

DAWN SUTHERLAND & LAURA SOKAL (Editors). *Resiliency and Capacity Building in Inner-City Learning Communities*. Winnipeg, MB: Portage & Main Press (2003). 212 pp. \$39.00. (ISBN 1-895411-95-5).

This recent book is important for anyone concerned with what has traditionally been referred to as "inner-city schooling," that is, schooling serving areas characterized as impoverished, transient, multicultural and multilingual, and often beset with a range of difficult social issues. Children from such backgrounds have traditionally experienced difficulty succeeding in school. This book is based on the belief – and offers evidence – that schools can make a positive difference for these children, their families, and their communities. The answer it offers is based on (1) the belief in the potential and resources of these children, their families, and communities rather than in their shortcomings and deficiencies and (2) a collaborative partnership with these families and communities rather than an isolated effort on the part of the school alone.

This edited book is a collection of articles written by a wide range of educators all associated with the University of Winnipeg's teacher education program. This recently-constituted program is focused specifically on preparing teachers for inner-city teaching contexts, including access to the program for candidates from inner-city contexts. While the book is spearheaded by faculty members from the university's Faculty of Education, it is truly a joint effort with classroom teachers, school administrators, and community workers who live and/or work in Winnipeg's inner-city core area, a core area typical of those in most major urban centres in Canada.

The book is unique in several ways. First is its focus on the relationship between school and community in Canada. For too long inner-city schools have tried to work with the children of these communities, but in relative isolation from the communities themselves. This volume views inner-city schools as part of the equation for building stronger neighbourhoods and communities. Second, the volume considers issues of praxis from the critical perspective of resiliency and capacity building, starting with the potential and resources of the children, their families, and their communities. Such an approach stands in stark contrast to traditional deficit perspectives on inner-city communities – and the children from them – and thus a remedial role on the part of the school in working with those children.

The volume has several strengths. True to its praxis orientation, it provides both theoretical underpinnings as well as descriptions of promising, concrete, front-line work in the Winnipeg context, all as an organic, coherent whole. The book offers not an exact blueprint to follow, but certainly a vision, a sense of direction, and helpful guidelines. This vision is based on a review of related literature that is not only recent, but also broad, drawing particularly from sociological and psychological insights on these kinds of

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families and communities as well as the recent work on school success – best practices, organization and leadership, and so on.

I found this volume an extremely helpful resource, one from which educators could draw insight to inform new practice in major – and promising – ways. My own experience working in a range of schools in the Montreal area is that, sadly, this book would also be helpful for educators working beyond the traditional inner-city core areas since, as the authors point out, the demographics that characterize inner-city core areas have spread to other, formerly immune areas of urban centres. The issues dealt with here are truly widespread and often overwhelming in Canadian schooling. This book offers help and inspiration in the struggle to address them.

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