

**Winton, S. (2022). *Unequal benefits: Privatization and public education in Canada*.  
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Wealthier people shouldn't be able to use their money to buy access or advantages for their kids, nor should funds for public schools be generated from private business or foundations. And public money invested in education should remain in the public domain ... If we want to achieve a socially just Canada we need to stop education privatization and pursue the public school ideal. (Winton, 2022, p. 28)

Sue Winton recalls her Canadian public school classroom as a child, with colourful Scholastic brochures that availed curated lists of book titles over which she would pore and then wait in anticipation of her much-coveted selections. Years later as a parent volunteering in her son's kindergarten class, Winton reminisces as the thrill returns not only when she helps her son select books from the familiar flyer but also when she accompanies the group to the Scholastic book fair. While assisting other children from the class, one of them chooses a book and yet has no funds to pay. Winton reluctantly advises the child that he will not be able to take the selection home on that day and would need to ask his parents for money to purchase the book. The child begins to cry, and Winton's demeanor fades. She describes the disdain she felt for what she said, for the school, for the teacher, and for the book fair. Although she understood that educators and parents were being encouraged to participate for the children's benefit in school fund-raisers of this nature, she realized that not all children and parents might choose to or be able to partake.

Education privatization is a phenomenon that has emerged globally as a neoliberal principle that celebrates the personalization of learning, parental choice, free market competition, and standardization of practice (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2019). Winton addresses this notion through a Canadian lens, drawing on personal narratives such as the vignette of the book fair and the varied experiences of individuals, parents, and families, including a mix of rich research and scholarly expertise. Winton critically analyzes policies and practices that have resulted in the responsibility for public education being shifted away from governments and placed on parents and organizations in the private sector. She argues that this devolution has sustained dire consequences and aspires to challenge the inequality that has developed in favour of pursuing policies that prioritize the collective requirements of students rather than individual interests. Winton sheds light on efforts to resist privatization in public education, ultimately striving to achieve what she coins a more democratic, socially just, "public school ideal" (p. 20). In this way she describes a viable structure where all children have the ability to access high-quality public

education and can access that benefit without cost.

In *Unequal Benefits*, Winton engages in critical policy analysis—a step away from a more traditional research method wherein a scholar examines policy effectiveness according to specified criteria. Apple (1982/2012) indicated that critical theory in education has emerged to address challenges that were formerly considered ‘taken for granted’ assumptions. Moreover, he maintained that critical approaches serve to help society not only understand the intricacies of education policies but also adopt critical perspectives to challenge inequalities (Apple, 2019). Furthermore, Young and Diem (2018) observed that the use of a critical policy framework would enable a more complete understanding of the challenges associated with education policy, ranging from initial identification of the problem and policy creation, through to application and assessment. The critical approach taken by Winton in this work focuses on questioning assumptions, power structures, and perspectives, as well as historical, cultural, and social contexts. Winton claims early in the text that the value of critical policy analysis involves the quest for social justice. She reasons that a research strategy that can provide deeper analysis and concern—not only for what policies do but for whom they are created—is required. Winton believes that a critical analysis approach encourages a variety of perspectives and contributes to solutions through the lenses of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Winton documents a logical and clear sequence of ideas, making for a coherent and compelling narrative. In the first chapter, she introduces education privatization along with a cadre of existing policies that have supported and perhaps allowed this trend to flourish. Winton underscores the importance of ensuring access to free and accessible education for all children and advocates for the opportunity to experience the benefits that come with attending school. In the second chapter, she positions herself respectively within the field of critical policy research and differentiates between the traditional perspectives and the critical stance that she takes. Winton uses this context to provide readers with insights on how critical policy researchers engage in this work. She revisits the topic of privatization in the third chapter, highlighting policies that have allowed private funding to enter public educational organizations and examines the impact on equity, equal access, decision making, and public priorities. Winton details an exploration of policies and private resources in a subsequent fourth chapter with a demonstration of how these factors have coordinated to benefit those with privilege. In so doing, she ventures into the realms of private psychological assessment, private tutoring, and course credits from private institutions. Winton concludes with a fifth and final chapter, which contains suggestions for information sources and additional research, reminding readers to ensure they are asking essential questions about current policies and methodologies in the field. An informative appendix at the end of the book outlines procedures for individuals to follow if they are interested in undertaking future critical policy research.

Winton’s comprehensive background on education privatization is evident throughout this work in her ability to convey a deep understanding of the topic and its complexities. She echoes the message of the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, which concurs that education must be independent of privatization for a strong democratic foundation to be maintained (Froese-Germain, 2016). Winton draws upon anecdotes from across the country, providing practical examples of school-of-choice fees, international education tuition, and sundry fundraising campaigns, as methods that schools and districts use to generate revenue and offset reduced government funding for public education. By illuminating these paradigms, Winton effectively challenges readers who may unknowingly become entangled in such contexts and ethically compels them to reassess their practices. That said, she also offers concrete suggestions which can prompt alignment of individual actions with newfound understandings.

*Unequal Benefits* is an essential resource, accessible to a wide variety of readers. In a conversational style, Winton confronts education privatization and the challenges of inequality while at the same time promoting the importance of free and accessible public schools to the democratic framework of society. The feeling when reading this book is akin to sitting down with an expert who is passionate about a subject, making the examination of complex ideas both enlightening and enjoyable. This approach creates relatable connections, ensuring that those who are new to the topic can engage with the key concepts presented. Winton is candid when she states at the outset that this book was written not only for educators and policy makers but also in the interest of parents and other citizens. Accordingly, whether this book is chosen by a parent overwhelmed by unexpected school fees, a curious reader, an educator, or perhaps a researcher with an inclination toward the critical policy approach, the content will satisfy a wide range of interest and expertise.

Winton's book is remarkably pertinent in today's educational environment. By critically analyzing the concerns and implications related to privatization, she prompts crucial conversations, urging the public to consider the ethical dilemmas of privatized education. Through her work, Winton endeavours to model an education system that we strive to create for all youth. She advocates for schools that teach about equality, equity, and the value of diverse worldviews and ways of life. Furthermore, Winton's work serves as a guide to anyone delving into critical policy perspectives on privatization, offering nuanced insights on socioeconomic and ethical issues that are vital to unravelling the complex dynamics at hand. In an era where education systems are constantly evolving, Winton's research not only captures current trends, but anticipates future possibilities and developments. This book is essential reading for all who are committed to shaping the future direction of public education policy.

## References

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