

## *Recensions / Book Reviews*

Patrice de Broucker & Arthur Sweetman (Eds.). (2001). *Toward evidence-based policy for Canadian education/Vers des politiques canadiennes d'éducation fondées sur la recherche*. Kingston, ON: John Deutsch Institute for the Study of Economic Policy, Queen's University. 517 pages. ISBN 0-88911-944-9.

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De Broucker and Sweetman aim to contribute to the current debate on the development and use of empirical research in education in Canada, with a special emphasis on achievement indicators. The book is a series of papers, in French and English, presented at a November 2001 conference that brought together academics, policy-makers, and administrators in education, as well as economists.

First, we recognize the overall quality and coherence of this conference proceedings. In spite of its voluminous size, the book is reader-friendly and easily *apprivoisé* (tamed). Furthermore, many of the authors, both English- or French-speaking, are recognized experts in their fields; to find their work gathered together in one book spanning Canada, as well as Quebec, is by itself a noteworthy contribution to educational research and practice. It will therefore be of major interest to Canadian researchers, practitioners, and decision makers in the field of education.

Although the book focuses mainly on education in Canada, the authors also present an international perspective. Furthermore, while not exhaustive, the multidisciplinary approach adopted by the authors provides a rich and diverse analysis of evidence-based policy making in education. For instance, it is exceptional for researchers in educational evaluation and measurement to ponder the long-term economic significance of achievement indicators. In this respect, the papers by Lemieux, by Green and Riddell, by Ferrer and Riddell, and by Riddell are very informative. Also, many chapters are designed to demonstrate the systemic complexity of evidence-based policy making. The book covers many important issues in Canadian education, including: the relationship between policies in education, empirical data, and action; the challenges of decision making based on a profusion of data available on achievement indicators; the causal relationships that link achievement indicators, teaching practices, and students' mother tongues; and the current situation of gender-differentiated results in science and mathematics, or in increasing

improvements in academic performance.

The book might appear eclectic at first glance because a number of chapters address very specific subjects. However, in our view, these chapters demonstrate the range and variety of applications for empirical research in education. This is notably the case with Bernard's contribution on evaluation of teaching in universities — an ubiquitous subject at a time when post-secondary teaching competency is increasingly questioned. This is also the case with Warburton and Warburton's paper and with Wright's comment on the relevance of financing for disadvantaged students ("a social duty or a waste of public money?"), and with Zhang's paper and Bertrand's comment on an equitable access to educational resources. In Paquette's paper, we note a mistake that needs to be corrected: The concept of "cultural capital" (*capital culturel*) was created by Pierre Bourdieu in his early work. This term was then borrowed by Bernstein, who redefined it in order to emphasize the fundamental role of one's "linguistic capital."

Finally, in an era of public funding accountability, this book provides a wealth of vital information, reflections, and training on research-based analysis and decision making in education. Given the strength of the accountability movement in the United States and the similar trend in Canada, this book could prove to be very useful to graduate students in educational administration or evaluation programs. It could, in fact, become a major reference work, given the fact that such an academic undertaking might again be repeated in the near future.

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 Angela Nairne Grigor. *Arthur Lismer: Visionary Art Educator*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002. 447 pages. ISBN: 0-7735-2295-6

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We don't do heroes in Canada. Oh, Pierre Trudeau had his moment (except here in Alberta), and Margaret Atwood is a bit of an anti-hero, but really, except for the occasional sports figure and CBC radio's awkward attempts to get with the pop culture of the moment, this society generally avoids unruly emotions and infatuations. Then there is the Group of Seven, those graphic designer/landscapists who blended a little British Landscape tradition and some Scandinavian design with the beginnings of Ontarian cottage culture to produce the picture of Canadian identity. During the nearly 90 years since the Group's founding, Canada has grown up and grown older in the world. But for many, when we look in the mirror of national identity, we still see ourselves in the form of a Lawren Harris

mountain or an Arthur Lismer tree. Though many may not be aware, few Canadians will be surprised to learn that members of the Group of Seven played important roles in the growth of art colleges and museum education programs in this country. Arthur Lismer's life and influence are of particular interest to educators because, along with very early on striking a balance between his artwork and his work as an educator, the focus of his attention was progressively (yes there is a pun there) more on children.

*Arthur Lismer: Visionary Art Educator* is a heroic work, monumental in both its scope and its intent. Written with an eye for detail that speaks to the author's commitment and fascination with her subject, this 447-page text is really two distinct works. The first is a meticulous telling of Arthur Lismer's art life. The second is a more analytic exploration of the growth and development of Lismer's ideas about art education. The second part is far more successful than the first.

PART ONE: "A Life in Art" begins as a description of Lismer's development as an artist and chronologically traces the artist's many moves from one school or museum to the next. Lismer had his hand in the beginnings of virtually every significant art school or children's art programme east of Toronto. His commitment to art and to children, combined with his charisma and energy, resulted in many successful beginnings. His socialistic vision of the role of art and the centrality of education in the mandate of art museums meant that he rarely lasted in any one institution for very long. Time and time again, his demand that museums support extensive children's programming, and his capacity to attract and train enthusiastic staff and masses of children, created conflicts within institutions that had more elitist intentions. This is good stuff, a story that has the potential to link contemporary readers, interested in the politics of both art and education, with their past. Focussing on Lismer's goals and ambitions as an artist-educator might be a way to finally bring that rugged outdoorsy image of the Canadian landscape into the city.

Frustratingly, this portion of the book substitutes masses of information for ideas. As an example, the book is illustrated with a number of group photographs of a variety of Lismer's colleagues from his different jobs as well as dozens of incidental sketches from the sketchbooks he worked in throughout his life. These images are "merely" illustrations, the visual equivalent to lists of facts. Even though the first 75 pages of the book make much of the transformation of Lismer's art as he grapples with his working class origins, engagement with theosophical philosophy, and his experience of the Canadian landscape, we are not given reproductions of the works to consider. We are told that Lismer was passionately committed to the clarification of Canadian identity and yet the clearest early evidence

of this commitment is missing in its visual form from this text. In the early years it was Lismer's art and his ideas about Canada that gave him the opportunity to begin his important journey as an educator. These things are named but not analyzed. Instead we get class and staff photos taking their place with endless lists of names of administrators who either supported Lismer, or didn't. The many sketchbook reproductions used to open and close each chapter appear to serve a merely decorative function. Grigor missed an important opportunity to go beyond telling to showing in this portion of the text.

PART TWO: This section is far more readable because it is far less dependent on visual information. Arguing in her conclusion that Lismer was "the foremost art teacher in Canada" (p. 349), Grigor closely traces the development of Lismer's ideas about art curriculum, pedagogical practice, and children's visuality. Supported with evidence from curriculum documents, statements by Lismer, and comments from students, Grigor is able to link Lismer with the most up-to-date thinking about child art and education from the 1920s to the 1940s. Grigor convincingly argues that Lismer's concerns with social justice, his commitment to the intelligence of children's art, and his belief in the need for art to be outside of the institutional restrictions of the regular classroom, all played a part in his often frustrated efforts to develop art programs in museum contexts.

There is a fundamental irony at the heart of *Arthur Lismer: Visionary Art Educator*. This book is not about art. It is about one man's lifelong battle with artworld institutions. Arthur Lismer's important and influential career was a seemingly endless series of hopeful beginnings followed by abrupt endings because he felt, passionately, that what he was doing was about art and children, not about institutions. Grigor's concluding comment, that Lismer's "approach [to art education] emphasizes values that, with the growth of dehumanizing technology, will be sorely needed in the future" (p.349), highlights a nostalgia that colours the entire text.

Grigor portrays Arthur Lismer as a charismatic and influential modernist. He is her great man. Her approach as a historian has been to write a meticulous and respectful modernist biography. The first portion of the book, functioning as it does as a portable archive, has a degree of detail that will be useful to future researchers, who may take up the task of building a critical discourse around the relationship between Lismer's art and his pedagogy. The second portion of the book which rightfully argues the centrality of Lismer's contribution is a usefully analytic tour of the development of art educational ideas in the first half of the 20th century in Canada.

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At this early moment in the 21st century, with the complex balance between the visual and the lexical, the nonlinear and the linear, the spatial and the chronological, the field of art education is redefining itself in ways that may matter across curricula and disciplines. The institutional borders and barriers that have defined academic thought for the last several hundred years are, for now, open to question. With innovations in educational research such as image-based and arts-based methods and a growing discussion about the role Visual Cultural studies might play in educating for the future, there is much that Arthur Lismer might have found intriguing about contemporary trends in education. Certainly, the kind of nonlinear discourse represented by these methods would resonate with Lismer's commitment to the visual. In *Arthur Lismer: Visionary Art Educator* Grigor brings Lismer to the end of the modern era and leaves him there. A history written with a little less awe and a little more connection with current critical questions may have found ways to bring some of Lismer's vision into the 21st century.