Book Reviews

Ricker, E.W. & Wood, B.A. (Eds). (1995). *Historical perspectives on educational policy in Canada: Issues, debates and case studies*. Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 298 pp. (Softcover).

The academic papers published here were first presented at Dalhousie University in October 1986 at the fourth biennial conference of the Canadian History of Education Association/Association canadienne d'histoire de l'éducation – "a special moment in time," according to the editors. The nine-year delay in publication (accompanied by the demise of Dalhousie's teacher-education program) reveals as much about educational policy issues in contemporary Canada as it does about the discipline of educational history.

First, educational history. Eric Ricker begins with an overview of recent historiography in a manner reminiscent of J. Donald Wilson. Then come many of the country's leading practioners of the mid-1980's – scholars representing universities from Atlantic to Pacific whose research interests span the 19th and 20th centuries. Some of the better papers are highly theoretical, like Harold Silver's "Policy Problems in Time" or R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar's "Schooling and the Idea of Merit." Other exemplary papers are narrowly focused in time and space, like Michael Owen on Cape Breton Island in the 1910's or Wilson on British Columbia rural schools of the 1920's, while still others range widely over time (John E. Lyons on Saskatchewan) or across space (Nancy M. Sheehan on World War One's impact on provincial educational policies).

Such eclecticism might enliven an academic conference or brighten the pages of a scholarly journal, but it hardly bodes well for an integrated book. The authors seem to have been given free rein to fit their own research interests under the vague umbrella title of *Historical Perspectives on Educational Policy in Canada*. Even that broad a title, however, cannot contain J.L. Granatstein's polemic on contemporary university standards or Bruce Curtis's treatment of punishment and moral character in early modern British schools. (Why these tangential papers

but nothing on Aboriginal, feminist, poverty, or racist themes in Canadian education – issues that might have given the volume more of an edge?)

The original purpose was even more grandiose: to publish a complete record of the Dalhousie conference – all 49 papers and commentaries. This proved far too ambitious an undertaking, given scholarly egos and unfortunate funding difficulties. "Not all participants wished their papers to be considered for this volume and some who were interested initially decided to withdraw in the face of the publication delay" (p. xii). Despite the fine essays ultimately included, then, the resulting publication seems to be an example of "rump eclecticism;" papers that did not (or could not) get published elsewhere during the nine-year interval are included here.

This nine-year publication delay partially explains the lack of congruence between conference papers and the practical concerns of contemporary policy makers. Historians, of course, should always have the freedom to pursue subjects that interest them, and academic conferences should reflect this freedom. But with declining public-sector subsidies, book publishers have to live by market-place concerns. And through the 1980's and early 1990's, educational policy makers dealt with such divergent and contentious issues as funding cutbacks, inclusion of special-needs children, North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), calls for back-to-basics, and challenges from private schools and charter schools.

Should we try to bridge the gap between the legitimate demands of historical scholarship and the political requirements of contemporary policy makers? Several articles in this collection do so, without sacrificing scholarly integrity. William B. Hamilton's account of Nova Scotia higher education in the 1830's is a fitting backdrop to that province's current struggle to "rationalize" its post-secondary institutions. Paul Axelrod's critique of *The Great Brain Robbery* should be required reading for all university administrators who naïvely believe they have the final answer to the on-going battle between tradition and innovation.

But how many policy makers will read Hamilton or Axelrod, let alone an entire collection of historical essays? As an alternative, should we bring historians and policy makers together in conference or brain-storming settings? Alas, the expectations of the two groups are apt to be too divergent. (One such session held in Ontario some years ago threatened to collapse when policy makers attacked historians for not being able to solve contemporary problems and not willing to predict the future!)

Another possibility is offered by Ronald Manzer in *Public Schools and Political Ideas: Canadian Educational Policy in Historical Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). Manzer, a political scientist, presents 150 years of educational policy-making in a tightly-organized, well-written and easily digestible manner. Manzer's approach, however, is all policy and no action. He ignores crying children, bored teenagers, angry parents, stressed-out teachers – all the over-wrought participants in the school dramas of the past 200 years.

So we continue searching for ways to unite the concerns of educational history and contemporary policy-making. Unfortunately, despite some fine individual articles, Ricker and Wood's *Historical Perspectives on Educational Policy in Canada* fails to bridge the chasm. Meanwhile, Dalhousie University's department of education has been abolished, a victim of policy makers!

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Crawley, M. (1995). *Schoolyard Bullies: Messing with British Columbia's Education System.* Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers, 186 pp. (Softcover).

Year 2000 was a 1990 plan for sweeping progressive reform of elementary/secondary education issued by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. It was largely inspired by the recommendations of the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education which had reported in 1988. *Schoolyard Bullies* chronicles and critically reviews events and principal characters in the British Columbia *Year 2000* drama. Crawley has manifestly done his homework as an investigative reporter/researcher. One of the real strengths of this book is the breadth and scope of perspective it offers from key players in the *Year 2000* scenario. *Schoolyard Bullies* packs an impressively rich, thick, and multi-perspective description of what happened to elementary and secondary education in British Columbia in the wake of the Sullivan report (1988) into its slim 180 pages.

Bullies is eminently readable. Cast in journalistic rather than academic style and format, the book is much more accessible to noneducationist audiences than are most books focused on particular