research; and the wider public, such as neophyte school board members, school advisory council members, or parents who have a vested interest in a particular

issue but do not understand the bigger picture (e.g., homeschool associations seeking greater recognition and legitimacy). Moreover, this resource can be valuable for newcomers entering Canadian postsecondary education programs as it can help them grasp the fundamental aspects of Canada's K–12 school system. As such, the textbook has become a primer on the Canadian history of public schooling, a door into the recurrent public policy issues confronting educators, and an initial foray into the argot and obsessions within K–12 education.

Above all, it must be said that the textbook retains its solid 10-chapter structure and topics, initiating readers into broad issues "in the organization" (p. 50) while later chapters focus on the school and classrooms. The reader is introduced successively to purposes and goals; historical structures; policy and politics; legal matters; resources and financing; teacher contracts and salaries; parent-teacher relationships; teacher professionalism; curriculum, assessment, and programming; and prospects for educational reform. This structure certainly lends itself nicely to the scope and timing of a university semester, setting the book up for its use as required reading for undergraduate courses. Comparing the prose on these topics in the 1998 edition with the 2021 edition reveals much continuity. Loading the front chapters with content on the purpose of schools and existing tensions is a preview of things to come throughout the rest of the text: Uniformity and Diversity, Stability and Change, Individuality and Collectivity, Centralization and Decentralization, Power and Equality.

The authors have retained almost word-for-word the introductory vignettes to each of the 10 chapters, designed to provide insight into staffroom discussions and debates. These prologues are an enticing point of entry into the succeeding chapter material, and experienced teachers will recognize the scenarios as familiar. But where Margaret Laurence's *Stone Angel* was the object of crackpots' and extremists' censorship in 1998, now it is purportedly Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale.* This structure allows the authors to translate the 'hot issues of the hour' into persistent policy tensions prevalent in schools. Bookending each chapter are exercises designed to further explore the issues presented in the chapter and purposely left open-ended to respond to contemporary contexts. Once again, this approach is suitable for undergraduate courses and should give the edition additional shelf life. The authors have dropped the chapter-end sections on "Further Reading," thus forsaking the task of guiding a reader to further, up-to-date research or government publications. That might not be helpful for the avowed graduate student audience looking for gaps in the literature. Nor do we have highlighted terms, as in the 1998 edition, to the key terminology and jargon of 2021 in the latest edition, which will be a disadvantage for the public audience.

Thankfully, the authors do acknowledge a general need and advocate that "an entirely separate book needs to be written about First Nations schools, their histories, contemporary issues, governance structures, and educational programming and outcomes" (p. xix). Unfortunately, they claim that "it would not be equitable to 'compare' systems that have entirely different histories of development" (p. xix). Yet justice is necessary in both public education systems, given the large proportion of Indigenous students in federal, provincial, and territorial systems. Given the tortuous history of nationalism and ethnic-linguistic issues in this country, a comparative rather than "separate" textbook for First Nations education (whether or not the data is initially available for federally funded schools) is imperative. Such an approach would best exemplify the pluralist ideals of this textbook. At least, the 2021 version of this text does explore Indigenous education and the education of First Nations students in a preliminary way that does not appear in the 1998 edition. However, Nunavut, Yukon, and Northwest Territories students and schools do not make an appearance in this current or older versions, surely a major oversight that will be corrected in the future.

In its 1998 edition, we have the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as an appendix; the 2021 version disregards this add-on material, perhaps out of editorial page pressure, but does afford considerable attention to its impact. The *Charter* has become such a key flintstone of ideas in its application by Canadian courts, that we now accept it as a permanent fixture in our educational cave. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that the legal sections and examples demand a substantial rewrite and update. We have come a long way in Supreme Court case law from *Moore v. British Columbia* in 2021 in special education, which is featured in the latest edition of the textbook. But we have not moved far in our ideas about the federal Official Languages Act or *Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia* about French language schooling in 2020, and *Regina v. Jarvis* in 2021 about teachers about the Criminal Code and technology, which are not featured. Instead, the 2021 edition reveals its rapidly

aging legal ideas by continuing to feature *Eaton v. Brant County Board of Education,* (1997) or *Regina v. M (RM)* (1998) as precedent-setting.

As with earlier editions, the authors are wise to stay clear of describing current pedagogy, such as cross-curricular instruction or inquiry learnings (or whatever the flavour of the day is), as that can be left up to the myriad of educational experts to dive into the nuances of pedagogy. Rather, the focus is on the organization and structure of schools, articulating the standardized organization of schools that has endured for decades (if not a century) modeled after Ford's factory system. The curriculum is based upon knowledge the provincial government has legitimized and deemed as necessary for students to learn. The text points out that students who have different values, such as knowledge about traditional ways, may not be seen as important. A change in this current version is the recognition that school boards have highlighted anti-racism and diversity training applied from everything such as hiring practices to unearthing biases teachers have toward their treatment of students.

There is a greater move toward including students in the conversations about learning and assessment—seeing students as partners (education and assessment as something done *with* students rather than done *to* students). This extends to the inclusion of students with special needs, although there continues to be debate about funding for these students and the programs with which students with special needs can engage. Although the text offers a chapter on the importance of the parent-teacher relationship, the text avoids controversial topics, such as excusing students from certain aspects of the health or science curriculum, seeking permission to join Gender and Sexuality Alliance clubs, or needing parent permission to use a preferred name and/or pronoun. The increased media attention on these issues and potential lawsuits may set the precedent for redefining this relationship in the future.

Although there was an attempt to reference the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the next edition of this textbook should include the long-term changes to education that may have resulted from such a sudden, massive refocusing on classroom structure and delivery. The demand for teachers, students, and administrators to immerse themselves in online learning environments necessitated changes to instructional and assessment practices. Whether those practices were innovative or represented a bare minimum may be up for debate. Additionally, the authors should include how pressures from social media influence the role of teachers and administrators. The omni-presence of social media and expectations of school administrators to regularly monitor and respond to postings may have shifted their role away from instructional leaders and managers of school operations toward crisis management in the digital environment. Furthermore, the opportunities and challenges of artificial intelligence in K–12 education is quickly emerging as an issue worth exploring further. As with any technological innovation—for example, the introduction of calculators or word processors—there are those who fear its use will corrode fundamental skills. Others envision the possibilities artificial intelligence presents and feel it would be a disservice to students not to expose and integrate it into regular instruction.

The final chapter, "Prospects for Education," is substantially rewritten, but it is now coloured with the language of neoliberalism and the slogans of social justice activists not evident 25 years ago. Instead of a balanced discussion around issues of markets and welfare economics, we are given sociological jargon that is unhelpful. What was once a textbook paean to pluralism and the dangers of ideology, the final section has become a binary call to remember our colonial history; to warnings about systemic inequities; and to making over-sweeping claims about marketization, capitalism, managerialism, de-professionalization, deskilling, curriculum narrowing, and ironically, teachers' unions and not professional associations. In 1998 and in 2021, the reader is appropriately admonished about the "imposition of dogma—no matter whose dogma it is—inevitably leads away from learning, not toward it" (p. 562). But does dogma about "managerialism" fit in a textbook about educational administration? Perhaps that is another way of saying that Canadian educational administration is moving away from the study of public policy and administrative arrangements in organizational theory, toward amplifications in politics and enthusiasms in sociology.

Is this textbook emblematic of a larger shift in ideas from a liberal democratic tradition in public education moving toward a social democratic understanding of Canadian schools? Perhaps. However, we are still a long way from the sentiments of Stanley Ryerson (Sweeny, 1999) or Michel Foucault (Rabinow, 1984). The authors do not advocate critical discourse analysis nor systematic deconstruction as panaceas to the educational issues *du jour*. In brief, *Understanding Canadian Schools* in its latest edition is more

activist in its orientation, more prone to recognize a bifurcation in ideologies, and more susceptible to describing polarizations in political matters than a quarter century ago. In that sense, the spirit of the educational age in 2021 is less gentle, less fact-driven, less grounded in documents and statistics, and more dogmatic. Thus, for any international reader, this textbook remains a valuable mirror reflecting the rapidly changing climate of ideas surrounding Canadian schools.

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