

Teichler, U., & Sadlak, J. (Eds.). (2000). *Higher Education Research: Its Relationship to Policy and Practice*. Oxford: Pergamon-IAU Press. Pages: xvi, 192.

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Governments in Canada continue to look critically, some of them distrustfully, at their universities. Firm in the belief that these historically sheltered institutions should be much more accountable to the public, governments seek to make them far more responsive to the market realities of an expanding and changing economy. To that end proponents of programs of study that do not impact the economy directly and positively are routinely challenged, even at times excoriated, while those programs that promote the development of the types of human capital deemed necessary for the continued expansion of the new economy are actively promoted. For their part, the universities find their public funding environments increasingly problematic as such official sentiments are expressed more concretely in intrusive fiscal policies. In response and somewhat self-defensively, university administrators look to management models and practices derived from the corporate sector — which many academics believe to be incompatible with the collegial culture of the universities — in their zeal to plan strategically, control costs, generate collateral resources, increase productivity, and manage change. Caught in the political turbulence the professoriate — the human infrastructure of scholarship and research—has come to feel vulnerable and exposed. Although encouraged by administrators to talk about these new academic realities in the positive language of “challenges and opportunities,” there is unfortunately no gainsaying that these developments are taking a substantial toll on the core commitments that have for many generations been at the centre of the academic professions. In such an environment, of course, the substance and methodologies of research in higher education are likewise challenged. Natural affinities between such university-based research programs and the process of policy formation in postsecondary education can unfortunately no longer be presumed. Here divergence and displacement are particularly unfortunate. It

could be quite plausibly argued that at no time since the beginnings of systematic research into higher education has the importance of bringing this expertise and the commitments and values embedded therein to bear on these critical issues of public policy been more urgent.

The publication of *Higher Education Research: Its Relationship to Policy and Practice*, a major consideration of the present state and future possibilities of higher education research, is therefore both welcome and timely. This volume, published under the auspices of the International Association of Universities, will be enormously useful to researchers and policy makers in the postsecondary sector as they reflect on their present professional practices and arrangements and rethink their own roles within the emerging policy environments of the future. Edited by Ulrich Teichler and Jan Sadlak, this volume presents a dozen essays that provide both comparative discussions of major issues in the research/policy relationship and in-depth treatments of the current state of play in Canada and other countries. Together the essays provide an invaluable international perspective on the research/policy interface that identifies areas of strength as well as difficulties to be overcome if research in higher education is genuinely to lead policy formulation rather than simply react to the relatively autonomous exigencies of state-sponsored analyses.

The Canadian experience is expertly analyzed by Glen A. Jones, whose lucid chapter, "Higher Education Research and Policy in Canada," will be of particular interest to readers of this journal. At the system level, Jones argues, there seems to be a significant imbalance that favours the policy side of the relationship, for although some aspects of higher educational policy in Canada may be traced to the specific informing influences of university-based research, it is far more often the case that the policy makers have led the research agenda. Jones rightly demonstrates that the chief problem here is the fragmentation of the present infrastructure for this kind of research. Part of this fragmentation may be attributed to the somewhat disjointed nature of the professional lives of many researchers. As members of the academic guild, university-based researchers are guided by expectations derived from peer-referenced and peer-evaluated professional norms. Within this community, the intrinsic value of the questions pursued and the rigour and

originality of the methodologies used are at least as important, if not sometimes more important, than the actual pay-off the research may have for specific policy initiatives. On the other hand there is a cluster of occupations including those of the institutional developer and government policy analyst that is influenced by a more task-oriented culture of research. Researchers of this kind may sometimes be impatient with work whose immediate relevance is difficult to discern or with extended preoccupations with methodology *as* methodology.

Jones correctly recognizes that although these two research networks have importantly distinctive sets of perceived occupational interests, they do not exist in isolation and there is communication between them and mutual benefit deriving from that communication. In urging higher education researchers to support new venues for publication and the dissemination of results and cooperation between the two networks in producing common reference materials, Jones would seem to be pointing the way toward the development of a new synthesis of professional interests for all higher education researchers regardless of their particular occupational network. Bringing both research networks closer to a common domain of higher education research in which all practitioners participate in a more comprehensively conceived field of activity would be an ambitious goal but one that might yield many worthwhile outcomes.

Were such a synthesis to be realized, for example, there would be obvious benefits to policy makers as well as supplemental or alternative sources of career rewards for the academic researchers. And it may also be suggested that in this synthesis there could well be a repositioning of core academic values in the policy-making process as more avenues of communication and dissemination eventually create better appreciation of the perspectives and commitments of all participants. That is one important and heartening possibility to be discerned in this fine collection of essays and one that might begin to address the stresses and concerns — those problems of perception and distrust—described at the outset of this review.

Other promising possibilities are to be found throughout the volume. The contrastive, comparative focus of the contributions encourages boldness in moving from the present state of the research/policy and practice

relationship toward newer, more proactive, arrangements. Independently developing a comparable theme to that of Jones, Peter Scott attempts to offer such a transforming synthesis in his contribution, "Higher Education Research in the Light of the Dialogue between Policy-Makers and Practitioners." Here the two dominant views of the field are set out. The European model, which fosters macro-level, national and system-wide studies, is contrasted with the North American model, in which meso-level and micro-level studies of specific institutional and practical problems prevail. While some countries like Australia have seemed to achieve a hybrid model, Scott's conclusion is that the real future for higher education research is to move to a larger frame of reference altogether. Researchers in higher education are urged to consider engaging the big intellectual questions that relate policy, practice, and research to the fundamental changes now occurring in science and society. If the future of the world's economies is increasingly grounded in learning and knowledge, research in higher education could well have a central role to play. As such, the study of higher education itself might well become the pivotal discipline in the contemporary university. As we move into the still new century, nothing could be more promising for researchers in higher education than that.

It is difficult to recommend this collection too highly. Only two of its excellent contributions have been highlighted here, but readers with a scholarly interest in higher education will also find a superb introductory chapter by editor Ulrich Teichler as well as three chapters dealing with major issues in comparative perspective. The discussion of the state of play in Canadian higher education research by Glen Jones is also augmented with chapters dealing with the Australian, Japanese, and Latin American experiences. The synthesis written by Peter Scott discussed above and three supplementary "annexes" conclude the volume.

