

Book Reviews

Correction

The Volume XLV, Number 1 issue of *ajer* included a review of a book by Ian William Sewell, published by Qual Institute Press in Edmonton, AB. In the review the book's title was incorrectly listed as *The Folkloric Art*. The correct title is *The Folkloral Voice*.

Education Finance: Current Canadian Issues. Y.L. Jack Lam (Ed.).
Calgary, AB: Detselig, 1998, 150 pages.

Reviewed by Benjamin Levin, University of Manitoba

A Canadian book on education finance is to be welcomed. As Jack Lam points out in his introduction, it is difficult to find good Canadian material on education finance, although somewhat less so than used to be the case thanks to the efforts of the authors in this collection and others.

This new book will help the situation, although less than one might have hoped. It contains quite a bit of interesting and useful knowledge, but is limited by the lack of an overall framework, some significant gaps in coverage, and, unfortunately, poor production.

First, a brief description is in order. The book contains 11 chapters divided into two parts. The first part, titled "Current Status and Concerns," includes five chapters. Gendron reviews overall spending on education in Canada over the period from 1970 to 1995, looking at the drivers of costs and revenues. Perrin's chapter appears to be based on a speech made soon after the introduction of the Canada Health and Social Transfer in 1995, and looks at the possible impact of that policy shift on provincial support for education. Lam critiques legislation in Manitoba in 1996 intended to change some aspects of education finance, including collective bargaining, by shifting more control to the provincial government. Jefferson provides a brief analysis of the financial implications of school decentralization. Binda's chapter, although titled "Financing Aboriginal Education," actually discusses changes in the governance and financing of First Nations schools.

Section Two is entitled "Possible Solutions and Prospects" and contains six chapters. Lam uses an analysis of rural school districts to argue that education spending should properly be viewed as an investment rather than a cost. Lawton discusses some of the difficulties in financing education under current economic conditions and suggests some significant changes that should be considered. Hajnal and Walker provide a typology and some data on what they call "non-traditional funding" such as school fundraising efforts. Walker and Kay analyze school-business relationships and partnerships, particularly

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from an ethical perspective. Novak looks at the potential of new technologies in education. Renihan and Renihan consider the implications of the changing school context, including financial restraint, for leadership.

The breadth of coverage in the book is both a strength and a weakness. On the positive side it is useful to make the broader connections between finance and issues such as leadership, technology, and legislation. Much of the finance literature, I would contend, has been too narrowly focused on a few issues such as provincial funding levels and mechanisms. Seeing finance as strictly a matter of money is too limited a perspective.

There are, however, several problems with the breadth in this particular volume. First, the connections between some of the chapters and finance issues are not well developed. For example, the chapter on technology provides no substantive discussion of economic issues other than a claim—unsupported by evidence—that technology can improve cost-effectiveness in education. The chapter on leadership treats financial constraint as only one of many factors bearing on schools and has little to say about the specific impacts of budget cuts on school leadership. The chapter on school-business partnerships is an ethical rather than an economic analysis. These connections could usefully have been developed more fully. As well, many of the chapters are simply too short to do justice to any important topic. This is especially true of the chapters that deal with the less traditional finance elements in the book.

At the same time, there are some vital areas of finance that are not in the book at all. Apart from Gendron's chapter, which is at a pan-Canadian level, there is little basic empirical data in the book. Issues of taxation are absent except for a brief mention in Steve Lawton's chapter. Little is said about the allocation of money to particular purposes in schools such as the relative importance of various instructional and noninstructional cost elements. Indeed, costs are hardly discussed at all. Important recent work looking at alternative ways of deploying resources in schools is not discussed. Although too much attention to provincial funding systems is not desirable, these receive almost no attention in this volume. Nor is there any mention of collective bargaining issues (other than Lam's reference to the Manitoba legislation that restricted it) or much discussion of recent moves to more provincial control of finances, limits on property taxation, and reductions in the numbers of school districts. Many of the basic things that a student of education finance would want to know—how much money is spent, where it comes from, and how it is used—are largely missing.

In one sense, critiquing an edited book for gaps in coverage is unfair. No book of reasonable length could cover all the key issues in education finance, and an editor is also constrained by who is actually available to write. In Canada only a few academics work on education finance, and most of them do so only sporadically, so finding authors for desired chapters may not be easy. However given the paucity of Canadian work, it might well have been more useful to focus on fewer issues in more depth rather than casting the net so broadly but unevenly.

One further coverage issue has to do with the strong advocacy component in some parts of the book. Some of the chapters on controversial issues such as those on partnerships or on spending patterns, are carefully neutral in stance.

Others take clear positions. Novak strongly supports greater use of technology (though without any evidence that technology will either improve outcomes or reduce costs). Lam's two chapters both attack government policy—in one case because of Manitoba laws that gave the Minister more power and limited teachers' collective bargaining rights. The second attacks governments generally for cutting funding to schools, thus demonstrating a lack of understanding of education as a key social investment. Lawton, on the other hand, argues that additional investment in schools is both unaffordable and inefficient.

Policy advocacy is an entirely appropriate approach, but the reader is left wondering about the purpose of advocacy in this book. Is it intended to shape a particular view of finance issues, or to introduce readers to a range of positions, or, as in some chapters, merely to lay out some of the issues in as neutral a way as possible? In the event, the book has some of each, resulting in a rather unsatisfactory melange.

The gaps and differences in stance could have been alleviated perhaps, with a fuller introduction that mapped out the larger field of education finance and located the chapters in it, something like providing a picture of the completed jigsaw puzzle and marking on it the many missing pieces. A final summary chapter might also have served the same purpose, drawing threads together and acknowledging the inevitable gaps and limitations.

Finally, it is unfortunate that the book is so poorly produced. It appears that no copy-editing was done as the book is replete with missing or incomplete references, as well as grammatical and typographical errors. These begin in the list of authors and preface and extend through just about every chapter. It is a production standard most of us would not accept from students' papers. The lack of an index is also frustrating and limits the book's usefulness for teaching.

I have no doubt that this book will be read and used, in part because of Lam's accurate contention that there are so few Canadian sources in this area. I hope that the editor will consider a further volume that meets more of the objectives he has rightly set.

Knowing Her Place: Research Literacies and Feminist Occasions.

Lorri Neilsen. Great Tancook Island, NS: Backalong Books, 1998, 288 pages.

Reviewed by *Ann Sherman, St. Francis Xavier University*

This interwoven collection of essays and poetry, interviews, and field notes leads us through the journey Lorri Neilsen has taken on her road to uncovering a fuller understanding of what it means to be a researcher and to be a woman doing research. Each of the segments, events, and feminist occasions described in the book help us to understand better the research languages, literacies, and discourses she has sampled throughout her life. Pinar (1996) suggests any discipline or research area can be treated as discourse and analyzed as such. To

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