

Friesen, John W. *When Cultures Clash: Case Studies in Multiculturalism*. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1985, 171 pp. \$14.95 (paper).

Despite its attractive title, this book promises very much more than it actually delivers. There is no attention to the clash of cultures in any of the chapters — neither in the first two general chapters on “Multicultural Education in Canada” and “Ethnic Minorities in Canada” nor in the last chapter on “Teaching and Cultural Survival.” In each instance, such attention would have been appropriate. Nor are the remaining five chapters on the French in Western Canada, the Plains Indians, the Métis, the Hutterites and the Mennonites case studies in multiculturalism. Apart from the chapter on the French, in which Western Canada’s negative attitude toward an immigration policy which brought diverse peoples to the West is noted, the attitude of each of the groups toward multiculturalism is not mentioned. Nor is there any attention to the attitude of each toward ethnicity or ethnic groups. With the French and Métis the stress is on biculturalism, with language and culture (historically, the classical ‘schools question’) seen as the traditional main support of the Roman Catholic religion. Religion is also the focal point in the treatment of the Hutterites and Mennonites, neither of whom are approached as ethnocultural minorities. With the Plains Indians, the main concern is racism and intercultural education, which to the author is synonymous with multicultural education.

Such loose thinking characterizes the whole book. As if lumping multiculturalism and intercultural matters together without discussion were not enough, the author refers to multiculturalism as “a relatively young academic discipline” (p. 159) and to becoming “a multicultural person” (p. 49), without indicating either the nature of multiculturalism as a “discipline” or how one becomes “a multicultural person.” Is a person who concerns himself with multiculturalism “a multicultural person”?

But not only is the author confused, he occasionally misleads as well. It is erroneous to refer to “the original Government Act on Multiculturalism” (p. 2) in discussing the introduction of the multicultural policy in October, 1971. There was no federal legislation at the time and there has been none since. And why, moreover, the capitalization? The book also abounds with statements such as the following: “In terms of support for multicultural activities, however, Alberta Culture has lived up to the Minister’s (of Culture) statement” (p. 4). Left alone, the sentence is a political statement and has no place in what is supposedly a scholarly work.

And in the end, the above supposition is the book’s main problem. Despite its numerous footnotes and other scholarly apparatus, the book is not a scholarly work. It not only lacks definition and purpose, it shows little understanding of the subject matter it purports to discuss. How, for example, does one reconcile a statement like “School programs should not focus on the ‘contributions’ of a particular ethnic group but rather on the roles of various groups in the development of Canada” (p. 166) with another statement such as “Encourage children to learn about and appreciate the unique contributions of their own culture” (p. 169)? These statements are in the same chapter and only three pages apart! And further,

How do we perceive the development of the Native or the immigrant child? Should he become a “typical” Canadian student when he reaches grade twelve — manifesting the same values, desires and goals as other students, or are some differences to be tolerated? If so, what kind of differences? Ethnic groups often place varying emphasis on academic achievements; in light of this, to what extent should the teacher identify those preferences and cater to them in the classroom? (p. 48).

The above are, of course, good questions, but in the book they are unfortunately only asked and not discussed. One could single out much similar ‘unfinished business’ in analysis and in conceptualization in this book.

The book, in short, has all the appearances of one which seeks to cash in on multiculturalism as the current fad or vogue. In the end, it fails to do justice to multiculturalism *per se* or to the minority situations which it does treat. Numerous instances of sloppy editing such as omitted or misplaced quotation marks [pp. 4,9-10]; inconsistent form such as “nineteen-sixties” [p.159] and 1960s [p. 72], 1940’s [p. 59] and 1940s [p. 63]; “succession” when “secession” is intended [p. 31]; inconsistent citation of doctoral dissertations [pp. 79-80]; the use of the verb “enamour” as a noun in “I can pursue my enamour of studying . . .” [p. 11], to cite only a few deficiencies, only add further to the aggravations which the reader sustains because of the superficial nature of the overall content.