

Book Reviews/Recensions

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Alan Thomas and Edward W. Plowman (eds.)

Toronto: OISE Press, 1985.

This book contains 14 papers presented at the Global Learning Symposium held at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, in April-May, 1985, with an introductory chapter by each of the two editors. It is a good thing they have been published because only 42 people were there to hear them, by design.

This prompts consideration of the ways that the kinds of ideas that were exposed at the Symposium come into the awareness of--and are therefore able to be learned by--the far-flung-peopled world. In his introduction, Thomas refers to the famous 1913 Armouries Exhibition of impressionist painting in New York, which permanently transformed the world-vision of those who attended it. In those days you had to be *there*, in person; so the impact--and the learning--were limited to that elite and lucky group. Thomas concludes that for the learning process that took place at the Symposium to be kept alive and extended globally, there needs to be an increase in the range and background of the participants. And the last contributor to the book, Montagnon, an English film and T.V. producer who was in at the beginning of the Open University, brings us round to the point again. He questions the very nature of the communication that goes on in such a symposium, through the "safe . . . academic paper", and asks what the media--T.V., radio, audio-visual and video technologies, etc.--have to offer to complement the "two ancient stand-bys: the written word, or pictogram, and face-to-face dialogue".

Between these two contributions this book contains a galaxy of good stuff, from a pretty stellar cast. In fact, a great virtue of the book is that it introduces us to thinkers and doers from many cultures: North American, African, Sri Lankan, Latin American, West Indian, Chinese, English. Because of this, it would be impossible to do justice to any one of them in devoting a few lines to each.

What I have found challenging in the book is what the papers, taken together, state or imply about the relationship between education and learning. While insisting, as many of us do, on a distinction between the two, in his introduction Thomas refers to the practical subtleties of making such a distinction. And what I end up with is a question as to whether the subtleties may not, in fact, be such as to obliterate the distinction itself. The question is generated by the range of meanings of both learning and education as they are treated in the book, and the way

that the two concepts merge into each other when you look at them in different cultural contexts.

Hewage and Ariyaratne, from a Buddhist perspective, show that learning consists of processes embedded in the culture--meditation, reflection, the "psychosphere" as distinct from the Western-perspective "siosphere". And these processes constitute a learning system, i.e., "education", itself. Writing of the Sudanese Dinka people, Deng suggests that learning and education are one, a process of informing ("in-forming") by which skills and language are passed down. "In pre-literate societies knowledge and learning are embodied in the human being, his experiences, his recollections, and the collective memory of his community. In literate societies, knowledge is found in the libraries, archives, and various forms of cultural expression"--and, we might add, schooling of various kinds. So, is the distinction between learning and education a Western/literate function, coming out of what Schön calls the positivist epistemology?

Not if we heed the contributions in this book from such others as Boulding, Schön himself, and Holland. No-ogenetics, Boulding reminds us, is the transmission of learned structures from one generation to the other. Schön sketches out his idea of reflection-in-action (which he has elaborated elsewhere), which brings together learning and the structures we develop to encourage learning. Holland reminds us that conditioning learning theory, on which much of our educational structure is premised, is only a part of the story; the ethological theories of learning are about the natural behaviours of organisms in their process of adaptation. Hall draws our attention to cultures characterized by what he calls "high-content communication", where much of the meaning in communication is already stored, i.e., has, so to speak, already been learned from the culture, as if by osmosis. And Hall so identifies not only Hopi, Pueblo, some African, and Japanese cultures, but also the French "in their daily life" (but not in their intellectual life). Glusberg suggests that the very structures and signs of the city are themselves the context and stuff of learning. Plomer, co-editor of the book, suggests that we are changing simultaneously our knowledge of the world and our ways of knowing and learning (i.e., our concept of education?) through the new information and communications technologies. These are voices of the west, not well enough listened to.

We distinguish between learning and education by saying that learning is a (still mysterious) process that takes place within the *individual*, and our point of reference is the individual, while education is the way society structures that process in terms of time, place, and methods. One important reason for making the distinction, particularly insofar as adult education is concerned, is to keep us alert to the limitations,

indeed the inadequacies, of education as it is conceived and structured in our society, and to break out of that structure. In the Buddhist and other non-European cultures, learning is seen as a *communal*, collective phenomenon; in those cultures (and in our own, if we follow some of the writers I have mentioned), education is a pervasive and embracing process that should be seen as enmeshed in learning. So in clinging to the distinction, are we failing to explore the practical implications of seeing learning and education as one, in the Dinka way? Are we failing to see Glusberg's signs of the city? Are we in effect reinforcing what we say we are against?

These are some of the questions the book leaves me with. It is a good book for stirring up the mind.

Hayden Roberts
University of Alberta