

Paul Anisef, Norman Okihiro and Carl James, *Losers and Winners: The Pursuit of Equality and Justice in Higher Education*. Toronto, Butterworths, 1982, pp. 225.

The Ontario Ministries of Education and of Colleges and Universities have shown considerable willingness to fund empirically-based evaluative studies of the practices and processes of educational and occupational choice. One of the authors of this book, Paul Anisef, has played a particularly important role in encouraging and directing these studies, the most notable of which is the longitudinal study of Ontario grade 12 students which was commenced in 1973 and culminated in the report *Is the Die Cast?* published by the two ministries in 1980. The experience gained during these studies, supplemented by a subsequent literature review, showed Anisef and colleagues that such key policy concepts as "equal educational opportunity" seem to change definition with the passing of time, and changes in intellectual and ideological fashions. Again, despite the substantial number of studies dealing with access to higher learning in Canada, they found that there was no reliable monitoring strategy for identifying accessibility trends over time. This book is an attempt to come to grip with these issues. True to form, it is a commercially published version of a research report which was submitted to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities in 1982.

The title, "Losers and Winners", reverses the common phrase "winners and losers" presumably because the authors wish to emphasize the importance of those students who lose out in the educational system. Their book, not unexpectedly, is much concerned with the fate of those young people who by dint of barriers linked to social class background, gender, ethnicity or region of living are substantially under-represented in the universities of Ontario and elsewhere. Thus, pursuing this general theme, the first couple of chapters are concerned with definitions of concepts such as equal educational opportunity and with the public debate on access to higher learning. After that, there is a brief description of the arguments and conclusions of six empirical Canadian accessibility studies commencing with John Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic* (1965) and ending with *Is the Die Cast?* (1980). This is followed, in turn, by a brief sociological account of the sources of structural inequality in Canadian society, and then by an exploration of trends in access to full-time and part-time learning in the Ontario universities and colleges between 1971 and 1976 using special computer runs from the censuses for the former and latter years. Finally, the authors offer a series of recommendations designed mainly to facilitate access to higher learning for disadvantaged students. The main body of the text is followed by three appendices, two of which cover certain theoretical and methodological issues and the other providing an annotated bibliography of Canadian accessibility studies.

All this in just over 200 pages means that much is touched upon, but not much can be the subject of detailed discussion. The authors' intention appears to be to offer a broad, and somewhat diverse, body of theoretical and empirical material in order to attract the interest of a wide academic audience. There is, however, some danger that their book will fail in this aim for two main reasons: first,

because parts of it make for intellectually frustrating reading (many avenues are opened for hypothesis and speculation, but too few are explored); secondly, because – with some notable exceptions – much of what it contains has already been covered in other publications. For example, the chapter on the sources of structural inequality might appeal to a first-year undergraduate student, but no more so than many introductory sociology texts which contain chapters on stratification and socialisation. Again, the review of Canadian accessibility studies is potentially of most interest to the serious scholar in the field – but s/he is also most likely to be aware of these studies already. Even the analysis of trends in accessibility to the Ontario universities and colleges between 1971 and 1976 largely confirms what sociologists of education would have assumed to be the case on the basis of other research findings: namely, that women made substantial gains in postsecondary participation relative to men, but that there was no reduction in the differentials in university participation between the socially advantaged and disadvantaged groups in the society. Thus, in 1976, a woman whose father had attended university was still five times as likely to attend university herself as a woman whose father had received no schooling. Similarly, whilst the authors consider it to be surprising that many Ontario minority mother-tongue groups were either catching up, or had caught up, with the English mother-tongue group in rates of university participation, these ethnic gains did not extend to the highly disadvantaged native Indian population. Finally, as other studies have shown, the CAAT's draw their students from a much more socially representative cross-section of the population than the universities. This may seem like a small triumph for democracy, but there are still those cynics who would argue that a CAAT education helps to 'cool out' through dampening of ambitions many of those bright lower class youth who would otherwise aspire to the universities.

In response to the above criticisms, a defence might be made that one of the main purposes of this book is to develop and test a methodology which will allow for the study of access trends. The fact that the actual application of the methodology does not reveal much that is dramatically new is not, therefore, an attack on its appropriateness (nor indeed on the need for continued monitoring of trends in postsecondary participation). The defence has some validity, especially since Anisef *et al*'s strategy would appear to be basically sound. Using the special census computer runs, their analysis of postsecondary participation trends was based upon the group of young Ontarians aged 18-21 who were living at home in each of the two census years. As indicated above, the participation of this group was correlated with gender, parental educational attainment and mother-tongue. This strategy does not provide much information on part-time postsecondary students, since they are mostly over 21, but applied over the long-term it will probably enable us to have a much clearer view of the effects of policy shifts and changing economic conditions upon opportunity structures for full-time higher learning. One should recognize also that a study of trends over a limited term (1971-76) may well be considered useful mainly as a test of the use of

census data, and that its probable application to the 1981 census returns will give a valuable picture of a decade of access trends in Ontario.

The methodology *is*, therefore, original. So also is the authors' analysis of the discussion of accessibility by various public bodies, with special attention being paid to the debates of the Ontario legislature between 1956 and 1980. These debates reveal quite clearly that politicians still think of barriers to higher learning as being mainly financial – and hence surmountable by student financial aid – despite the accumulated body of evidence which points to the primacy of early childhood experiences in moulding perceptions and realities of educational opportunity. (Incidentally, they also reveal the importance of a watchful parliamentary opposition to Ontario's Big Blue Machine; most of the searching questions in the legislature on issues of educational opportunity emanate from Liberal and NDP members). In the light of this official "financial bias", the authors' recommendations to the Ontario government lay stress on the importance of early educational intervention as a means of overcoming seemingly intractable educational inequalities between disadvantaged and advantaged youth. Thus, they suggest the implementation of compensatory education programmes for economically disadvantaged pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children extended to the elementary and secondary levels if necessary, and supplemented by compensatory summer camps. They recommend also *early* financial intervention in the form of a family allowance saving plan: recipients of family allowances would be encouraged to place them in an interest-earning government account which could be later utilized if a child attends a postsecondary institution. Meanwhile, as these equalization policies were underway, there would be a good deal of research into the effectiveness of the policies, into the characteristics of attenders and non-attenders in senior high school, and into the factors which might explain the sharp increases in postsecondary participation of some ethnic groups. Much of this research would presumably be carried out by government bodies, but (oh, noble sentiment of enlightened self-interest!) it is recommended that external consultants be periodically hired "to review the state of research with regard to early socialization effects on postsecondary enrolment attitudes".

Even when buried deep in the literature, sensible ideas have a way of re-emerging from time to time. The authors recognize that financial aid at the postsecondary level, whilst a valuable equalization mechanism, is not going to attack the grass roots of social inequality: hence the logic of many of their recommendations. Likewise, during the late 1960's, this reviewer wrote a book on accessibility which favoured early financial intervention, but otherwise noted the limitations of financial aid as a means of facilitating access to higher learning for disadvantaged youth. At that time, I found most apposite the observation of the then principal of Glendon College that "one million dollars spent on kindergartens for the four and five year old children of the poor will be more effective in moving towards our objective of equality of educational opportunity than \$10 million spent on bursaries for students at university, provided that the four and five year olds who are given a headstart by going to first rate kindergartens go on

to first rate primary schools": and, as Anisef *et al*'s main recommendations show, the rationale behind this observation is apposite still. Wise ideas for policy formulation have, of course, no proprietary ownership. Presumably, they re-emerge because, though ignored by politicians, they remain rational solutions to difficult problems. What worries me though, in the present instance, is that Anisef *et al* devote so little space to elaborating upon the specific policies which they recommend. For example, the proposed family allowance saving plan is brought forward, and some of its administrative complexities and potential social inequities are hinted at, but otherwise all is silence. Similarly, as the authors recognize, compensatory education programmes have been tried in the past and found wanting. However, their brief elaboration upon the evidence that recent compensatory programmes have a better track record in the long-term educational enrichment of disadvantaged youth is not likely to overcome the widespread official disillusionment which still surrounds this type of educational intervention.

If the government contract which funded the research for this book is typical of most, the deadlines for the completion of the research and presentation of the final report were probably very tight. This might explain, for example, why there is little elaboration upon the recommendations. It might also explain why the bibliography of empirical Canadian accessibility studies contained in one of the appendices is broad enough to cover over fifty books and articles in the English language literature, but ignores the relevant French-language literature emanating from Quebec! Attempts to breach the two solitudes are not encouraged by lack of reference to such empirical works as C. Escande's *Les Classes Sociales au CEGEP* or some of the volumes of "Les Cahiers d'A.S.O.P.E.". My general conclusion is, therefore, that the authors might have been advised to stay with the original contracted research report (which, after all, was quite accessible to scholars) or have recognized that preparation of such a report for commercial publication would require a lot of additional scholarly work.

Robert Pike
Queen's University