

# Book Reviews

**Hugh A. Stevenson and J. Donald Wilson.**  
**PRECEPTS, POLICY AND PROCESS:**  
**PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN EDUCATION.**  
**London, Ontario: Alexander, Blake, 1977.**  
**354 pp. \$8.95 paper.**

Somewhere back in the revolutionary 60's, educators, especially those in the social sciences, cast aside the authoritative textbook. In decrying the text's monolithic but limited view of reality, they chose to adopt series of studies, or numerous "related readings" (usually in paperback), or collections of works. Some of the anthologies were extracted from classics in their fields, some were commissioned especially for the new publications, some were self-compiled through the magic of xerography or the more mundane mimeograph machine. The purposes of these books of readings were to provide diversity, to enrich any subject by the use of multidimensional approaches, and to permit students to choose their own paths to relevance rather than to have truth imposed upon them. Inevitably, some of the collections were slight, slick, cliché-ridden and ephemeral, but others were fresh, stimulating works of honest scholarship. Now as the wheel of academic fashion continues to turn, as the movement "back to the basics" gains momentum and as other kinds of conservatism begin to reappear, a preference may once again be expressed for substantial, guiding texts which provide continuity rather than diversity and which reflect the insights from one inquiring mind rather than the views of many writers. In the meantime, here is yet another collection of essays on Canadian education.

Though designed for a mythical readership of "all who are concerned with the state of Canadian education", this book will almost certainly be most read as an assigned work in Faculties of Education across the country, where it will make a contribution to the ever-growing, but often "scrappy", works on the subject. Editors Stevenson

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and Wilson selected themes they considered significant and then invited authors to write, but “made no attempt editorially to impose any degree of uniformity on the thoughts and style of each contribution”. (p.v.) As a consequence, one must expect some unevenness in the quality of writing, some variation in the depth of treatment of the issues, and some repetition. However, the editors have chosen both their topics and their authors well. Thus, the book is more satisfying in its comprehensiveness than many collections, and its contributors are more lucid than many pedagogues. It is unfortunate that the book’s jejune title, which strives journalistically for alliteration rather than meaning, does not do justice to the editors or the authors.

The work is divided into five sections: I “Tradition and Transition”, with two somewhat repetitious but interesting overviews of Canadian education, one by George S. Tompkins, the other by J. Donald Wilson; II “Cultural Imperatives”, with five papers on aspects of Canada’s cultural pluralism, including one by McGill’s Roger Magnuson on “Language, Education and Society in Quebec”; III “Teaching”, with four of the strongest papers (though they have little to do with teaching), including Norman Henchey’s “Pressures for Professional Autonomy and Public Controls” and a welcome essay on colleges and universities by Desmond Morton; IV “Curriculum”, which has six surveys of problems in the theory and practice of curriculum, including a useful analysis of discrimination by Jane Gaskell; and finally, V “Educational Futures”, containing only Hugh A. Stevenson’s hopeful, but turgidly written, “So Much More for the Mind . . . A Reprieve for Canadian Public Education”.

Certainly this collection has much to offer, and I used it as a recommended reading in an introductory course on Comparative Education in the Fall term, 1977. It achieved good student reaction and can be endorsed as a good starting point for the study of Canadian education and its problems. It even reflects at least one problem it did not address directly: the limited participation of women at the higher levels. Of the twenty authors, three are female — a sad figure, which represents less than the proportion of women in Faculties of Education, although it is more or less consistent with the proportion of women who seem to be active in professional societies. These remarks are not intended as criticism of the compilers of this collection so much as a comment on the continuing under-representation of women in places of importance in Canadian higher education, and a call for women themselves to do something to make a change. They should remember that “Publish or perish” was not spoken of man alone.

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