

disadvantage; no concession is made to, for example, British English speakers, even in the phonology chapter. The focus on English means that certain areas of description are overlooked, for example inflectional morphology and syntactic universals. The book also fails as a general introduction to linguistics by ignoring more applied areas. There is little on socio-linguistic topics such as bilingualism, language attitude, language and education, or language and culture, all linguistic concerns of great interest to the student taking linguistics as a subsidiary subject.

Despite these critical comments, this is a book I warmly recommend as succeeding within the theoretical terms it sets itself. Any student continuing in linguistics will find it excellent not only as an introduction but also as a book to refer back to, and anyone teaching linguistics would be well advised to have it on their shelf as a source of material for a range of introductory courses.

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References

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J. Donald Wilson, Ed.

AN IMPERFECT PAST:

EDUCATION AND SOCIETY IN CANADIAN HISTORY.

**Vancouver: Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction,
University of British Columbia, 1984.**

218 pp. \$10.00.

An Imperfect Past is a collection of readings on Canadian educational history. The book's ten essays, each written by a different author, are organized around five themes: historiography and educational reform; literacy and female education; native peoples and education; schoolmasters, reformers and ideology; and rural education and ethnicity. Most of the essays were given originally as papers before a joint conference of the Canadian History of Education Association and the American History of Education Society in Vancouver in 1983.

What makes a good book of readings? An essential condition of the genre is that the parts are interrelated, that they come together to form a more or less coherent whole. This chemistry is wanting in *An Imperfect Past*. The essays are so specialized

and different from one another in terms of subject matter, place and time reference as to belie a collective format. Indeed, no less than three centuries and most parts of Canada are represented in the work. The reader will spot the trees but not the forest.

This is not to say that the essays, when taken individually, are without interest and merit. On the contrary, all are competently researched and written and testify to the evolving state of historical writing in Canadian education. Still, because of the disconnectedness of the essays and the absence of a unifying theme, the book will have a limited appeal, even for the encyclopedic mind.

Of the ten essays the two on historiography will likely attract the most readers, both because of the topic and the quality of the presentations. That educational history and its practitioners are coming in from the cold, is the leitmotif of J. Donald Wilson's informative "Some Observations on Recent Trends in Canadian Educational History". He writes optimistically of the growing maturation of educational historians, their tendency to draw on the findings of related disciplines and their explorations into new areas of inquiry, such as rural, ethnic and female history. Although Brian Simon's well crafted "Can Education Change Society?" is devoid of Canadian content, its inclusion in the book is not unwelcome. The noted British educational historian answers his query in the affirmative, arguing that education can and does alter society. If, he adds, this fact is not always recognizable, one explanation is that we have been misled by the techniques of social science, which are defective in measuring the impact of education in human terms.

Two essays touch on Quebec education. And while they deal with female learning, the link is a tenuous one inasmuch as the two articles are centuries apart in focus. A.J.B. Johnston offers an original piece on the little known educational activities of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in eighteenth century Louisbourg and the effect they had on female literacy. Ironically, it may be the author's passing remarks on boys' education that constitute the essay's most significant finding. Although the Notre Dame Sisters maintained a school in the thriving fortress town from 1727 to its military collapse in 1758, there is, notes Johnston, no record of a parallel boys' school during the period - all of which raises important questions about the accepted belief of the supremacy of male learning in New France.

From a trio of authors, Marta Danylewycz, Nadia Fahmy-Eid and Nicole Thivierge, comes a comparative study of home economics education in Quebec and Ontario during the first half of the twentieth century. The essay is both long and humdrum. Part of the problem is the subject itself, which is not the stuff of an attention getter. Still, the authors did not help their cause,

treating the subject in a largely conventional, unimaginative fashion.

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Kevin Harris.

TEACHERS AND CLASSES: A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE.

London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.

182 pp. \$11.95.

Writing on the eve of mankind's most tragic and devastating human conflict, the legendary American historian Charles A. Beard argued that:

If we are to overcome the stresses and strains of our civilization by democratic processes rather than by the sword then the foundations must be laid by the front-line teachers. If we are to widen the civilization of the people, as distinguished from the culture of an elite, teachers must be advance-guards.

Many people would uphold the tenet that educators are the *sine qua non* of material progress and social betterment. Beyond these general truisms which applaud the positive contribution offered by the teaching profession, however, lies the more sophisticated philosophical question that seeks to ask how this worthy goal can best be implemented to serve contemporary needs. In other words, is education, as we know it today in the western world, an energetic driving force progressively responsible for the upwardly fluid and mobile advancement of society as a whole or is it time to re-evaluate this premise on the basis of radically new interpretations? According to this latter view, the present educational outlook, far from providing equal avenues of opportunity for all children, rolls over, or at the very least seriously obstructs, those who find themselves at the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder. Stated another way, does education serve as the great liberating force that breaks the bonds of class differentiation or is this view a hollow myth shrouded to conceal serious defects and abuses?

In *Teachers and Classes: A Marxist Analysis*, Kevin Harris provides us with ample food for thought with his provocative and controversial gadfly approach. The author is of the opinion that "the function of education is conservative, being directed towards integrating new generations into the prevailing culture, and providing knowledge and skills geared toward ensuring social stability and perpetuation of the *status quo*" (p. 8). There is every reason to believe, contends Harris, that the edifice of public instruction not only mirrors the pillars of capitalist society in microcosm, but to a very considerable extent strengthens them