

the university offers hope that their example will lead more women into these positions. But Baudoux's analysis of the university as a socio-political system highlights the capacities for resistance to gender change and the evolution toward more managerial rather than collegial administrative practices does not augur well for the future. ♣

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Bryan, C. & Clegg, K. (2006). *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education*. Routledge: New York. Pages: 256. Price: 49.98 USD (paper).

Reviewed by Laura April McEwen, Queen's University.

As a mature female doctoral student in the area of assessment in higher education (HE), I have been engaged with this literature for almost ten years. It has been an exciting, sometimes confusing experience as our field struggles with the often thorny, always multifaceted issue of assessment. Over the course of my academic career at three major Canadian universities I have come to realize that although the assessment literature is a reflection of struggles experienced in practice, the leap from the literature to inform practice is a significant one. For where as assessment is a challenge common to students, faculty members, and administrator, few can allocate the time to attain sufficient expertise necessary to negotiate this burgeoning area of research. *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education* provides an accessible entry point for those eager to engage with new directions in this field. This work is an eclectic grouping of writings across a diverse range of disciplines, dealing with a broad scope of assessment issues, in various institutional settings. The predominance of contributors from the UK with several notable exceptions accurately reflects the active research agenda that has been underway in that area of the world for some time.

The volume is thoughtfully organized into four parts: Pedagogical context, Implementing feedback, Stimulating learning, and Encouraging professional development. The Pedagogical context section begins by providing a valuable introduction to the contextual factors driving current adjustments to assessment regimes in UK and beyond. The theoretical foundations of this movement are then presented, grounded in the extensive research literature. The relationship of assessment to student learning is highlighted and optimal conditions for learning are defined. Issues concerning the validity and reliability of assessment judgments are then considered within a discussion of faculty members' professional preparation for the task of assessment. Further, the movement towards providing formalized professional development in this area is advanced as a positive outcome of these new directions in assessment. Institutional characteristics that can promote a culture of learning are then explored through the lens of Alverno College. In closing, this section links assessment practice with the development of self-regulating skills, whereby learner responsibility and autonomy are emphasized and encouraged. The potential to lever technology in service of this goal is also discussed.

The balance of the book is a series of case studies grouped under three sections. The first of these deals with aspects of the design of feedback. A study of learners' response to feedback opens the section grounded in empirical evidence generated with the use of a survey instrument. A conceptual model for course design that integrates teaching, learning and assessment aspects is then presented. The third case in this section explores a social constructivist approach to assessment and the final case is centered around writing workshops and highlights the use of core assessment criteria as a mechanism that can be leveraged to support students in adopting deep approaches to learning.

Cases in the third part of *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education* speak to the matter of implementation of assessment in service of learning. The rapidity with which large cohorts, studying at a distance can be effectively supported though the learning process is the focus of the first study. Student experience of assessment is examined in the second case though the lens of "flow" theory. The authors discuss the impact of an integrated assessment system in terms of reducing anxiety and enhancing the learning experience. The third case in this section describes the use of confidence based marking as a mechanism to scaffold self-assessment and promote reflection as students complete objective tests. Process focused assessment within the context of collaborative group work is highlighted in the fourth case. Evidence of the potential of such strategies to positively impact overall performance is put forward. The final chapter in this section explores the relationship between assessment and learner autonomy. The authors underline the need to scaffold students' emergent autonomy through the strategic use of assessment.

The final section of *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education* addresses issues related to the preparation and support of faculty members. The first case emphasizes the importance of assessment of prior learning and experience of faculty in relation to institutional goals as a tool to shape professional development program in higher education contexts. The following three chapters examine assessment regimes in professional development in clinical psychology, medicine and interprofessional education (medical and nursing programmes). Where the salience of context is closely examined in the first, challenges associated with multiple assessors is the focus of the second and various assessment methods are explored in the third. The fourth section offers a discussion of the current limitations in assessing academic staff in terms of teaching competency and how those issues might be addressed.

In the final chapter of the book editors Bryan and Clegg draw the threads of action reflected in individual case studies together and relate them back to the theoretical foundations and practical realities that underpin emergent thinking in the area of assessment. A shift from solely product based assessment towards a more processes orientated model is highlighted as the authors describe the emergence of a new assessment paradigm.

The range of topics reflected in this collective work highlights the prominent role of assessment within the learning process. It is encouraging to see

such diversity of thought and action focused on the issue of assessment in higher education. The case study format recognizes the embeddedness of assessment within the learning environment and appropriately honors the powerful influence assessment practices play. Far from prescriptive, these windows into authors' experiences of innovative assessment can serve as models for readers' future action. At the very least, the volume stimulates thinking about alternative purposes, practices and potentials of assessment in higher education. ♦

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Donald Fisher, Kjell Rubenson, Jean Bernatchez, Robert Clift, Glen Jones, Jacy Lee, Madeleine MacIvor, John Meredith, Theresa Shanahan, Claude Trottier, *Canadian Federal Policy and Postsecondary Education* (Vancouver: The Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, and Alliance for International Higher Education Policy Studies, 2006), 191 pp. Price: 50.00 CAD (paper).

Reviewed by Paul Axelrod, York University

New scholarship on the development and dynamics of post-secondary education in Canada is to be welcomed, and this study, which traces federal policy initiatives primarily over the past three decades, makes a valuable contribution to the literature.

It arises from a collaborative project, funded by the Ford Foundation, through the Alliance for International Higher Education Policy Studies (AIHEPS), designed to explore the "performance" of higher education in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Led by University of British Columbia's, Donald Fisher, the book has an astonishing ten authors, making it, possibly, a miracle of consensus building. Because there is no foreword or acknowledgment page, the nature of each author's contribution is unknown, and perhaps unknowable.

What is known, according to the study, is that Canadian federalism has produced a "patchwork" of policies in post-secondary education, characterized by episodic bursts of activity, overlapping jurisdictional tensions between Ottawa and the provinces, and too little coherent national planning. Furthermore, the potent force of "neo-liberalism," which drives universities into the marketplace and increases their dependence on the private sector, now infuses government policy, particularly in the world of scientific research.

Evidence for these arguments emerges from a variety of policies: the withdrawal of the federal government from the direct subsidization of universities after 1967, the introduction of the Canada Health and Social Transfer in 1996 which dramatically reduced federal transfer payments to the provinces, the proportionate growth of tuition fees as a source of university revenue, the increasing reliance on "regressive" student assistance instruments such as the Canada Student Loans Program, the (soon to be dissolved) Millennium Scholarship Foundation, and the Registered Education Savings Plan, all of which, according to the authors, privilege the middle classes at the expense of the poor.

The book acknowledges, and the statistics bear out, the “phenomenal” infusion of federal research funding into universities after 1997 during the last half of the Chrétien era. The Canada Foundation for Innovation, the Atlantic Innovation Fund, the Canada Research Chairs Program, the establishment of the Canadian Institute for Health Research, the entrenchment of the Networks of Centres of Excellence Program, and the new Canada Graduate Scholarships all helped lift post-secondary education out of the doldrums at the turn of the millennium.

There was, however, a cloud in this silver lining. Even as funding increased – and how Canada fared comparatively on the international stage is not entirely clear in this book’s account (see p. 6) – these federal initiatives appeared to narrow, not broaden, the scope of post-secondary education. The Liberal government’s policies flowed, at least in part, from its Innovation Strategy, which sought explicitly to use universities as instruments of economic development. Like the Conservative governments before and since, it favoured science and technology over the humanities and social sciences, and undermined the autonomy of universities by requiring them, increasingly, to seek private and corporate funding before securing public support. Combined with the growing tendency of provincial governments to target university funding and to subject the institutions to new performance indicator and accountability systems, public support for higher education now comes with short and tight strings.

The overall narrative of the book rings true, and the statistical summaries it provides are especially useful, but I do have some questions about aspects of its argument and methodology.

The second chapter on the historical development of federal post-secondary educational policy, covers a vast period of time, is drawn entirely from secondary sources, and has been oft told previously (by David Cameron, Glen Jones, Robin Harris and Edward Sheffield, the latter two up to 1960, among others). By now, those who explore the history of post-secondary education in Canada should aim higher and dig deeper. Their accounts should do more than merely summarize previous summaries of important policy moments; they should probe the reasons for and the processes through which policy choices were made, and they should be sure to consult the existing work of historians who have contributed to the literature. For example, the best book on the background to and the events flowing from the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts Letters and Sciences (1951) is Paul Litt’s, *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission* (1992), but it is never cited in surveys such as this one.

Nor, as historians, are Fisher et al. always convincing about cause and effect. They attribute the creation of the Canada Student Loan Plan in 1964 to the political pressure exerted by the National Federation of Canadian University Students (29), and later credit the Canadian Federation of Students with the defeat of the proposed Income Contingent Loan Repayment Plan in 1995 (63). In both cases, these explanations are, at best, partial and reflect an overly ro-

matic view of the impact of student activism on social policy. The full stories behind these and other post-secondary developments, past and present, remain to be told.

More importantly, I believe the book's main arguments – that neo liberalism is pervasive in policy making and Canada lacks a national post-secondary educational plan – trap the authors in an unresolved contradiction. If the federal government has proven to be a prime agent of “marketization,” and shows no signs, in Canada or elsewhere, of abandoning this agenda, then why wouldn't more federal intrusion merely extend the influence of neo-liberalism on higher education? Arguably, from a policy perspective, the universities' best protection against this trend is a vigorous defence of their autonomy, or what's left of it. The authors are surely aware of the ways in which highly centralized states (Australia, New Zealand, England, among many others) have eroded institutional and academic self-governance in the name of planning and accountability.

Indeed, escaping the conceptual contradiction above probably requires scholars in the field to now move beyond the “neo-liberalism” paradigm. As this book illustrates, it explains a good deal, but not nearly enough, about the history and prospects of post-secondary education. ♣