

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

HELEN JEFFERSON LENSKEYJ, *A Lot to Learn: Girls, Women, and Education in the 20th Century*. Toronto: Women's Press, 2005, xii + 181 p., + index.

*A Lot to Learn* is a feminist autobiography and social history focusing on the experiences of girls and women as students, parents, and teachers in the educational systems in Australia and Canada. Lenskyj discusses her personal and professional evolution from working-class origins, heterosexual marriage and motherhood to being an independent, feminist, lesbian, tenured education professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE).

The book is organized into two parts. The first is a discussion of historical events and reflections on the author's personal experiences and those of three generations of her family as recorded in oral histories, personal papers, and news stories. Lenskyj intertwines references to feminist theory and sexual orientation in the history chapters. The family history in the first part of the book spans 173 years and is not organized chronologically. Readers may need a bit of time to adjust to the way she sometimes makes only implicit linkages between different types of texts.

Lenskyj quotes from autobiographies by Australian women, some of whom attended the same private school she did, comparing and contrasting their experiences and interpretations with her own. These passages are more successful than the more theoretical interjections. Chapter three is an historical and sociological analysis of the author's private school in Australia. Lenskyj includes comments by other women who attended the same school or other private schools for girls in Australia. These interjections are well integrated into the text, adding rather than detracting from the author's narrative.

The themes in the last chapter in part one are more tightly constructed, making it very readable. Lenskyj explores the school structure; administration; curriculum; teaching methods; composition of the student body; inter-school competitions and relationships; associations between the school, parents and community; and student outcomes.

In the process of tracing the historical development of the school, Lenskyj comments on the differences between her own education and education today and points to the implications these differences have for women's

status and opportunities. This is very useful for helping high school and university students better understand the changes which have occurred in society as well as the challenges women still face.

Part two of the book addresses Lenskyj's development of a feminist consciousness while living in Toronto, her later involvement in feminist activism, and ends with her experiences as an education professor at OISE. Lenskyj's account of her participation in the community development activism by parents concerned about education is written from her point of view as a mother. Yet, it is informed by her professional status and involvement in the development of feminist pedagogy and advocacy for gay and lesbian rights at OISE. The eras of the 1960s to the 1990s are conflated to present readers with both a feeling for what it was like for Lenskyj to go through this evolution of consciousness and activism as well as provide an analysis of it.

It is evident from the level of detail in the book that Lenskyj is targeting readers who are professionally interested in education. Her affiliations with various activist organizations provide a good example of how community development and social change are created and experienced by committed citizens and useful for undergraduate students and others attracted to such activities.

Lenskyj emphasizes the point that it is one thing to change the curriculum in schools and universities, but having teachers understand, accept, and implement it as intended is another thing entirely. Even gay and lesbian teachers can be reluctant to "come out" in favour of the new curriculum for fear of retribution by other teachers, administrators, and parents. Thus, working for social change is a continuing process as evidenced by the fact that homophobia is still a major social problem today.

Lenskyj also relates her involvement in the development of women's studies at OISE and the struggles she waged with feminists and non-feminists alike. This is a fascinating history and one which is still evolving. Issues of class, gender, ethnicity, and religion are addressed in relation to the development of women's studies, gay and lesbian studies, as well as the community development movement for changes to the curriculum in Toronto schools. Her discussions are set in the context of the social and economic environment of the times. Thus, the book is both history and sociology.

*A Lot to Learn* will be of interest to undergraduate students in the social sciences and education. It is particularly useful as a textbook for courses focusing on curriculum and pedagogy in schools and universities including comparative education courses. People involved in and/or interested in advocacy of gay and lesbian rights, women's studies, education in general, and community development will find the book interesting and useful.

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