

International education as public policy in Canada

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

International education as public policy in Canada

Merli Tamtik, Roopa Desai Trilokekar, Glen A. Jones (Eds.)

McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020, 425 pages

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Two distinct and important concepts, international education and public policy are new-found constructs in Canadian research literature. As the book's title also claims, the focus of this book is not international education and public policy, but more specifically, international education as [emphasis added] public policy in Canada. This title clearly admonishes the intent of this book which is to situate international education (IE) as a distinct and evolving public policy field within the Canadian public policy context and literature. Although one might consider these concepts as paradoxical opposites on an ideological spectrum, as the book title suggests, international education [exists] as public policy in Canada, with the chapter's authors noting the varied constraints, challenges, and opportunities for this new policy concentration.

This book purports that "...this current volume makes an important contribution to the study of IE by presenting a collection of chapters that tell the Canadian story of when, how, and who of IE in Canada" (p. 3). Tamtik, Trilokekar and Jones, the book's editors, through these chapter's authors introduce readers to the field of internationalization, both within the provincial and territorial political context of Canada. They also discuss the various actors, networks, and discourses within the burgeoning field of internationalization policy, including a chapter on decolonization, indigenization, and internationalization. In the introduction to their book, they present their perspective on IE policy within Canada's federal, provincial, and territorial governments, but also with insights from kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12), and post-secondary, including both universities and colleges. The editors further argued that this book is especially important for K-12 schools, given "... the increasing im-

portance of international rankings as signifiers of global prestige and as such, attractors of international students, rankings ... [which] could have negative implications for individual institutions and for Canada's international reputation in higher education" (p. 5).

The editors establish three objectives: the first relates to the why and how of IE, specifically the historical process that precipitated the development of IE policies since 1970 and up to the federal government's updated policy in 2014. Secondly, the editors analyze the divisions between federal jurisdictional powers and provincial and territorial responsibilities. The third objective builds upon the second, attempting to decipher how "...IE policies have impacted Canadian federal-provincial relations" (p. 8). As part of this objective, the editors pose the question: "Are governmental IE strategies converging or diverging in terms of policy coherence?" (p. 8). As the editors propagate, this book applies a multi-level governance (MLG) framework, offering a "comprehensive yet complex and critical perspective on Canada's broader policy contexts" while further discussing "... a wide range of policy theories and taking historical, federal, regional/provincial, inter-sectoral, and multi-actor perspectives..." (p. 4).

With this rationale and the book's extensive research the editors and the authors, in part, answer their question: "does this book meet these objectives?" However, as further noted in this book, they acclaimed that: "We choose to speak of IE as "policy," and claimed that "the internationalization of higher education is commonly understood as a "process" (p. 7). Their argument is "that IE is increasingly becoming a core area in Canadian public policy that engages and impacts all levels of government, involves a wider pool of stakeholders, and cuts across a diverse range of policy actors" (p. 9). As this acknowledgement and premise is true, an explanation and exploration of the public policy process in Canada and the real-world practical implications would further support their evidence and their perspectives on this new Canadian paradigm. Perhaps, the question to ask is: "What is the public policy process in Canada and in what way does this process influence IE?"

In the final chapter, the editors recount that there are two factors that have contributed to IE as an important public policy: "Most Canadian provinces view the need to attract skilled, highly education workers as vital in the context of an aging and, in some cases, declining population" (p. 412) Second, "IE is now widely acknowledged as a key Canadian industry with important economic and international trade implications" (p. 412). For example, IE has become Canada's sixth largest export industry, and even the government now views IE as an "industry" which can return economic benefits to the provinces. To further add to the editor's proposition, I believe it is also important to note that this "industry" poses significant public policy implications, including economic and financial challenges in other government portfolios, including foreign affairs, citizenship, and immigration.

Finally, the editors ask the question: "Where is the Canadian story of IE headed?" (p. 424). Their response to this question was: "In our view, the current narrative positions IE as essentially an international student policy designed to address domestic human resource needs" (p. 424). This response deviates from their earlier claims regarding the

complexity posed by cross-sectoral policy fields, the challenges of policy decision-making processes and the call for a broader debate and future research direction.

In public policy literature, Kingdon (2011) posed the important question: “But what makes an idea’s time come?” (p. 1). The consideration of IE *as* [emphasis added] Canadian public policy is long overdue, and as noted throughout this book by the editors and authors, Canada needs to “catch up” with other countries in the global education marketplace. But more importantly, I believe there needs to be further deliberation and consideration about IE as public policy and what that means for Canada. Referring to the public policy literature, Anderson’s (1984) definition of public policy “... a purposive course of action followed by an actor or a set of actors in dealing with a problem or a matter of concern” (p. 4), can offer further reflection and direction on this important and timely new public policy initiative. This adopted proposition would support what the book’s editors are suggesting *is* [emphasis added] the new policy doctrine for IE in Canada.

References

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- Kingdon, J. W. (2011). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies* (2nd ed.). Longman.