

## BOOKS

A. Richard King. *The School at Mopass: A Problem of Identity*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967. Pp. 112. \$2.25.

In *The School at Mopass* Richard King has provided an empirical block for the building of models to describe variations in school structures. However, King leaves the establishment of significant relationships between the Indian residential school and schools beyond the Yukon entirely to the reader. Parallel reading of Goffman's essay "Total Institutions" would readily provide a framework into which this study could be placed.<sup>1</sup> Most simply, bureaucratic tendencies apparent in all of Canadian education are magnified many times in an Indian education. King's study shows in almost absurd terms the consequences of superimposing a standard curriculum, rule-dominated principal behavior, withdrawal by teachers into a sanctuary of rationalizations, alienation of students from learning and into the practices of manipulation and the grandeur of test preoccupation by one and all.

Though the aim of Indian education was to integrate the Indian children into Canadian culture, in this Yukon Territory school the provincial curriculum of British Columbia was used without modifications. With an Alice-in-Wonderland type of rationality teachers were given no special training and made few modifications themselves in a curriculum designed for the adjoining province. With a similar type of reasoning a standard curriculum for all Canadians might be avidly advocated.

Similar insights concerning rule-oriented flights from reality are reported for principals. King writes revealingly of the "handbook philosophy" shown by the educational leaders. Clearly, if departments of education will lay down more rules and if accreditation of schools is avoided forever, then all Canadian education can enjoy the advantages of being "a well-run stock ranch" which is now largely limited to the privileged Indian few.

The Mopass school itself isn't quite as well run as a stock ranch since neither the administrators nor the teachers know the "parentage, production records, and performance characteristics of each animal." Teachers, says King, are "in the school, but not a part of it." The teachers vanish like a mirage from the school as frequently as possible, raise no objections to the maintenance staff having full authority over students outside classroom hours, and are mainly occupied with keeping their own commonwealth identities. The teachers, escaping from their own inadequacies,

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<sup>1</sup>Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 1-124.

find true martyrdom in helping the "unfortunate Indians." Other Canadian teachers probably have little to learn from the teachers at Mopass. However, separate entrances and special elevators for teachers in schools might be considered as leading toward a full blown separatist movement!

The unreality of the curriculum, the rule-oriented fantasies of administrators, and the happy illusions of teachers reach their logical conclusion in the nightmare of the childrens' education. As beginners the young children reach out to touch their teachers and obtain acceptance from them. However, the students quickly learn to keep their hands, feelings, and minds to themselves. Through avoidance behavior and peer group norms the children become masters of one-upmanship. Specialization in manipulation is accompanied by lower academic achievement. Certainly, here is the germ of an idea for new type of streaming.

Few schools can claim as complete a failure as that achieved in Mopass. With the goal of integration of Indians into Canadian culture ignored in the academic program, the first stage for failure was achieved. With the academic program undermined, in turn, by polarization between staff and students as revealed by the students' manipulative practices, the teachers' flight from the schools and the administration's retreat to the handbook, the second stage in the comic blastoff was realized. Finally, clear results are mapped from the orbit of the students. They never even label themselves as Canadians. In fact, when shown pictures of Indians from different tribes, the students do not accept the tribal differences since the differences between Indians and Canadians are so strong and central. If similar failure were achieved elsewhere, we could have a nation in which no one talked to anyone else from sea to sea!

Though oblivious to their failure to achieve Indian integration, teachers, administrators and students are concerned about the low scores of students on intelligence tests. King reports the results of a controlled experiment which clearly shows the advantages of cheating. Practice sessions virtually eliminated the differential between the Mopass school and a nearby day school. Furthermore the students came to enjoy the test racket. Here is the way to maintain the delusion of test validity for all students. One suspects that King has been caught up in the insanity of his subjects or influenced by the opium smoking of Ph.D. rituals for which the study was prepared. In any event no serious policy proposals are made. However, by presenting education under the microscope of an Indian setting, King's monograph should provoke many thoughts for future action, past the horizons of Mopass.

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