

Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West

David C. Jones, Nancy M. Sheehan, and Robert M. Stamp, eds., *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1979. Pp. viii & 259.

Nothing—at first glance—is more gloomy to contemplate than yet another edited collection of essays. Perhaps it is a commentary on our times that we seem fated to be assailed by the bland collective mutterings of assorted academics, analysts, and soothsayers. Their discursive commentaries spill easily over the profound and trivial issues of the day and it is rare to find the resolute iconoclast in their midst who, in Max van Manen's phrase "is committed to [the pursuit] of emancipatory values." Fortunately, some books of essays clearly embody the convictions of editors that the selection of articles does not depend on personal whim or idiosyncrasy. Even if *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West* does not avoid all of the weaknesses of joint editorial ventures, it is a refreshing exception to the usual pattern. Furthermore, as a work of educational history it is not only welcome—given the sparse writing on western educational themes—but also timely in its pointed attention to some neglected topics in the history of education.

A quick overview of the substantial works in Canadian education prior to the 1960's suggests a number of shortcomings and characteristic preoccupations: a barely restrained obsession with the story of Ontario; an emphasis on the beneficent development of public schooling with its proclaimed absence of conflict and tension; and the isolation of these studies from mainstream history and from the methodological advances of related social science disciplines. C. E. Phillips' *The Development of Education in Canada* (1957), F. Henry Johnson's *A History of Public Education in British Columbia* (1964), and C. B. Sissons' *Church and State in Canadian Education* (1959) captured the essential spirit of that age but, in turn, have been found wanting by the present generation of historians. Inspired by Bailyn's Critique of American educational history and provoked more recently by Michael Katz's influential but singularly uncompromising analysis of Ontario's educational past, the editors of *Shaping the Schools* have set out to enlarge our understanding of education in the west. They have imaginatively juxtaposed old and new scholarship to form a collection that speaks equally to lay and professional audiences.

The organization of the book is straightforward, with specific sections on origins, the experiences of minorities, the rural-urban context, teachers, and the programs and curricula of schools. A number of the essays are original contributions but eleven of the fifteen chapters have been published elsewhere and subsequently assembled for this volume. The acid test for including articles previously in print has not been spelled out; however, the skill with which the editors have set out the major motifs of the book—the influence of eastern Canada, the significance of local contributions to policy making, and the role and dimension of educational leadership—attests to the appropriateness of their choices. To cite but two examples: Cornelius Jaenen's scholarly account on Ruthenian schools, originally published in *Paedagogica Historica* a decade ago, ably supports the editors' insistence that the role of particular groups and the so-called "client viewpoint" are essential to any revised history of education. Similarly, Apolonja Maria Kodjer's recent (1977) study of the Saskatoon Women Teachers' Association brings emphasis to a neglected subject. Jaenen and Kodjer both deal with identifiable members of a larger society who, in the one instance, resisted the majority's imposition of a uniform system of schooling; and, on the other, worked to oppose and to modify discriminatory practices by those who preached the benefits of public education. Both essays are reminders of the need to explore more fully the history of participants who were affected by decisions of educational policy makers; both suggest new approaches and perspectives often overlooked in the standard accounts.

Other examples of previously published material that should be noted include Keith McLeod's "Politics, Schools and the French language, 1881-1931" (1968) which is especially timely, given the persistence of the "French fact" in any discussion of Canadian society and education, a point underscored once more in the recent court decision upholding French language rights in Manitoba. McLeod's dispassionate account of the inexorable pressure on the French Canadians to yield to the dominant Anglo-conformist concept of "common schools" makes for sober reading and should be reviewed by anyone concerned about education in a pluralist society. From other perspectives, but equally illuminating, are Stamp's succinct analysis of the growth of bureaucracy in the Calgary school system, and Robert Patterson's critical examination of some key generalizations related to the history of teacher education in Alberta. Stamp confirms that the "social differences between Calgary and eastern cities diminished quickly" (p. 121) insofar as its educational system was concerned, while Patterson suggests that the wide gap between the rhetoric of teacher preparation and the reality calls for an even more critical survey of our educational past if we are to ask the appropriate questions about current and future policy.

It has already been pointed out that *Shaping the Schools* depends heavily on the quality of established scholarship (including essays by W. L. Morton and F. Henry Johnson not yet cited) but it is the inclusion of two or three chapters of new material which clearly establishes the calibre of this volume. In particular, Jones' own contributions, "The Strategy of Rural Enlightenment: Consolidation in Chiliwack, B. C., 1919-1920" and "Creating Rural-Minded Teachers: The British Columbia Experience," are stimulating forays into new areas of

educational history. Drawn from Jones' doctoral dissertation and based on extensive archival research, these essays and that of Timothy Dunn whose "Teaching the Meaning of Work: Vocational Education in British Columbia, 1900-1929" challenges earlier interpretations of the history of vocational education, show how deficient the standard accounts of schooling may be. Perhaps it is Jones' work which best underlines the formidable task of writing a "complete" educational history. His inquiry into the strategies adopted by educators like J. W. Gibson to solve the problems of rural schooling, bring out much of the behind-the-scenes controversy among teachers, principals, and superintendents, and the conflict over philosophies and policy making. It is clear from a reading of these chapters that one prerequisite to understanding how the schools were shaped is in more thorough investigation of the social, economic, and political contexts in which educational decisions were taken.

In summary, the Jones, Sheehan and Stamp collection can be warmly recommended to a number of constituencies: certainly to educational historians who might well profit from an example of editorial collaboration that still advances historiography; to teachers who are in need of a critical perspective; and to the lay readership which searches for intelligible prose explanations in Canadian history. Perhaps if we were always to keep the last constituency in mind first, the task of policy makers and committed educators in shaping the future of schooling would be considerably enhanced.

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Tasks and Social Relations in Classrooms: A Study of Instructional Organization and its Consequences.

Steven T. Bossert, *Tasks and Social Relations in Classrooms: A Study of Instructional Organization and its Consequences*. Cambridge Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1979, Pp. 119, \$4.95.

This is very important monograph that will be of great interest to teachers, prospective teachers, and professors of education and sociology. The monograph is written by a young American scholar as part of his Ph.D. dissertation in Sociology at the University of Chicago (under the direction of Charles Bidwell). It is one of those rare dissertations that not only deserves to be published but also deserves to be read. Moreover, it is written in a style that can be understood and appreciated by teachers, undergraduate students, and professors.

In a nutshell, the monograph examines how the structure of activities, particularly the nature of common, recurrent instructional tasks, shapes the behavior of teachers and pupils. The study is based upon many interviews with both teachers and pupils and an extensive period of observation, over two years, in several elementary classrooms. The monograph provides an in-depth examination of how variations in certain forms of instruction, specifically recitation and individualized instruction, affect teachers' use of classroom control, the allocation of instructional assistance among pupils, the formation of peer groups, and the development of norms for group competition and cooperation.

The monograph links these issues with the extensive research that has been conducted in industry. Some readers may be amazed to discover that there has not been very much research on the nature of classrooms and the social relationships that develop. Bossert argues persuasively that this is a very important topic in order to understand the way in which different pupils learn and form attitudes towards school.

Of course there is Robert Dreeben's book *On What is Learned in School* (1968) in which a number of propositions about the differences between families and schools are postulated, but there are very few empirical analyses of any of Dreeben's propositions. In Bossert's work, the notion of universalism, as presented by both Parsons and Dreeben, is examined. That is, Bossert examines whether children are treated in accordance with their needs in both recitation activities and individualized instruction activities. The results show that there is much more unjust treatment in recitation activities than in individualized instruction activities. Teachers who use individualized instruction are able to provide individual assistance when necessary but teachers who use recitation have few opportunities to provide individual assistance, and when assistance is given, the top achievers receive a disproportionately high share.

Moreover, Bossert also shows that certain teachers are more likely to use these two basic types of presentations to different degrees. That is, some teachers almost always use individualized instruction while others almost always use recitation. Thus, elementary school pupils are generally locked into classrooms stressing different types of organization which, in turn, influence the interaction patterns between the pupils and the teacher. There is strong indication that this also affects achievement and attitudes towards school.