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

Heather E. McGregor
Inuit Education and Schools in the Eastern Arctic

Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press, 2010. ix, 220 pp.

M. Lynn Aylward
Acadia University

Heather McGregor stays true to the stated purpose that her book "is intended not as a definitive narrative but as an invitation to examine more closely the factors that have influenced the purpose and practice of education in the Eastern Arctic"(ix). McGregor's comprehensive and multifaceted examination of the complexity of factors, spanning fifty-five years, related to the purposes and practices of education in the Eastern Arctic contains an appropriate mix of certainty and inquiry. Referring at the very beginning of the book to Justice Thomas R. Berger's (*Conciliator's Final Report: The Nunavut Project*, 2006) characterization of Inuit education as a "crisis," McGregor asks us to consider one vital question: "What does history tell us about the foundations on which education in the Eastern arctic was built, the direction it has taken over time, and the meaning and importance of education to Inuit?"(1). The author's challenge and struggle, felt by the reader throughout the text, is related to the framing of "education" in ways that emphasize and give status to Inuit viewpoints.

As an educational researcher who has lived and worked in the Nunavut Territory, I appreciated the detailed methodological notes contained within the preface and introduction that help to position McGregor and her work in the field of history. McGregor honestly and accurately discusses her "liminality" in terms of the place she occupies as a northerner, non-aboriginal, historical researcher who is aiming to answer the global call by indigenous scholars for cross-cultural research that is respectful, reciprocal and responsive to Aboriginal peoples. It is an ambitious and ethically dangerous task to write up any aspect of Inuit history without substantively foregrounding Inuit voices and it is obvious that McGregor takes her ethical commitments seriously (having lived and attended schools in the Eastern Arctic as a child likely contributed to this character trait.) McGregor makes every effort to provide a diversity of Inuit perspectives on education at the local, territorial and national levels. This diversity of perspectives is more profoundly played out today in the Inuit

territory of Nunavut as it spans three regions (East-Qikiqtani, Central-Kivalliq, and West-Kitikmeot), running north from Quebec to Alberta.

Since McGregor did not want to "limit her survey approach," she chose not to generate new interview data but rather constructs her four part historical narrative through an exhaustive and rich documentary review of primary sources such as: verbatim transcripts of the Elders' Advisory Committee meetings (maintained by the Department of Education and for which she received individual permission from each elder to use in the publication of the book), monographs, media reports, creative works by Inuit, transcripts of Inuit oral history, excerpts from interviews or research projects with Inuit and speeches by Inuit leaders. McGregor's historical record of Inuit education and schools in the Eastern Arctic of Canada stands alone in terms of its depth and breadth of sources and its relevance to what is transpiring within the current legislative and policy circles of Nunavut education. The book's preface, introduction, afterword, appendices, endnotes and bibliography are of equal value to the four core chapters outlining the history of Inuit Education: the "Traditional Period," "Assimilation in the Colonial Period," the "Territorial Period," and finally, the "Local Period." Educators, researchers, and the residents of Nunavut in general, were in need of a reputable resource that could, at the very least, progressively complement the sometimes too often cited works of Hugh Brody, Quinn Duffy and Jean Briggs and for more obvious reasons move readers away from some of the essentialist stories of anthropologists such as Knud Rasmussen, Franz Boas and Diamond Jenness.

Heather McGregor explains how she chose to "look closely at the power relationships between Inuit and Qallunaat (non-Inuit) within the education system and, to a lesser extent, at how the education system may operate to affect power relationships in the Eastern Arctic more generally" (11). She chose not to theorize power in the book claiming that her sources "do not easily or specifically support a theoretical analysis of power in this context" (11). However, she does not shy away from citing key voices that clearly characterize the longstanding intercultural conflict between Inuit and Qallunaat worldviews with respect to education (Chapter 3). In McGregor's discussion of "Qallunaat Schooling: Assimilation in the Colonial Period," more input from the many strong Inuit women in leadership roles both past and present would have provided a more complete account of this period of time.

In her conclusions, McGregor returns to Justice Berger's report and covering letter to the federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and points out that the "crisis" earlier noted is contributed to by the lack of funding provided through the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement to fully realize the potential of full participation by Inuit in all levels of employment and education. Thankfully, McGregor tempers the Nunavut Land Claim financial dialogue with what I think is more important discussions of local community driven educational governance, curriculum and instruction. Overall, I would wholeheartedly agree with McGregor that future research in the area of educational theory in Aboriginal schooling contexts or on the topic of Inuit education in Nunavut will be greatly informed by this historical narrative.