BOOK REVIEWS

Canada's community colleges, at least the vast majority of them, were born for the most part in the 1960s and early 1970s. In existence for about 30 years, they number about 150 institutions in total with some 700 satellite campuses. About 500,000 students are enrolled in credit programs, and a further 1.5 million students in non-credit continuing education courses. The community colleges represent therefore an important element of Canada's post-secondary educational scene. Furthermore, because each province and territory has its own college system, there is a remarkable diversity in the colleges' objectives, governance, programs, and priorities.

In spite of this diversity (or perhaps because of it), there has been very little scholarly discourse or objective critical analysis of Canada's community college sector. That is not to imply that nothing has been written about the colleges. Far from it! Each provincial government and territory has a tendency to write voluminous reports on its own college system, but there is little available that examines the college sector as a whole or on a comparative basis. In fact, there have been just two major studies on Canada's community colleges. The first was Gordon Campbell's *Community Colleges in Canada* published in 1971. The second was *Canada's Community Colleges: A critical analysis* jointly authored by John Dennison and Paul Gallagher in 1986. Now, there is a third. *Challenge and Opportunity: Canada's community colleges at the crossroads*, edited by John Dennison, provides both an update on developments in the community college sector in each province and territory

since 1985, and contains chapters on important issues such as college leadership, organization, accountability, instructional methodology, community college values and culture, and aboriginal education. This is all valuable material for anyone who wishes to understand some of the challenges and opportunities that currently concern Canada's community colleges.

The book also contains some sharp critical analysis. Much of this, of course, is provided by the editor in the introduction and conclusion. But there is also an important chapter by Paul Gallagher entitled "Promise Fulfilled, Promise Pending." It is argued that the two distinguishing characteristics of Canada's community colleges are (a) as instruments for the implementation of social and economic policy, and (b) as exemplars of teaching excellence. This book provides an up-to-date report card on the successes and failures of these dual characteristics. Many colleges, however, appear to have an uncertain future, at least for the short term. Given the current fiscal restraints, certain governments increasingly tend to see the colleges simply as instruments to deliver work-related training programs. Will the colleges be able to continue with their other functions, and to what extent? Will they be able to continue to provide increased accessibility for traditionally disadvantaged groups? Can they adapt to technological change? Can they survive economic restructuring? Can they seek out and serve new clienteles? Will they continue to experiment with new teaching methodologies? How much autonomy, if any, will they be allowed? The colleges are, indeed, "at the crossroads."

This is an important book for anyone who wants to keep *au courant* with the community college scene in Canada.

DONALD A. BURGESS *McGill University*

DAVID PIMM. *Symbols and Meanings in School Mathematics.*
London: Routledge (1995).
220 pp. $17.95. ISBN 0-415-11385-7.

David Pimm has extended the ideas he introduced in 1987(1) to explore the place of symbolism and icons in mathematics. At the same time that he makes a significant contribution to the growing interest(2) in the interaction between language and mathematics, Pimm challenges his readers to question their beliefs about mathematics teaching and learning, and the meaning of mathematics itself.