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Fall 2001

**Review of *Contested Classrooms: Education, Globalization, and  
Democracy in Alberta* Edited by Trevor W. Harrison and Jerrold L.  
Kachur**

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Bohac Clarke, Veronika, "Review of *Contested Classrooms: Education, Globalization, and Democracy in Alberta* Edited by Trevor W. Harrison and Jerrold L. Kachur" (2001). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 571.

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**Contested Classrooms: Education, Globalization, and Democracy in Alberta.**

Edited by Trevor W. Harrison and Jerrold L. Kachur. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1999. xxxv+191 pp. Tables, notes. \$19.95 (ISBN 0888643152).

*Contested Classrooms* is a collaboration of fourteen authors, most of whom hold doctorates in either educational administration, sociology, political science, psychology, or the humanities. They represent a broad range of educational stakeholders—professors, leaders in the province-wide Alberta Teachers' Association, associates of research institutes, and administrators in the province's public school systems. Together, they contribute experience, expertise, and scholarship to the volume.

The editors' intent is "not only to increase public understanding of education and the deep social, political, and economic change occurring in Alberta, but to goad readers into action and to shape the future direction of public education." Cautioning against the seemingly unnoticed shift in the purpose of public education—and its unconscious acceptance—as a result of local and global economic, social, and technological changes, the editors aim to provide "a means by which parents, teachers, and concerned citizens can sort through the discrepant claims about public education and re-think the relationship between education and society."

The essays' authors particularly critique the neo-liberal ideology, typical of current Western governments including Alberta's, that they see undermining public education through privatization and through redefining its purpose to that of a "servant of the economy": "Educational funding was slashed; corporate sponsors were invited into the schools and universities; charter schools were encouraged; teachers were subjected to increased workplace discipline; the number of school boards was reduced; and administrators came under increased and contradictory pressures to deal with the results." Ultimately, the authors want readers to think about what kind of society they want for the future and what role public education should play in it.

In the book's first section, "Globalization and Educational Change," education is described as a "site of broader ideological debates." Neo-liberal ideology and its effects on education are discussed, as are broader global influences, such as the need for the creation of a new kind of worker—the perpetual learner—to function in a knowledge-based economy. "The Politics of Educational Restructuring in Alberta" reminds readers that not all changes have been bad—"restructuring created more equity among school boards"—but cautions that "the reductions in spending levels" may result in "equality in a race to the bottom." This section provides examples of how "privatization of education" undermines public education as well as illustrations of government manipulation of information and media. "Re-organizing Schools: Scenes from the Classrooms" discusses the role of the principal and the type of education required to prepare people for a new society that will need to be "extremely open to change and democratic in the broadest sense."

*Contested Classroom's* arguments are well supported by references and statistics. A number of recommendations are presented in the final chapter. The supporting data and examples should succeed in admonishing Albertans to "enter the fray" of public debate about the role of education in a just, democratic society for the future. **Veronika Bohac Clarke**, *Faculty of Education, University of Calgary*.