

NEW WTO NEGOTIATIONS

Perilous Lessons:

**The Impact of the WTO
Services Agreement (GATS)
on Canada's Public
Education System**

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Introduction

These are difficult and ominous times for public education in Canada. They will become even more troubling if international trade rules place limits on the ability of citizens, through their governments and school authorities, to determine the future of our children's schools.

What is the GATS—the General Agreement on Trade in Services? Why should anyone care? Why have most people never heard of it? Do its global rules apply to Canada's public education system? Does it affect education in Canada? In every province? If so, how? Could it affect local school boards? Will it compromise Canada's ability to put the public interest first when governments and local education authorities address crucial issues that already face public education? Will the treaty help Canadian education businesses operating overseas? What role has the Canadian government played in the negotiations that are now underway in Geneva to expand the GATS? Finally, what should be done? How can Canadians—and the education-related organizations to which they belong—become actively involved in the critical issues that are on the GATS negotiating table?

The purpose of this report is to examine the implications of the GATS—and of GATS negotiations now underway in Geneva—for Canada's public education system. In addressing the above questions, it raises worrisome concerns about Canada's approach in the GATS negotiations, and the possible consequences for primary and secondary level education.

PART I

The GATS and education: What's all the fuss about?¹

The report begins, in **Chapter 1**, with an introduction to the GATS. Its point of departure is the right of citizens to education that is contained in long-standing and well-established international human rights law. The section discusses the general significance of these rights and of the GATS in the context of recent education policy initiatives.

Chapter 2 examines the existing GATS treaty and considers whether it covers our public education system. It considers how education and related services are classified in the treaty, and which of the GATS rules now apply to this sector.

Chapter 3 considers the current trends towards increased commercialization and privatization, providing examples of various forms of each. It discusses how these effects may interact with, and amplify, the effects of the GATS. It also highlights some of the ways in which the existing treaty already threatens public education.

PART II

The Devil's in the detail

Chapter 4 employs numerous illustrative hypothetical examples to describe the threats that future negotiations on an ever-expanding treaty are likely to pose for Canada's public education system.

Chapter 5 examines Canada's approach to the current round of GATS re-negotiation. It describes Canada's con-

flicting GATS objectives for education and how federal representatives consistently play down the treaty's domestic risks as Canada proceeds down an increasingly hazardous one-way street.

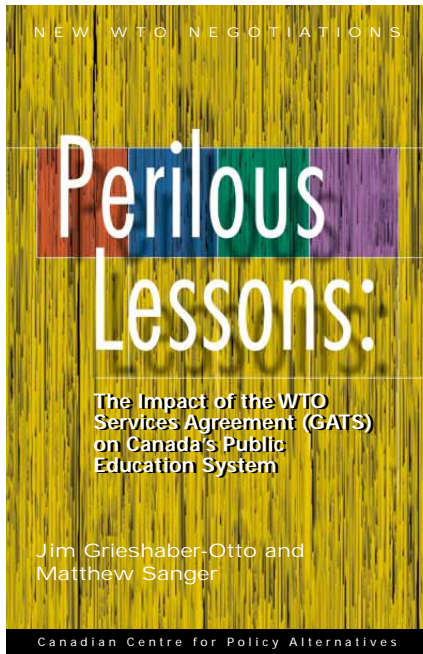
PART III Where do we go from here?

Chapter 6, which concludes the study, offers specific recommendations to individuals and organizations seeking to reduce and/or eliminate the GATS threats in order to build a more balanced future for Canada's vital public education system.



Perilous Lessons

The Impact of the WTO Services Agreement (GATS) on Canada's Public Education System



Written for professionals and citizens alike, this book provides a primer on a little-known agreement within the World Trade Organization, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). It highlights the threats the treaty already poses and, using highly plausible scenarios, describes how it could undermine public education in the future. Trade policy specialists Matt Sanger and Jim Grieshaber-Otto dissect federal government efforts to reassure and mislead Canadians about the threats GATS poses to public education. They advocate specific changes to Canada's negotiating approach to safeguard our vital public education system.

GATS "services" negotiations that are now underway in Geneva pose a significant danger to our public education system. Reading this book is a critical first step towards doing something about it.

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