

## BOOKS

A. B. Hodgetts, *What Culture? What Heritage?*: A study of Civic Education in Canada. (Report of the National History Project, Trinity College School, Port Hope). Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, Toronto, 1968. (Curriculum Series, No. 5.) Pp. 122+v. \$2.00.

When I reviewed, in this Journal, *Society's Children; A Study of Ressentiment in the Secondary School*,\* I concluded with the suggestion that, while United States findings did not necessarily apply to Canada, we would be well advised to subject our own schools to equally critical examination, when the issue is the vital one of what is happening to our youth to make or mar them, both as mature human beings and as democratic citizens. I did not expect at that time to have such an immediate opportunity to read a Canadian study, of comparable authority and equally searching analysis.

This is what this most recent example of O.I.S.E. initiatives provides. It is in my judgment (and I will list some of the evidence) one of the most significant little books on education that has been written in Canada in a decade. It is intriguing to add that, whereas *Society's Children* arose out of concern in the U.S. that youngsters with scientific talents were showing serious lags in motivation, *What Culture? What Heritage?* derives from a concern which can justifiably for Canada be regarded as even more important; namely, the extent to which our new generation is aided by our schools to understand the issues and conflicts of being Canadian — whether this is the much vexed question of identity, or the bridging of the cultural and socialization barriers between “French” and “English,” or the ultimate one of the kind of world Canadians live in today and must help to recreate tomorrow. In “subjects” terms, these are the issues of history, civics, and social studies: in realistic terms, it means the classroom and what goes on in it, the students and what they get out of it. These are actually the titles of chapters 2 and 3 of this lucidly written report, and its down-to-earth language is one of its many virtues.

Before we face the conclusions, let's “evaluate the methodology.” The National History Project took two years, employed a team which observed 847 classroom teachers in history and social studies and 48 in current events; in twenty cities in all ten provinces; used questionnaires, student interviews, teacher interviews, school “profiles,” recorded observations of several kinds, and “open-ended essays” by students which, at first thought of as “a simple little question we first began to use almost by

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accident" to take up 15 minutes at the end of observation classes, actually garnered some of the most hair-raising evidence. The simple question: "What do you think of Canada, and what do you think of Canadian history?" Extended notes and case examples are given at the end of each chapter; and O.I.S.E. promises a companion book to the present one which will detail all the research instruments. Here are some of the findings, specific examples first:

1. "Three out of four Canadian history classes . . . were engaged in the mechanical memorization of historical facts." "Of the 400 essays written by the secondary school students, 64 per cent contained indictments of this particular weakness."

2. Of all the classrooms visited, only 13 per cent "provided the physical environment (and facilities) conducive to effective social studies teaching." "A grossly inadequate 4 per cent" could properly be classified as teaching laboratories.

3. In school libraries, American magazines and newspapers outnumbered Canadian by almost three to one. Over half of all the Canadian books in school libraries, other than the authorized textbook, were "seldom or never read."

4. 65 per cent of school libraries, in Quebec and other provinces, "had no books on English-French relations."

5. More than half of the Canadian studies classes in the survey were using the lecture-without-discussion and the memorized-assignment methods without remedying their "most widely condemned" defects. Recognizing the *pro* and *con* on this subject, illustrative examples are given; and the whole matter is treated very judiciously by distinguishing other methods, "discussion vs. aimless chit-chat," insightful questions "used or ignored," and "ideal dialogues" which really enlist the students' interest, and develop interplay of judgment and evidence.\*\* It was not possible to rate the best classes as higher than 20 per cent of the total.

6. Of the (English speaking) students who wrote the "Open-ended Essay," 47 per cent thought they knew more American than Canadian history, and 71 per cent of them found it more enjoyable!

7. The estimate for *all* the students was that 18 per cent were "actively bored" (some to the point of creating bedlam), 17 per cent were "passively bored." 41 per cent were rated "mechanical" (i.e., well behaved but merely going along). These are dimensions that compare in their own way with the alarming discoveries of "conformities" in *Society's Children*. For Canadian social studies, the alarming proportions are the 17 per cent who alone could be described as "moderately

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\*\*Teachers who think the proper method for a completely instructed lesson is the "McLuhan approach" (with no background study) should read the fascinating (or alarming?) *verbatim* of one such lesson, given in detail, pp. 63-66. "To believe that this lesson had anything to do with the subject" on which it was supposed to secure response, would be "stretching the imagination to breaking point." (By contrast, cf. questions listed on p. 23 and footnote 5, p. 35.)

keen," and only 7 per cent as "keen" — less than 25 per cent between them. In other words, three out of every four youngsters are disaffected, in the most critical *Canadian* area — many of them, as Hodgetts puts it, "psychological dropouts in class."

There are others; but there is surely enough here already to alert us to the critical situation. Yet the enduring values of Mr. Hodgett's book is his integrated presentation of what is at fault and what are the results. (a) In the great majority of secondary schools, the study of Canada, and all that goes with it — a social interpretation of history, the understanding of our ethnic components, the challenges of nationhood and informed democracy — are not being effectively taught. (b) What is often forgotten, students' expectations are not being realized. Indeed, there are perverse and unpredictable results; not merely boredom, but political indifference or cynicism, the reinforcement of regionalism and parochialism, and the "two solitudes" of French and English non-communication. (c) Notwithstanding the pious objectives that the skills of independent thought, informed debate and tolerant understanding should be engendered in school whence they can be transferred to adult life, knowledge of the democratic process is being frustrated, even vitiated.

Naturally, the teaching of history is a major component in this analysis, and the concrete interpretation this is given is particularly welcome. (d) History must be "opened out" (not only by the teacher in the classroom, but by those who teach teachers). First, there are the social forces, which are the true stuff of history. Hodgett spells out what he properly calls the "political sociology": "Such things as protest and minority movements, class developments and issues, the influence of art, literature, and ideas, education and religion, industrial growth and a great many other aspects of human endeavour." They are virtually ignored in the schools (p. 20). From another angle, this is an issue of realism; of being "close to life" (and therefore helping the student to visualize links between today and the past, which again is one of the "aims" rehearsed in all official curriculum statements). "We did not see a single class discussing the psychological or sociological reasons for voting; the influence of personal frustrations, age, sex, family, peer groups, religion, class and other determinants of voting patterns were never mentioned" (p. 30). "The influence of mass media, the role of political parties, the effects of lobbying and pressure groups, the decision-making processes, power elites and other factors that bring politics to life seldom get into the Canadian classroom." Then there is the least familiar viewpoint of all, yet one farthest removed from the dry-as-dust, record-of-consensus, single-textbook approach that stifles most "Socials" — the fact that there are many interpretations and reinterpretations, of the same "history" (p. 26). But how many teachers have even heard of historiography? Professional analysis altogether apart, how many understand history as the continuous choice between *alternatives*?

Equally refreshing is (e) the clear-headed presentation of the issue of French-English relations, which runs through the investigations and the findings, from start to finish. It includes the ideological disparities between "French" and "English" history books, still far from remedied except by a small handful of teachers; the disturbing evidence of ignorance or sheer prejudice among English-speaking students and of "nationalist" self-absorption among Québécois; the paucity of books and up-to-date information (including la révolution tranquille — and even of Expo!). English students are "apathetic about their past" and uninformed about it; French students are "emotionally involved in their own cultural heritage," and misinformed about it. What a dilemma for us all! Yet it is "secondary to the fact that Canadian studies in the schools" on both sides of the linguistic curtain "do so little to encourage mutual understanding" of the differences. It is pleasant to record that this study, initiated in Toronto, gave full weight to Quebec in its research plans; and, published in Ontario, is issuing simultaneously a French edition.

Finally, nothing has more potent implication — for the present as well as the future of Canada — than (f) the appalling ignorance of the arts revealed among the thousands of students who were "polled." 88 per cent of Grade 12 students were unable to name three Canadian artists, 78 per cent equally unsuccessful with the poets, and 81 per cent with the writers. (A few named Americans instead!). "Fewer than 10 per cent showed what might be called good to excellent cultural knowledge." Hodgetts properly suggests this should not be interpreted merely as a memory test, but that such things as the appeal of Canadian scenery and the struggle for recognition which actuated the Group of Seven were not communicated. One shudders to think of the results for music! The reviewer would add here (what is only implicit in Hodgett's exposition) that if cultural heritage is really to be brought to life, it is time for English and Fine Arts teachers and university personnel, as well as those in Social Studies, to get together; perhaps this combination indeed would help to break the barriers of time-table and scheduled "slots" which are a formidable part of the difficulty at present.

In *Society's Children*, the gloomy recital ends almost in despair. It is encouraging that *What Culture? What Heritage?* concludes with vigorous proposals. It recommends a Canadian Studies Consortium with a determined executive committee; a *national* program to change scope, content and teaching strategies in Social Studies; the impetus to come boldly from our new Council of Ministers of Education. It must be independent, frankly interprovincial (though leaving the way clear for provincial injection into the schools), and committed to the fundamental objective that Canadian studies should be not for national unity, not for "consensus," but for *national understanding*.

There is plenty of built-in warning against undue optimism; not least of which is the sad story of non-reform, the many reports and curriculum

studies which have never penetrated to the classroom (p. 5). Hodgetts is careful to recognize the efforts of "all those engaged in the tremendously difficult tasks of education." Nevertheless, all of us, he says — "department officials, academicians, professors in faculties of education, school administrators, and teachers — are trapped inadvertently in a labyrinth of confusion and inefficiency." In this latter area, his report is plain-spoken and factual on the inadequacies in the qualifications of teachers (pp. 105-110), the indifference or lack of understanding about Social Studies too often shown by principals (p. 104); and, not least, the gaps in the teaching of teachers (pp. 98-105). It is not enough, incidentally, to argue that there has been great improvement in recent years. Nor for some of us who happen to live in British Columbia or Alberta or Montreal to be cheered by the fact that most of the best Social Studies teaching was observed in these areas. This is a national problem, and a very urgent one; and we should keep our eye on the figures that not more than 15 per cent of the teachers could be assessed as successful; only 20 per cent could be adjudged as making a determined effort to keep abreast of the appropriate literature; that 70 per cent of teachers are "capable of much better work than they are now doing."

Is it necessary to emphasize how deeply the world is in trouble today? It has been said, in awful sincerity, that we have only one generation left to settle the fate of mankind. I cannot say more for the report of the National History Project than that it must be given equal attention with the Hall-Dennis Report in Ontario, the BCTF Commission Report (*Involvement*) in British Columbia, if this welcome evidence of stirrings among the teachers is to gain sufficiently rapid and far-reaching results. Let Mr. Hodgetts have the last word on this, one last quotation from this most quotable little book. "Regardless of the fundamental problems facing this country, the general quality of civic life — and therefore of our civic education programs — remains a matter of utmost concern to a democratic society like Canada . . . The prospect of reversing [the current deficiencies], of bringing the democratic ideal closer to fulfilment through reforms in the educational system and other social institutions, is perhaps one of the most inspiring challenges facing free men everywhere."

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