Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire de l'éducation
BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

Christopher Dummitt and Michael Dawson (Eds.) *Contesting Clio's Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History*

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In 2007 nine historians gathered at the Institute for the Study of the Americas at the University of London to present papers on the current and future state of scholarship in Canadian history. Out of the discussion came this volume, *Contesting Clio's Craft*, consisting of eight chapters that challenge many of the historiographical trends of the last forty years, and pose questions to encourage new lines of inquiry in Canadian historical research. The authors raise a variety of issues, but the editors provide an introduction that explicitly identifies key themes that emerge from the chapters and this enhances the coherence of the volume. The book is thought-provoking for anyone researching and teaching Canadian history, including Canadian educational history.

In the first chapter, Magda Fahrni addresses the reasons for, and unfortunate consequences of, English Canadian historians' neglect of Quebec. Arguing that the endurance of the two solitudes in Canadian historical writing is as much a result of historians' preferences for local studies and the methodologies of social history as the linguistic divide, she makes a convincing case for "some degree of (implicit or explicit) comparative history within a Canadian setting, along with an understanding of the fundamentally 'entangled' nature of the histories of Quebec and Canada" (20).

Building on this theme of comparative history, other authors in the collection call for Canadian historians to consider transnational and cross-cultural approaches, rather than assuming that the nation-state really matters. Adele Perry ably summarizes twentieth century approaches to Canadian historiography, tracing the shift from early historians' emphasis on Canada's place in the British Empire, to mid-century historians who stressed the colony-to-nation narrative. She goes on to argue for the need for global and postcolonial perspectives in order to examine issues such

as gender and migration, but also "to question the meaning, impact, and limits of the nation as an experience and a tool of analysis" (140). Katie Pickles recounts her own development as a women's historian who has examined the imperial connections of Canada and New Zealand. In her chapter she identifies the central insights her comparative approach has provided, but is honest about the challenges historians face in undertaking transnational investigations, particularly those that examine the potentially controversial legacy of our colonial past. Michel Ducharme's chapter demonstrates the power of transnational and crosscultural perspectives when applied to Canadian intellectual history. He integrates Canada into the Atlantic framework with its emphasis on competing ideologies of republicanism and British constitutionalism, and thereby reinterprets the significance of the Constitutional Act of 1791 and the Rebellions of 1837–38. These three chapters should convince historians of education of the promise of broader, crosscultural examinations of educational phenomena, such as the emergence of common schooling or the impact of ideas related to progressive education for example.

Though it appears in the middle of the volume, in many ways Christopher Dummitt's polemical chapter, "After Inclusiveness: The Future of Canadian History," focuses the book, since the issues he identifies are taken up by the other authors in the collection. Dummitt asserts that the History Wars of the 1990s are over, and the social historians won: "A bottom-up, inclusive 'People's' history of Canada is now the standard version of history in Canadian universities" (103). He makes a convincing case that, with the exception of aboriginal history, there is simply little intellectual debate among Canadian historians. He attributes this to the fact that the inclusive, social history was rooted in "the new left soil of the 1960s" (108), and while its academic practitioners were enthusiastic about identifying the prejudices of the past, they were less willing to examine their own. He argues that the time is now ripe for addressing the dilemmas this consensus created. It is time to address omissions like political history and the impact of religion on Canadian society, and to correct the distortions that examinations of categories like gender and race have encouraged. He calls for works of synthesis that attempt to tell 'the big story' in entertaining and analytical ways. The other authors in the volume take up his arguments, sometimes contradicting them, and sometimes demonstrating their warrant.

Adele Perry fundamentally disagrees with Dummitt because in her view revisionist history was not simply about adding more voices to Canada's story, but transforming our understanding of the past and of the discipline. As she says, "We cannot be … beyond inclusion" (124). Steven High in his chapter argues that in the new social history of the 1970s, "the subject matter changed, but not the research process or our authorial voice" (22). He challenges historians to share authority and recognize the promise oral history can provide for authentic, inclusive history.

Other authors in the collection agree with Dummitt's assessment of the questions that have been marginalized in Canadian historiography. Andrew Smith sees a need to examine Canada's British connections after 1867, particularly drawing on socio-economic theory to acknowledge the nature and legacies of those connections. Michael Dawson and Catherine Gidney argue that the persistence of traditional periodisation

in Canadian history (the examination of "twentieth century" history for example, or even decadal divisions) has resulted in distortions in Canadian history. Continuities between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been ignored or downplayed, including the importance of English Canada's British connection, the influence of religion on social institutions, and the enduring nature of rural lifestyles.

In considering the essays in this volume, Canadian historians of education can certainly acknowledge the debt they have to the social historians and the methodologies of social history that are challenged by many of the authors. Like Canadian history generally, Canadian education history was transformed in the 1970s and 1980s as historians turned away from questions of educational politics and policy and towards examinations of the impact of race, gender and class on the schooling and other educational experiences of Canadian children. Many education historians, however, have continued to attend to some of the questions the authors assert have been marginalized: the impact of religion and the nature of schooling in rural communities come immediately to mind. Others have taken up some of the new approaches suggested by the authors. For example, the University of Ottawa has established an oral history research unit: Making History: Narratives and Collective Memory in Education which has the opportunity to take up High's challenge "to think deeply about narrative voice, memory, authority or the public's role in the historical process" (46). Larry Prochner's recent book, *A History of Early Childhood Education in Canada, Australia and New Zealand* (UBC Press, 2009) indicates the promise of transnational approaches to the historical examination of educational ideas and institutions.

But education historians could benefit from attending to Dummitt's challenge to attempt a synthesis of the rich but often regional studies of the last few decades in order to construct the "big story" of Canadian education (116), or at least begin to consider what the overarching questions might be in creating such a story. *Contesting Clio's Craft* is an excellent volume of essays that poses important questions and issues interesting challenges to this and the next generation of Canadian historians.