

Learning to Leave: The Irony of Schooling in a Coastal Community

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

Learning to Leave: The Irony of Schooling in a Coastal Community

by Michael John Corbett

West Virginia University Press (2020), 297 pages

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Michael Corbett's recent book *Learning to Leave: The Irony of Schooling in a Coastal Community* explores the role of education and its impact on the migratory patterns of youths in the rural coastal community of Digby Neck, Nova Scotia. The book documents a research project conducted from 1997 to 2001. The author conducted two surveys with individuals who attended the local elementary school from its consolidation in 1957 until 1992 to examine and answer a general research question "In this coastal community who stays, who goes and why?" (Corbett, 2020, p.4). The overall aim of the book was to explore how rural youths learn to leave while others learn to stay by addressing issues that influence the problem of learning and leaving in rural communities.

In *Learning to Leave*, 2020 the author provides a rich analysis for understanding the complex social, economic, and cultural forces and landscapes of reflexive educational decision-making in contemporary rural development. Additionally, the author problematizes educational issues not only as contributory to rural, cultural, and socioeconomic advancement in one's community but as one that facilitates the migration of people to urban spaces. The notion of '*Learning to Leave*' advanced in the book explores a deep, yet ambivalent skepticism about rurality and the power of education to foster mobility and transform lives positively in rural coastal communities. The book also conjures up

imagery of not only rural education but formal education serving not only the purpose of social and cultural evaluation but rather a “kind of conspiracy of urban liberal elites using money, institutional positions, bureaucratic influence and linguistic sophistication to control, undermine and cheat the hard-working producers who serve as the backbone of the economy” (Preface, para 3).

The book is divided into seven chapters, a preface, foreword, and acknowledgment. In the preface, the author articulates the book’s intent, proposes a précis of its contributions to education in contemporary rural communities, and analyzes schooling through sociological, anthropological, historical, and social change lenses. In the foreword, the author espouses the significance of place and the influence of formal education and its impact on the mobility trajectory. **Chapter one** introduces and examines formal education in an Atlantic coastal community and rural coastal community by examining how youths persist through reliance on a single resource industry in social and cultural space. The author engages with the theory of the sociology of education and how it reproduces class structure in education. Specifically, the author draws on Paul Willis’s (1977) classical study on *Learning to labor* which is central to understanding the relationship between schooling and class in urban communities. Corbett asserts that in rural communities’ schools play several roles, including the reproduction of labor in traditional local industries, and migration to urban centers. Chapter one further explores themes of *Learning to Leave* from various angles.

Chapter two expounds on the post-structural ideology of power situated within theorist as Bourdieu to inform the idea of habitus/place. Corbett examines *Learning to labor* within Bourdieu’s (1990) *logic of practice* which situates habitus by examining the decision-making behavior of individuals base on “practical assessment of life choices” (Chapter 2, para 5). Corbett also examines resistance and community by drawing on theorists such as bell hooks and Stuart Hall. Hooks (1994) examined resistance of leaving home as the ‘in between’ home place and the academy. Hall (1976) examined resistance in the context of schools as institutions that use ‘double binding’ both ‘horizontal binding and vertical binding. Corbett posits that the resistance to schooling can be perceived as resistance to mobility and the multiple problems mobility entails for working-class youths.

Chapter three examines education and migration from the stance of who stays, who goes, and where. Corbett explores the impact of the out-migration flow of youths from Digby Neck that has remained stable throughout the thirty-six years of the survey.

Chapter four discusses a parallel education system through the period 1963-1974, which was situated within family and work that determined what Corbett term 'education for staying'. This period presents a historical analysis of education and work in Digby Neck for men and women. In **Chapter five** Corbett examines the relationship between schooling and community and the impact on gender and social class, and education and choices. Corbett examines the role of family position concerning work in the community and its influence on social class and elitism because of cultural and economic capital.

Chapter six discusses how the cohort of students survived the crisis of the fishing industry in Digby Neck and its inability to provide reliable employment for the resident regardless of their family social class, and gender. In **Chapter seven** Corbett reiterates the research question of who stays, who goes, and why, taking into consideration the role of formal education in the decision individuals make between staying and leaving. Overall, *Learning to Leave* makes a worthy contribution by helping us understand education in rural coastal communities and how people choose to migrate out or stay and help build their communities by contributing to the economic drivers that influence mobility. As such, *Learning to Leave* attempts to renew and challenges taken-for-granted assumptions about living and working in rural communities. *Learning to Leave* presents an interesting, practical, and compelling argument of schooling in rural coastal communities.

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