

Book Review

LEARNING TO BE ROTUMAN by Alan Howard. 1970. Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 184 p. \$6.25.—Rotuma is an island situated at the intersection of Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. The physical characteristics, language, and culture of its inhabitants reflect the influences of all those regions. These islanders are Polynesian in physical characteristics; their language seems to be a fusion of several languages, but their culture is distinctively Rotuman.

A time honored tradition in anthropology has been to seek perspective on a process being studied in one culture by looking for the same process in another culture. Howard conducts his inquiry into the Rotuman educative process with this end in view. He is seeking perspective on the western educative process especially where the students come from different subcultural backgrounds. The final chapter of the book contains his reflections on this topic.

Two strategies are at work in Rotuma, according to the author. The traditional strategy places primary emphasis on the human person, focuses on harmony and cooperation among persons, looks carefully at what people are doing and how this effects personal relationships, stresses learning through imitation and offers the best approach to the individual for acceptance into the group. The formal strategy of the school places primary emphasis on commitment to principles and ideals, focuses on competition between individuals, looks carefully into what people are saying and their motivation for it, stresses impersonal learning, and finally offers recognition for and opportunity to the individual.

The Rotuman who emerges from this educative process is developing into a bicultural person. He is quite at home in the Polynesian culture of his ancestors and adjusts reasonably well in time to the urban milieu of Suva.

Howard gives an elaborate review of the traditional strategy. In learning to be Rotuman one grows up in an atmosphere of *hanisi*. This concept, roughly equivalent to love, implies a willingness to give tangibly rather than being in an emotional state. The impression in the

air over Rotuma is that if a parent is not giving, the parent is not loving. During childhood a Rotuman learns the appropriate terms for his kin, and the behavior patterns they expect. The child develops an attitude of restraint with strangers and one of freedom with his peers. At the same time he becomes extremely sensitive to the opinions and evaluations of those around him. One guiding principle of the life style he develops is a sense of reciprocity. He is careful to maintain a delicate balance in his relationships and not to pay anything off completely, else he would destroy the social fabric of present and future relationships. A Rotuman evolves a situational ethic as he progresses in his life as a member of a group and he sees that what may be suitable in one social circumstance may not be suitable in another. He soon learns everyone knows that a promise or commitment is always contingent upon subsequent events, and failure to comply can generally be attributed to external conditions. It makes no sense to him to deny a request for help because by doing so he would reject the validity of the request and the significance of a relationship. Time as he grows up in Rotuma becomes an interval between human events, so the future is quite flexible.

Parents dispense *hanisi* unconditionally and punish only for violations of well defined rules. They have a natural sense of the way a child learns, teaching him in the course of daily routine as his attention focuses on something. It is as if they didn't want to interfere with their children as they learn—they are confident learning is inevitable because the child wants to learn.

So the children enter school with a background of indulgence at home and are not prepared to compete for the approval of the teacher in the school situation. In this new situation a low tolerance for frustration develops and one observes a tendency to withdraw when confronted with difficulties. Further, the main thrust of the school is to pass on denotative information to pass examinations. The teachers have altered their teaching techniques to accommodate the expressive code and to

influence the strategy at work in Rotuman culture.

In the final chapter entitled "Culture and the Classroom," Howard leaves the door open for what could possibly become a follow-up study on the educative process in one of the different western sub-cultures. As a teacher for sometime in the Pacific region on both the secondary and tertiary levels, I highly recommend this

work for anyone interested in teaching students from different sub-cultural backgrounds. Reading this work is a deeply rewarding experience and can be beneficial to beginning students in anthropology.

FR. THOMAS B. MCGRATH, S. J., *Micronesian Area Research Center, University of Guam, Agana, Guam 96910.*

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