

Acadiensis

Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region
Revue d'histoire de la région Atlantique

ACADIENSIS

History of Education Crossing the Street: Exploring the Tenuous Place of Educational History in Canadian Historiography

Theodore Michael Christou

Volume 43, Number 2, Summer–Fall 2014

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1062197ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this note

Christou, T. (2014). History of Education Crossing the Street: Exploring the Tenuous Place of Educational History in Canadian Historiography. *Acadiensis*, 43(2).

All Rights Reserved © Theodore Michael Christou, 2014

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

History of Education Crossing the Street: Exploring the Tenuous Place of Educational History in Canadian Historiography

AS A DOCTORAL STUDENT STUDYING the history of education, I was preoccupied with ensuring that my research was able to cross the street. I am still bothered by the same preoccupation. I lived, as I live now, in a faculty of education. On the other side of the road is the rest of the history department, nestled within a faculty of arts and science. Many education faculties are isolated on university campuses. This isolation has a literal and a figurative meaning.

Faculties of education are often isolated from the main body of buildings on campuses – a quirk arising from the relatively late arrival of education within university infrastructure. My own faculty at Queen's University is a healthy ten-minute walk from what is popularly termed the "Main Campus." On the "West Campus," which I have colloquially renamed "Exile Island," academics are physically cut off from the intellectual life and activity of our disciplinary colleagues. I do not have casual collisions with historians or with history students. I have to walk down a street and circumnavigate bends and hooks in order to interact with those scholars and activities that populate the Queen's history department.

Figuratively, education scholars have always had a complex about their place in the academy.¹ All educationists suffer this complex to various degrees, although we can be diagnosed on different points of a spectrum that extends from the healthy (productive, cooperative, interactive) to the unhealthy (bitter, isolated, morose, megalomaniac). This complex manifests itself in two tendencies, which are often interrelated. The first tendency is the explicit and tacit association of educational research with the epistemological and methodological traditions of *hard* disciplines, particularly psychology. The second tendency is the overt and systematic concentration of educational research on educational practice, especially in teaching and learning contexts and schools but also the overt effort to affiliate this research with some disciplinary home away from the isolations proffered on Exile Island.

The first tendency gives rise to an internal hierarchy within faculties of education. The hierarchy privileges *hard* quantitative research while tolerating *methodologically rigorous* qualitative research. It endorses a hybrid *mixed methods* approach to research while virtually marginalizing humanistic research. History and philosophy of education have suffered heavy losses.²

1 See David F. Labaree, "Progressivism, Schools, and Schools of Education: An American Romance," *Paedagogica Historica* 41, no. 1 and 2 (February 2005): 275-88. Labaree makes a bold, but convincing, argument that educational researchers emerged as losers in the struggle for control over education. Not only did the pedagogical progressivism that they espoused lose out to a brand of administrative progressivism in the schools, but "the education school lost out in the struggle for respect" in higher education, 275.

2 See, for instance, Donald Kerr, David Mandzuk, and Helen Raptis, "The Role of Social Foundations of Education in Programs of Teacher Preparation in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Education* 34, no. 4 (2011): 118-34.

The second tendency gives rise to a fracturing of educationists into disciplinary silos. In this case, educational researchers have little to say to each other unless their ontological, epistemological, and methodological orientations align. Nowhere is this more evident in the Canadian landscape than in the field of educational history. The Canadian History of Education Association (CHEA) has separated from the Canadian Association for Foundations in Education (CAFE), which brings together historians, philosophers, and sociologists. Rather than meeting in a formal capacity at the annual Canadian Society for Studies in Education (CSSE) conference, CHEA members gather biannually and independently.

Historians of education are increasingly shunning the CAFE meetings at CSSE and participating in the annual Canadian Historical Association (CHA) conferences, which are scheduled on the same university grounds during the same week. Having crossed the street for various and sundry reasons (the absence of a coherent conversation among educationists, the shunning of historical research by many educational researchers, the desire to belong to a broader disciplinary community), many educational historians are spurning education, even when their faculty positions are held within faculties of education.

This confusion over where history of education scholars fit within academia is due partly to the tension that exists between the two aims of educational history. Each presents particular challenges to the history of education and its practitioners. The first seeks to make educational history relevant to educationists and to contemporary educational questions. This, by necessity, narrows its focus of study. The more educational history is professional or presentist, the more it marginalizes itself from historians working outside of education faculties. The second aim seeks to make educational history relevant to the broader community of historians outside education faculties, making it more difficult to justify or demonstrate why it belongs within schools of education.

This tension has been persistent throughout the last century of educational research across North America. Ellen Condliffe Lagemann describes the relationship as a troubled one, wherein history has moved “from centre to periphery.”³ Beginning in 1898, Paul Monroe began teaching the history of education at the Teachers College at Columbia University. He initially published numerous text and source books that he used in his instruction, which pursued a rigorous academic program concentrating on historical knowledge building. “Thanks to Monroe’s efforts,” Lagemann explains, “history had become the subject of most dissertations completed at Teachers College during the first two decades of the twentieth century.”⁴ Due to pressure from education students, though, who were more concerned with the exploration of research that was narrowly concentrated on classrooms and on teaching practice, Monroe began the process of redacting his text and source books. The more he narrowed the focus of educational history in his teaching and publications in order to appeal to students in education, the less comprehensive this history became.

3 Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

4 Lagemann, *An Elusive Science*, 74-5.

“‘Real’ historians increasingly shunned historians of education,” Lagemann continues, and, as a consequence, “offerings in educational history declined, while offerings in other subjects multiplied.”⁵ The early rise and fall of educational history at the Teachers College is indicative of a more general trend within education faculties. Moreover, this tension that has characterized educational history can be understood as a paradox that applies to all efforts to pursue educational research using a disciplinary lens. When this disciplinary research is applied narrowly to the teaching profession, it loses relevance to scholars outside of education; when disciplinary research does not apply to education, students cannot see its relevance to their own pursuits.

The underlying issue facing practitioners of the history of education pertains to the scope and focus of their scholarship. Should educational history be serviceable to educational practitioners? Ought educational historians to help educationists understand present circumstances, adjudicate contemporary dilemmas, frame their practice in light of the past, and cultivate historically minded dispositions? How can educational historians respond to the practical concerns of students within faculties of education whilst utilizing the disciplinary lens of history, which is not subject to the demands and pressures of the present and the “practical”?

Each of the above questions can be answered in the affirmative. I have been arguing this point for the entirety of my academic career.⁶ In fact, I work as a historian of education because I see the discipline as eminently practical. Like the philosophy of education, it guides us as we live a life in education and it is our rudder in every storm that we encounter.⁷ As an elementary school teacher in Toronto, I was baffled by the complete absence of educational history amongst the rhetoric and discussions taking place among teachers, administrators, school board officials, and the government. I became an educational historian because I needed to do so. I needed to understand how the world of education had evolved and taken shape.

Herbert Kliebard articulated this point in an article entitled “Why History of Education?” where he argued that its purpose is the nourishment of deliberative and critical inquiry into the world around us. It consequently pertains less to the curriculum design, lesson planning, and classroom administration, which may seem immediately practical but only in a narrow sense. Educational history cultivates

the habit of holding up the taken-for-granted world to critical scrutiny, something that usually can be accomplished more easily in a historical context than in a contemporary one. Ideas and practices that seem so normal and natural in a contemporary setting often take

5 Lagemann, *An Elusive Science*, 76. This marginalization is evident with respect to actual publications in historical journals. As Lagemann goes on to explain, the journal of the American Historical Association did not include a single article on the subject of educational history over the first decades of its existence.

6 See, for instance, Theodore Michael Christou, “Gone But Not Forgotten: The Decline of History as an Educational Foundation,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 41, no. 5 (2009): 569-83, and Theodore Michael Christou and Alan Sears, “From Neglect to Nexus: The Place of Educational History in Teacher Education,” *Encounters on Education* 12 (2011): 37-49.

7 Theodore Michael Christou and Shawn Michael Bullock, “The Case for Philosophical Mindedness,” *Paideusis* 20, no. 1 (2012): 14-23.

on a certain strangeness when viewed in a historical setting, and that strangeness often permits us to see those ideas and practices in a different light.⁸

Kliebard's position follows Durkheim's, which held that educational history was an antidote to "neophobia" – a fear of the new – and "neophilia" – an uncritical embrace of all that is new. History is of little benefit with respect to the technical training of teachers, which Durkheim likened to "simply instructing our future teachers in how to apply a number of sound recipes," and yet if the training of teachers is exclusively technical it has little to do with wisdom.⁹

Educational historians, therefore, have a dual burden, whether they wish to acknowledge this or not. They must help educationists hold the world around them up to critical scrutiny. And they must also practice their craft in a manner that engages meaningfully with scholars on both sides of the street that divides education from the rest of the academy. Jeffrey Mirel, discussing an old adage, which proclaims that West 120nd, the street dividing Teachers College from the rest of the Columbia University campus in New York City, is the widest street in the world, argues that the divide between education faculty and liberal arts faculty ought to be bridged: "Both sides need each other and that even the widest street in the educational world can be bridged if colleagues on both sides agree to meet each other halfway."¹⁰

By and large, recent scholarship in the history of education can be seen as the building of bridges. The work represents important historical scholarship that enriches our understanding of pedagogical practices, institutions, structures, and rhetoric. Simultaneously, it permits educationists to develop a more robust understanding of the development and evolution of the contexts they inhabit. Here, I review five recent books that deal with the history of education in Canada, including the educational history – and present – of Atlantic Canada: Renée N. Lafferty's *The Guardianship of Best Interests: Institutional Care for the Children of the Poor in Halifax, 1850-1960* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013); George D. Perry's *The Grand Regulator: The Miseducation of Nova Scotia's Teachers, 1838-1997* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013); Paul Bennett's *Vanishing Schools, Threatened Communities: The Contested Schoolhouse in Maritime Canada, 1850-2010* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood, 2011); Robert Gidney and Wyn Millar's *How Schools Worked: Public Education in English Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012); and Sara Z. Burke and Patrice Milewski's edited collection, *Schooling in Transition: Readings in Canadian History of Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

8 Herbert M. Kliebard, "Why History of Education?" *The Journal of Educational Research* 88 no. 4 (March/April 1995): 195.

9 Emile Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought: Lectures on the Formation and Development of Secondary Education in France*, trans. Peter Collins (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 9, 8.

10 Jeffrey Mirel, "Bridging the 'Widest Street in the World': Reflections on the History of Teacher Education," *American Educator* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 12.

Renée Lafferty's *The Guardianship of Best Interests: Institutional Care for the Children of the Poor in Halifax, 1850-1960* seeks to complicate the depiction of certain educational institutions as entirely archaic and harmful. The opening lines of the book cite an article published in *The Halifax Citizen* in 1974, headed "Fiendish Cruelty Practiced upon the Inmates of the Halifax Industrial School" (1). This article, Lafferty argues, is reflective of popular opinion concerning industrial schools; it sought to shed light upon a multitude of injustices suffered by the youth who attended the school whilst characterizing institutional care as an unmitigated failure.

Yet even though this institution might be portrayed as a symbol of Dickensian bleakness, the book suggests that it must be understood in context and as part of an effort to construct a social welfare system and to offer support to families mired in poverty. The children's institution, brutal as it might appear by later standards, provided a social service within its historical context. The strength of the book is its challenge that we examine the Canadian welfare state, and our efforts to provide access to education for children with socioeconomic challenges, in light of efforts to do so historically.

Lafferty's principal goal is to examine how "our general understanding of child welfare development is affected when institutions rather than children's aid societies are placed front and center" (1, 26). She examines the child welfare system by evoking conceptions of childhood, equality, and professionalization while also examining how the "best interests" of children were defined by "child savers" and by the state. The actual definition of childhood was varied, complicating the intentions and the practices of the child welfare system. It, too, was subject to racist and classist biases, in that the white, middle, and upper class child stood as the personified and idyllic image of childhood.

Children who did not fit this mould were disadvantaged not only because they were different, but also because they could never be made to be the same. Their difference was permanent. Care for the poor was generally understood within a similar paradigm, so that the child welfare system could not help children escape their poverty but could merely help them to endure it. The "best interests" of the children depended upon their station in life, their religion, and the colour of their skin.

Serving the best interests of the child, Lafferty explains, provided a justification for actions taken by the institutions to serve their own interests and those of their supporters; these were, generally, withheld from the public. Child welfare, in addition to providing protection for children, "was also about creating *useful* citizens and preventing children from growing up to be criminals or paupers who would be both a financial burden and a moral threat in their communities"; in many ways, "the campaign against cruelty and neglect of children was, implicitly and explicitly, a 'citizenship project'" (11, emphasis in original). The child's best interests, in other words, were intertwined with and inseparable from the best interests of the community. Ultimately, the social and economic well-being of society at large served as a frame for understanding and depicting the well-being of children. In addition, social action and the definition of best interests increasingly came under the purview of professionals, rather than amateurs, although this did not guarantee any change or amelioration in the systemic problems that gave rise to the symptoms of neglect, poverty, delinquency, and dependency.

Lafferty acknowledges that the children's voices were, and are, almost entirely absent from the historical narrative of childhood, which is wholly articulated and conceptualized by adults. Consequently, and not surprisingly, the effectiveness of institutions set up for the education of the poor was not measured from the perspective of the children who lived within their walls. Absent, also, are the voices of the families who, mired in economic distress, relied upon these institutions. "I have often looked in vain," Lafferty laments,

for a sense of how the children themselves – the dependent, delinquent, and neglected clients of Halifax's child welfare system – perceived their own lives and the services that were intended to help them. . . . Children were heard, most often, in moments of suffering (27).

History is an attempt to understand the past on the basis of evidence, and Lafferty notes this limitation – the lack of the voices of the children or their families – while reflecting on how adult society tends to view the best interests of children (poor children, in particular), how these "best interests" have been understood over time, how we understand the phrase today, and how the meaning of the phrase has evolved. In considering the importance of these questions for historically minded educationists today, *The Guardianship of Best Interests* draws primarily upon public reports, government studies, administrative memoranda, press releases, parish records, and public addresses.

Perhaps the most obvious limitation of the book is the relatively brief discussion of religious orders in Halifax and religious beliefs in the shaping of institutional care for the poor and the conception of children's best interests. This is a limitation that Lafferty acknowledges, and while she engages the subject it is clearly highlighted as an area requiring further research. The author's prose is nuanced, thoughtful, and perceptive throughout. The chronology is not always clear, and considering the importance of continuity and change in the book's argument, I was compelled to keep a running timeline of events. Even so, the study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of child welfare.

George D. Perry's *The Grand Regulator: The Miseducation of Nova Scotia's Teachers, 1838-1997* explores another topic of persistent controversy in the history of education, namely teacher education. Perry's argument is extremely cogent, and it serves to historically situate contemporary teacher education practices and policies. As noted above, these have increasingly been framed by a tension between theory and practice.

Perry demonstrates that "method" overtook the importance of "content" in the training of teachers in Nova Scotia beginning with the opening of the province's first Normal School in 1854. Teacher education has since been characterized by standardization and technocratic views of teaching methods. As a consequence, general and subject knowledge has been marginalized. This narrow view of teacher education has led to the disengagement of students and teachers. "Good teaching cannot be standardized," Perry notes (vi).

Perry pulls no punches in this book. The patriarchal and elitist societal views of educational and political leaders led to a system that aimed to educate the "masses"

in order to preserve the status quo and discourage individuals from rising above their station. Public education also became responsive to the workplace, Perry argues, especially in rural and industrial settings. Meanwhile, academic standards for admission to Normal School, the principal site of teacher education, were consistently low. Together, these factors reinforced a negative view of teacher education in the public mind, which, in turn, played an important role in maintaining low salaries for teachers. The poor education of these teacher candidates prior to Normal School admission meant that the theoretical aspects of their education in Nova Scotia was largely ignored and misconceived.

Perry's argument is relentless. He posits that state-run teacher education was (and, by inference, remains) substantively anti-democratic in that it robs teacher candidates of the ability to use their training as a means of imagining alternative possibilities of being or living. It fosters social adjustment, not critical citizenship.

Perry's sources are numerous and varied. For the Normal School's early years, Perry uses citizens' petitions, government reports, newspapers, legislation, and publications founded by principals and leaders of the Normal School. He quotes from these sources to reinforce his claims about the prevailing moods, theories, and methodologies of teacher education and the state-centred education system. Throughout the book, Perry draws on a handful of government commissions that reported over the course of the 20th century. Some of the most interesting primary sources used by Perry are textbooks as well as essays and other schoolwork by Normal School students that communicate what was being taught and the depth of understanding possessed by the students. He also conducted over 40 interviews and correspondences with former Normal College students, which sheds considerable light on their training.

Ultimately, this book thoughtfully treats the origins of teacher training in Nova Scotia and questions its effectiveness. Perry grounds his history of teacher education in a rich historical and political context, examining education as a broad subject embedded in the political life of a province. He challenges elitist and patriarchal attitudes, and shows us how they can be detrimental to a democratically functioning society.

Paul Bennett's *Vanishing Schools, Threatened Communities: The Contested Schoolhouse in Maritime Canada, 1850-2010* has affinities with Perry's book. Both are preoccupied with power and the challenges of empowering people who have been deprived of autonomy and authority. Bennett argues that Maritime Canadians were essentially dragged against their will into the fold of compulsory, public education. One mechanism of this process involved incessant amalgamations, which had deleterious effects upon communities – including school closures, problems with transportation, and complicated school structures that are increasingly large in jurisdiction and administratively centralized. Bennett's argument is simultaneously historical and contemporary. These effects reverberate today, as communities lose their voices, their school buildings, and their understanding of how schools operate.

Bennett's discussion concerns school closures in the Maritimes since the start of the 20th century, which, he argues, threaten the existence of rural communities as well as local communities within urban centres. These communities formed the democratic foundations of public schooling, he maintains, and the increasing dislocation of schools from these foundations threatens democracy itself, as the

driving factors in education are economically derived and large-scale rather than reflecting the needs and interests of the people within the Maritimes.

Bennett acknowledges that his work builds upon the seminal work of educational historians such as Alison Prentice, Bruce Curtis, and Robert Stamp.¹¹ These pioneers are exemplars of how educational historians ought to cross the street disciplinarily, although Bennett's work is of a different sort in that his work distinguishes itself for its consideration of Canada's eastern provinces. His sources are sparser than those of the other works considered here, but Bennett draws on materials from archives, museums, and historical societies that are scattered throughout the Maritimes.

The strength of *Vanishing Schools* lies in a rich description of schooling throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in the Maritimes. Bennett's narrative offers valuable information on the design of schoolhouses, as well as on communities' schooling needs and their responses to the relentless march towards mandatory, public schooling. Bennett pays particular attention to smaller community schoolhouses. He also lauds those who sought to serve the region's educational needs and their fight to organize as a means of protecting their democratic rights within the educational sphere. Multiple figures are used to contextualize the discussion, together with reference to the broader forces of continuity and change across Canada. Bennett carefully documents the historical narrative within Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. Newfoundland – with its unique educational history – is an outlier here, so that the book is more about the Maritimes than about Atlantic Canada as a whole. Bennett's passion for community independence, heritage, and quality education bleed through every page.

Bennett is forceful in articulating his antipathy towards centralized power, modernization, and educational decisions made for the purposes of fiscal efficiency. Bennett's passion for schoolhouses as representative of democracy, though, is sometimes confounded with the value of these buildings from an architectural and heritage perspective. He associates the historic schoolhouse, almost uniformly, with "good quality teaching, and teaching for student's character" (2). Such characterizations detract from an otherwise concentrated historical discussion.

Ultimately, *Vanishing Schools* offers a unique story that explores the relationship between the Maritimes and its school buildings. This is done with reference to the larger picture of community schooling in Canada. It also highlights the particular nuances of schoolhouses within the history of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island as well as drawing together a range of facts and statistics that trace the continuity and changes to schools in the Maritimes and the region's school buildings. It provocatively suggests connections between the consolidation of schools and the degeneration of communities throughout the region.

Robert Gidney and Wyn Millar take a different approach to their historical

11 See, for example, Bruce Curtis *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, ON: Althouse Press, 1988), and Curtis, *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840-1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Ruby Heap and Alison Prentice, eds., *Gender and Education in Ontario: An Historical Reader* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1991); and Robert Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

research and, consequently, make a very different contribution to the history of education in *How Schools Worked: Public Education in English Canada, 1900-1940*. Gidney and Millar argue that for the first four decades of the 20th century children in English Canada encountered a system of education that reflected a strong allegiance to a Victorian worldview. They chart the topographical features of that broad context and define the contours of the provincial education systems. They simultaneously describe the particularities of each province and the outlines of the national picture.

Gidney and Millar propose that understanding the school systems in Canada between 1900 and 1940 involves understanding “the routine practices in the schools” (xix). Their argument reflects a reinterpretation of the orthodox views on the evidence, motivations, and underlying assumptions surrounding the English-Canadian public school experience during the first half of the 20th century.

The book draws upon archival material from four communities – Fredericton, Winnipeg, Blairmore (Alberta), and Kipp School District No. 1589 (Saskatchewan) – to retrace what the typical school experiences were like for teachers and students in urban and rural settings. Aside from these communities, the authors rely on a rich array of primary sources to identify patterns of education that have national significance. These include government reports and publications (at the national, provincial, and municipal levels), as well as a host of periodicals, including academic journals, professional magazines, and community yearbooks. The study does not include Quebec because, as the authors emphasize, the data cannot be “compared and contrasted systematically” (xxi). Nor are First Nations education, educational policy, and rhetoric subject to analysis. Gidney and Millar posit that these investigations are not germane to their research. Rather, *How Schools Worked* proceeds through the formulation of simple questions: Who attended school? What was taught? How did teachers teach? What were the qualifications of teachers? How was schooling financed? How were students promoted from grade to grade? What emerges is a richly layered understanding that is woven through a series of technical and descriptive conversations.

The book adopts a standardized language to describe, in a clear and consistent way, the essential features of the English-Canadian schooling experience. Key words and phrases, such as “school district,” “superintendent,” and “elementary school,” are introduced “to avoid confusion” associated with the varying terminology used in each province; these terms are carefully marshalled to substitute for “a number of commonly recurring terms” (xxiii). This allows Gidney and Millar masterfully to bridge the distinct legal terminologies that span the provinces without forsaking their objective in revealing the nuanced particularities of educational patterns to which the terms are applied. The authors have leveraged the strengths of quantitative methods to delve into issues of gender, class, and ethnicity, confirming, with abundant statistical evidence, the academic superiority of female students, the inequality between urban and rural schools, and the higher-than-average attendance rates among anglophone students compared to their non-anglophone peers. These insights highlight a progressive step in the advancement of historiographical research as the authors have conducted a meticulous study of charts, tables, and graphs. These are areas that I sidestep in my own research, perhaps due to my own preoccupation with rhetoric and the intellectual undercurrents of curriculum theory.

The quantitative elements do not detract from the polemics. Gidney and Millar do not shy away from questions that probe our relationship with technology and the place of memorization in the classroom. Their decision to omit discussion of educationists' actual understanding of how schools worked is fundamentally political. It distinguishes educational discourse and philosophy from educational practice in such a way as to disqualify each as a source of historical evidence that might elucidate the question "How did schools work?" Notwithstanding this caveat, Gidney and Millar's work serves as a significant counterpoint to my own work as an educational historian, which has focused on the meanings and interpretations of curriculum and policy (xix).

While the authors structure the book around the experience of the English-Canadian provincial school systems, their analyses also provide national insights. Not all Canadian students had access to the same educational opportunities. In the rural setting, the school was often a place of poor teaching and learning conditions. Isolated, bereft of resources, and home to a large class of students at various grades and age levels, the rural schoolhouse was often staffed by an inexperienced teacher who usually possessed fewer, or less substantive, professional qualifications compared to her or his urban counterparts. Conversely, in urban centres schools were usually a place to test innovations in school architecture, pedagogy, and administration. Scholars will mine the work compiled by Gidney and Millar for decades to come.

Sara Z. Burke and Patrice Milewski's edited collection *Schooling in Transition: Readings in Canadian History of Education* explores the broad landscape of Canadian education, albeit as a collective of chapters by different authors rather than as a single-authored text. Assembled as a reader for university courses on the history of Canadian education, most of the 24 chapters are previously published articles from refereed journals that address "key issues – such as local versus central control of the public education system and the accommodation of minority needs – [which] continue to shape the experience of children within our schools" (i). Well written and researched, each chapter focuses on a specific key issue, and includes two papers on the subject. The main argument is that the themes we see throughout the history of education in Canada are enduring ones. We have persistently struggled to adjust public schooling to the particular needs of communities, and contemporary educational concerns cannot be understood or grappled with in the absence of historical contextualization.

The work draws on a number of sources, both primary and secondary. The extent to which each is used depends on the article, but the authors generally draw upon newspaper articles, the *Journal of Education* (ranging in years, and starting in 1851), *The Nation*, assembly notes from provincial legislatures, private correspondence, and annual reports of ministers of education in different provinces.

There are 12 chapters in the text. Each concentrates upon a formative topic, such as colonial schooling or expanding opportunities for women, and juxtaposes two articles. In Chapter 2, Ian Ross Robertson explores "The Prince Edward Island Free Act of 1852," while in Chapter 4, Robert McIntosh writes about "The Boys in the Nova Scotia Coal Mines, 1973-1923" and Sheila Andrew navigates "The Problems of Convent Schools in Acadian New Brunswick, 1858-1886." Atlantic Canada is treated indirectly in chapters 5 and 6 with respect to the feminization of teaching.

The collection seeks to strike a fair regional balance – exploring contexts and questions from across Canada – although Newfoundland and Labrador are not treated and only 3 of the 22 articles concentrate on the Maritimes. This is, perhaps, indicative of a need within the community of Canadian educational historians. Increased attention to the history of Atlantic Canadian schooling in the pages of scholarly publications in the top tier journals is required. These journals are the source material for this reader.

The book is a solid representation of the stellar academic work that educational historians have undertaken in Canada. Burke and Milewski have compiled a formidable text, which includes many of the articles that shaped my own early understanding of the field. Each of the articles is worthy of its place in the study of Canadian educational history within the context of a “university level course” (i). The challenge, outlined earlier in this essay, is that these courses are increasingly few and far between in our faculties of education.

Despite the challenges facing the field, Canadian educational history is in a position of strength. As exemplified by the five publications discussed here, there is a veritable efflorescence of scholarship in the field. In fact, of late it has been a challenge to keep up with the high quality publications emerging from the field. In the past few years alone, the space that I devote in my office library to educational history has grown twofold. The vast majority of this work serves two masters. This assertion may have a biblically negative connotation, but within this field it is wholesome and constructive. Today, the history of education in Canada serves to probe and to prompt educationists who endeavour to understand the purposes and meanings of education. Concurrently, it weaves itself into a broader, compelling narrative about who we are as Canadians and how schooling is an inimitable part of our evolving identities. Educational history jars us into a historically minded disposition and forces us to consider the world around us more thoughtfully. Inevitably, this work is building a bridge between history as a discipline and history as a disciplinary means of understanding education.

THEODORE MICHAEL CHRISTOU