

BOOK REVIEWS

FRANK DARNELL & ANTON HOEM. *Taken to Extremes: Education in the Far North.* Oslo: Scandinavian University Press (1996). 283 pp. \$39.30. ISBN 82-00-22588-7.

This book is very easy reading for the non-expert who would like to become somewhat knowledgeable about: a) the history of education amongst the indigenous peoples of the north, and b) the challenges they face in creating schooling that meets their own needs.

The authors begin by defining the terms they will use and suggest that the lessons learned from studying this particular context will resonate with individuals in other settings where peoples from minority and majority cultures meet. The scope of the story they tell is indeed broad, an attempt to describe the experience of schooling since contact with European civilization among all peoples of the north, save those in the Soviet regions. They present physical and demographic information about Alaska, northern Canada (the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, northern Quebec, northern Labrador), Greenland, and northern Sweden, Norway, and Finland. From here, they describe the history of western schooling in each of these regions and draw out the similarities in terms of political, economic, and social relationships that occurred after contact. The intention is to provide sufficient context to understand the contemporary situation and issues. These are dealt with using the following broad headings: organizational structure of schools, locus of control, curriculum, language of instruction, and professional development of teachers. The final chapter of the book summarizes what they believe are the lessons learned and presents their emerging theories of education in multicultural societies.

At this point, a word about the authors' provenance and mine might be insightful for the reader! Both these individuals have worked in the

north with Native Alaskans (Darnell) in the United States and Saami in Scandinavia (Hoem) for many years. They make it clear that they are representing their personal understandings of the issues under discussion. Similarly, I have worked with aboriginal peoples (both Inuit and First Nations) in eastern Canada (though not for a long as they). So all of us are outsiders, and the voices you hear represented in the authors' and my words are mere echoes of the lived reality. The definitive work on this story will wait until those involved in it have the time to tell the tale.

So, now as an outsider, I give you my response to this book. What is striking to me but not surprising (given the authors' backgrounds) is that the story of the Inuit in Canada's north, particularly those in northern Quebec (Nunavik) and northern Labrador, is not recounted in the same depth as the stories from Alaska and Scandinavia. And yet, in my experience, these stories are revelatory (especially that of Nunavik since it has a quite distinct political and thus educational history from the other regions). So, even as a compendium of historical events, the account is missing important details.

One of the issues they tackle is the debate over the role of schooling in indigenous communities: Is it to sustain the indigenous culture, to prepare students for life in the majority culture, or to prepare students for both? As the authors make clear, there is not necessarily a shared vision among indigenous peoples as to what the role should be, but it is very evident that the third option, while perhaps desired by the majority, is an incredibly demanding task to undertake.

As for the premise of the book that there have existed across these communities similar phases, I would agree. First, the emphasis by Europeans on cultural replacement was followed by a period of clearly voiced discontent by aboriginal peoples, which ultimately led to political accommodation towards aboriginal self-determination. The authors believe that there has, in fact, been remarkable progress at the policy level; nevertheless, student performance is still abysmally low. Thus, there is still much to be resolved, e. g., how to provide appropriate and adequate education to the children of these communities.

In exploring the ways in which change has and might continue to occur, the authors point out that the rate of change and degree of distinctness or integration between minority and majority cultures varies among the following features of society: technologies, economic systems, social order, and aestheticism. For instance, technologies are

frequently incorporated into lifestyles very quickly, e. g., the snowmobile has become a very common means of transportation in the Canadian north. Such a shift impacts on the other three aspects of society in differential ways and at differing speeds, e. g., purchase of gasoline (market economy) rather than hunting for food for the dogs (subsistence economy), learning to repair engines (basic southern mechanics) rather than learning to lead and care for a dog team (traditional land-based knowledge), and so on.

The tradition of slow evolution that they recount has been characterized as ultimately transformative (Falgout & Lewin, 1991), that is, leading eventually to minority-based schooling systems. The authors contrast this approach with the notion that one could actually question the very structures on which schooling is based and develop completely novel forms of schooling. Unfortunately, they do not give us a glimpse of what these might look like.

Darnell and Hoem believe quite strongly that there are lessons here to be learned by those in other multicultural contexts (as they choose to describe them). I take some issue with the notion that these indigenous communities can be described as such since they strike me as being made up in general terms of one minority culture and a majority culture (in the case of Quebec, a third culture which has both minority and majority status depending on the context). In addition, the minority cultures that are represented in these communities are caste-like minorities (e. g., black Americans in the United States who have no choice as to their group status) as opposed to voluntary minorities (e. g., an immigrant who makes a personal choice to take on minority status) to use Ogbu's (1987) useful classification. Thus, I believe the lessons are only applicable in the broadest, most abstract, sense to the majority of contexts that in Canada we would describe as multicultural, ones in which there is a mixture of individuals from minority cultures, most of whom are voluntary minorities.

Overall, what is useful about this book is the documenting of a series of similar histories in a readable format. For me what is lacking is a framework which would push the reader to grapple in depth with the issues and develop some concrete ideas about what might work, what might happen in the future. I am left with the feeling that I have eaten a decent meal but experienced nothing so delicious or mouth-watering that I'm inspired to seek out more.

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Ogbu, J. (1987). Variability in minority responses to schooling: Non-immigrants versus immigrants. In G. Spindler & L. Spindler (Eds.), *Interpretive ethnography of education at home and abroad*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 255-278.

MARGARET GILLETT & ANN BEER (EDITORS). *Our Own Agendas: Autobiographical essays by women associated with McGill University. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995. 291 pp. \$22.95. ISBN 0-7735-1340-x.*

Fifteen years ago, in her path-breaking *We Walked Very Warily: A history of women at McGill*, Margaret Gillett provided a broad spectrum of readers with an alternative history of McGill University. The book was an eye opener for those interested in women's issues and in Canadian educational history. Indeed, for some readers, even the very existence of women at McGill came as a major surprise. Superb educator that she is, the prize winning author followed suit with another volume. To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the admission of women to McGill, in 1984, Margaret Gillett and Kay Sibbald invited a variety of "McGill women" to contribute to a collection of autobiographical essays tentatively entitled "A Fair Shake." I remember the excitement of the centennial celebrations and the book launching of *A Fair Shake*. For many of us, McGill became a friendlier, more interesting place.

Our Own Agendas: Autobiographical essays by women associated with McGill University continues in the tradition of *A Fair Shake*. It presents an even richer variety of essays than the previous volume. From the nearly thirty autobiographies it is clear that McGill University, considered the bastion of "Anglo" higher education in Quebec, has attracted women from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds: Canada's First Nations, the descendants of European-Canadians, and those born and educated in other parts of the world, such as the Cameroons, India, and the United States.

The essays represent many life choices. Almost all of them deal with various forms of "otherness" – race, religion, sexuality. All but two were written for this volume; while the one by Judge Rosalie Abella fits beautifully, the other, by the humorist Erika Ritter, does not. It is probably unfair to single out a few individual essays from this rich collection. After all, they all present facets of remembered experience and most of them allow the reader to catch more than a glimpse behind