

Book Reviews

Rita Kramer.

ED SCHOOL FOLLIES: THE MISEDUCATION OF AMERICA'S TEACHERS.

New York: The Free Press, 1991.

222 pp. \$22.95 US.

Rita Kramer's *Ed School Follies: The Miseducation of America's Teachers* is a good book that was published in 1991 but, surprisingly, has yet to be reviewed in any of the major Canadian education journals. This engaging book provides the reader with a detailed ethnographic analysis of the state of teacher preparation in schools of education in the United States. As the title suggests, it is anything but complimentary and is undoubtedly designed to encourage teacher educators to examine carefully the experiences that students have in schools of education as well as the quality of teachers that are currently being produced. The tone of the book is set early on when Kramer points out that "it has become commonplace to say that first-class minds are not to be found in schools of education" (p. 21). Using this as her point of departure, she begins to skillfully unravel the story of her extensive one-year tour of fifteen colleges and universities across the United States. What Kramer discovers is that there is a great degree of consistency across institutions, and that, regardless of their demographics, the real story lies in the classroom, in the candid conversations that she has with students and professors, and in the observations that she makes about the educational system, in general.

According to Kramer, the students in American schools of education are the victims of a system that has gone seriously astray. She argues that, over the last two decades, self-esteem and equity have replaced knowledge as the focus of the educational enterprise for both teachers and students in elementary and secondary schools. This, she says, has been achieved through such universally-accepted programs as cooperative learning and mainstreaming. From the countless conversations that she documents in her book, it is clear that those who are entering the profession see themselves more as social workers ready to cure an ailing society than as teachers ready and able to purvey knowledge to students. Moreover, Kramer portrays most student teachers as ill-informed illiterates who have not acquired the habits of mind of truly learned individuals. They are products, she says, of an educational system that has fostered the belief that students' opinions and feelings are more important than knowledge itself.

In fact, Kramer blames the inadequate preparation of future teachers on professors in schools of education. As she tells her story, the reader is introduced to a number of different types of professors — two of these are the nondirective facilitators and the instructional technologists. The nondirective facilitators are the “discussion people” found in most schools of education. They run “group encounter sessions” where students are encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings on what they have observed in school. In speaking with the author, one such professor summed up her philosophy of teaching in the following words: “Encourage discussion among the students; do not make yourself the facilitator of learning. . . . You are not there to feed them information but to be sensitive to their need for positive reinforcement, for self-esteem” (p. 135). It is clear from conversations like these that Kramer is uncomfortable with this notion of the professor’s role. She questions why such learned individuals so easily relinquish their roles as academic leaders and why it is often these same people who complain about the diminishing authority of teachers. Kramer concludes that it is no wonder that authority is a current educational issue when professors in schools of education so readily take a back seat to the whims and fancies of their own students.

Another type of professor commonly found in schools of education are the instructional technologists. These are the people charged with the responsibility of teaching the instructional strategies that will, hopefully, enable teachers to survive in the complex world of today’s mainstreamed, multilingual classroom. According to Kramer, the problem with these people is that they tend to turn out students whose technique is abundant but whose knowledge is practically nonexistent. Repeatedly, Kramer observes professors who she believes play ambiguous roles and who de-emphasize the importance of knowledge. In fact, her condemnation of these people is so strong, she is led to ask: “Neither possessing nor respecting knowledge themselves, how can teachers imbue their students with any enthusiasm for it? Nowhere in America today is intellectual life deader than in our schools — unless it is our schools of education. . . these are the greatest contributors to the ‘dumbing down’ of America” (pp. 212-213).

Apart from the players within the institution, Kramer makes it clear that there are fundamental problems with the educational system in general that have created the educational wasteland found in the United States today. Two of these problems are the lowering of standards and the failure of affirmative action programs. First, with the emphasis on self-esteem and the de-emphasis on content, Kramer argues that academic standards have been lowered to allow all students, regardless of

their motivation and achievement, to progress from one grade to the next. This is the social engineering view of schooling where “social leveling is achieved through intellectual leveling” (p. 173) and courses are “watered down” until the least able students pass from grade to grade irrespective of their performance. She questions the long-term effects of the “watering down” process on motivated students who can really achieve. Provocatively, she argues that it is very likely that some of these more capable students will become disinterested and unmotivated when they realize that they are part of a system that promotes everyone, regardless of effort.

Second, in spite of the ambitious and expensive affirmative action programs that have been designed to attract more minorities to teaching, Kramer argues that the results have been dismal at best. For example, in 1986, only nine percent of the American teaching force was classified as “minority” while three years later, the figure dropped to a new low of five percent. Not only does Kramer question the time, energy, and money that have been invested in these programs but she also questions those who assume that members of minority groups are not capable of the same effort and achievement as anyone else and, therefore, need special rules for them to succeed. The author then states that, although attracting more minorities to teaching is certainly a step in the right direction, perhaps it would be more profitable if a concerted effort were simply made to recruit better teachers.

In the concluding chapter of her book, Kramer makes a number of suggestions that she thinks will help nurse American education back to health. First, she believes that the purpose of schooling needs to be redefined from that of political and social work to that of transmitting culture and knowledge. Second, Kramer advocates the development of a core curriculum for all grades that would begin in the early years and would focus on written expression. Third, Kramer stresses that academic standards need to be raised so that success is once again related to effort and so that no student is passed from one grade to another until a minimum level of competency has been attained. Finally, Kramer argues that imparting knowledge has to become once again the primary function of schools.

Kramer’s argument for a complete overhaul of the American educational system is a convincing one. The issues that she raises are those that most educators, regardless of level, have had to struggle with at one time or another. More importantly in the success of this book, however, is the skillful way in which she describes the setting, sets the mood, and introduces the people that end up making such an impact on her. *Ed*

School Follies: The Miseducation of America's Teachers is neither a book for the faint-hearted nor the eternally optimistic. Furthermore, it is a book which is as relevant in Canada as in the United States. As such, it is strongly recommended for anyone concerned with the state of teacher education as it exists today.

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Douglas J. Thom.
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP:
WORD, SPIRIT, AND DEED FOR A JUST SOCIETY.
Calgary: Detselig (1993).
250 pp. \$20.95. ISBN 1-55059-048-0.

The author of this book has set himself an ambitious, even daunting, task – to set forth key sociological perspectives on society and education, as well as the essences of educational management and leadership, and upon these foundations to construct *Thom's Educational Leadership with CONSCIENCE (TELC)* model. Thom describes TELC on the cover note as a “postpositivistic model [which] incorporates the reality of organizational power and politics and the bureaucratic dynamics of collectivism and individualism.” He asserts that the book “is rooted in sound research. . . and encourages a balanced application of science and spirit for understanding and gaining wisdom.” Unfortunately, the product falls short of this lofty ideal.

Part I consists of two chapters outlining the author's sociological perspectives. The first deals with society and education, the second with bureaucratic theory. Part II sets forth his vision of educational management and leadership in four chapters: educational law, educational finance, values, and organizational framework. Thom's model, which is foreshadowed throughout the first two parts, is presented in Part III, together with a concluding chapter. Several appendices are included which contain an eclectic variety of material of varying degrees of relevance to the theme of the book.

Overall, there is a lack of unity and coherence to the material presented in the first two parts. For example, under one heading entitled, “Education Within a Broader Society,” we go from a statement of the importance of the goals of education, to the division of powers over education in the Constitution, to Turner's “Frontier Thesis”, to key ideas underlying the Canadian education system, and, finally, to the character-