

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Beynon, J. (2008). *First Nations teachers: Identity and community, struggle and change*. Alberta: Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication.

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As society changes through time, so does the way in which we pass on knowledge to younger generations. Because of this, Canada's educational curriculum is constantly changing to meet the demands of a population that is more culturally diverse than ever before. As these changes in curriculum occur, teachers face many challenges adapting to their students' unique needs and abilities, particularly in First Nations communities. June Beynon's timely book, *First Nations Teachers: Identity and Community, Struggle and Change*, discusses the struggle First Nations teachers have in keeping up with a quickly changing educational society, while continuing to instil cultural tradition and pride in their students.

First Nations Teachers focuses on difficulties experienced by teachers in both on- and off-reserve schools; however, Beynon focuses on First Nations examples of these problems. To present her position, Beynon includes many vignettes representing First Nations teachers, which speak to such struggles as instilling cultural values while still meeting the curriculum outcomes, the importance of integrating First Nations language, problems recovering the educational system from the restrictions of the residential schools, and how to incorporate First Nations parents into their child's education. As an example, there was an in-depth discussion about the difficulties First Nations parents would have following and agreeing to set curriculum guidelines after many of them faced the harsh realities of residential schooling. Beynon provides strong examples, through her own and other teacher's vignettes, of how First Nations teachers may successfully deal with problems such as this.

The book also describes the struggle of finding a job as a First Nations teacher and how difficult it can be for teachers and curriculum designers to bridge the gap between existing village schools and more recent city schooling. For example, one vignette discusses how First Nations students in a city school get an allowance to be there, while mainstream children at the same school do not.

First Nations Teachers is a book that is both easy to read and informative to any teacher considering a career in an aboriginal community. The book is very well laid out and it is easy for a teacher to pick up the book and find information on many struggles faced in a First Nations educational setting. There is consistent advice offered throughout the book about how the text should be interpreted. Beynon creatively includes questions at the end of every chapter so the reader can be sure they understood the information presented, she uses great writing strategies, and she includes metaphors in her work to explain difficult concepts to her audience. She goes beyond the obvious to make sure the reader gets the full message of her work. For instance, each chapter is introduced with an inspirational quote for teachers, which sets the tone of the discussion to come. The only

slight disadvantage to the format of the book is the feeling that the author is trying to sway the reader to take her perspective. When Beynon is passionate about a certain area of the text, the reader's attention starts to slip as detailed tangents emerge.

The book accurately describes various cultural issues suggesting ways to deal with the different situations a teacher may face; however, this book would be helpful to more than just First Nations teachers—many of the struggles are the same in a mainstream school. For example, integrating parents, community, and curriculum is a problem faced by teachers across the country. Beynon's book focuses primarily on British Columbia schools and thus may contain examples that are not directly relevant to other settings. The vignettes were developed from teachers working in a Ts'msyen culture who were struggling to integrate the Sm'algyax language. Also, many of the vignettes are from the early 1990s, and so there may be some more current issues that are unaddressed. It would be more beneficial if Beynon had included modern vignettes so new teachers could see the First Nations school experience as it exists today.

Canada is made up of so many diverse cultural groups that it was difficult for me to accept the argument that First Nations teachers struggle more to instil tradition and culture in their students than do other Canadian educators. Beynon describes the importance of teachers being able to relate to their students' cultural struggles and learning about the history of their education; however, this is not true to only First Nations teachers.

The book gives excellent descriptions of situations in which First Nations teachers struggle with the ever-changing student population, and the footnotes allow the reader to understand the vignettes that are presented. Although the author seems to speculate that only teachers in a First Nations setting experience these problems, I felt there were very few struggles that were mentioned in the book that are unique to that setting. Saying this, however, the book is an excellent resource for any teacher wishing to learn about aboriginal culture and history in order to become more connected with their First Nations students. The book even includes training aids for teaching the Sm'algyax language. Beynon's text provides a historical approach, as well as a sociological and economic look at modern day First Nations students in Canada. With an increase in aboriginal school enrolment, this book is an excellent guide for new and experienced teachers.

Beynon's text is a great resource for all teachers. It explains the most common struggles such as getting a job, following the code of ethics and integrating community and school. The book also gives advice in dealing with behavioural problems and issues that students may be having at home, regardless of their racial background. Most importantly, the author exemplifies the importance of caring for students and building rapport first and foremost through understanding the child's past. Though Beynon gears the tone of her book toward First Nations teachers, it is filled with great advice for all educators.