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### **Book Reviews / Revue de Livres**

Dr. Terry Anderson is Professor and Canada Research Chair in Distance Education at Athabasca University. He can be reached at [terrya@athabascau.ca](mailto:terrya@athabascau.ca) via email.

Katherine McManus, PhD. is a Program Director, with the Centre for Distance Education, at Simon Fraser University. She can be reached at [kmcmamus@sfu.ca](mailto:kmcmamus@sfu.ca).

### **No Place to Learn: Why Universities Aren't Working, 2002. Tom Pocklington and Allan Tupper. Vancouver: UBC Press. 220 pages. ISBN: 0774808780**

Review by Terry Anderson

It is always a joy to read a book that confirms with data, the lurking truths that one has had niggling away in the back of one's mind for years. Pocklington and Tupper's new expose of university education does for higher education, what Michael Moore's *Stupid White Men* does for political truth. The premise of the book is that Universities have abandoned their primary responsibility of undergraduate education and instead, focused on a research agenda that is heavily influenced by commercial forces.

The book provides an insider's view, from a Canadian perspective. Both authors are (or were in Pocklington's case) full professors at the University of Alberta and Tupper has had a stint as a senior administrator at Acadia University. Thus, they write from their own personal experience as lifetime academics as well as the considerable number of interviews and documents reviewed as they undertook research for the book. This familiarity with how it really is, is exemplified in their fascinating chapter detailing the career path of a typical professor in a research university.

Not surprisingly, the book does not underestimate the value of universities, it just very clearly points out the truth of the old adage that people do what they are rewarded to do. Publication and award of grants is the currency upon which critical tenure, promotion and remuneration decisions are valued. They take square aim at the dominant myth of university thinking that equates excellence in research with excellence in teaching - a myth that endures despite considerable evidence from a variety of studies showing that there is no correlation between teaching excellence as measured by a variety of factors (including student and peer evaluations of teaching) and research productivity. The authors even provide a number of theories as to why university students put up with the current state of affairs.

Despite all of value in this slim text, it has two major shortcomings. The first is a typical lack of understanding of the values or the effect of the implementation of learning technologies in university education. Like too many professors, Pocklington and Tupper see educational technology as merely one of many ways to deliver a product. What is worse is that they say this notion in their own heads, represents inherent conservatism in the minds and activity of education technology reformers. They seem to have little awareness of the thinking of

education technology theorists who go much beyond current understanding of teaching as impassioned speech delivered to a passive audience.

Educational technology advocates such as Laurillard, Koper, Johannasen, Shank and others are building learning environments that are not confined to courses, much less classrooms. To criticize these theorists and builders as conservative transmission advocates completely misses their valuable arguments. The argument that educational technology advocates are all technological determinists also needs some empirical verification.

Where they are correct, is noting that advocates of technology use in higher education are passionately consumed by an interest in ensuring that universities make a successful transition from their current stagnation in pre-industrial concepts of teaching. They struggle to insure that universities transform into to a valuable and valued social institution that helps learners find both value and meaning in knowledge based economy - and most are proud to be a part of this revolutionary transition and are very unfairly criticized as being conservatives.

The second deficiency of the book is a far too great an emphasis on an attitude of "reflective inquiry" as a solution to the problem of Universities. To be fair, the authors list five characteristics of good teaching (being there; knowing their subject; teaching ideas, not facts; enthusiasm and treating students with respect) and detail the converse characteristics of bad teaching. However, they haven't begun to address the fundamental problem. This being that an effective "place to learn" needs to focus far more on learning than on teaching. Teaching with "reflective inquiry" is fine, but it doesn't guarantee that the teacher is setting an effective learning climate, creating a set of engaging activities, building a community or developing authentic assessments that are characteristics of highly effective learning environments. A place to learn does require reflective teachers, but they must be equipped with tools and skills to meet modern learners' needs that go beyond high energy and reflective deliberation.

Notwithstanding these two criticisms, this book is a must read for anyone with a child (or grandchild) about to enter a research university, for anyone working within Canadian Universities and for the tax payer who is so heavily subsidizing these invaluable, but struggling Canadian institutions.

**Fundamentals of Adult Education: Issues and Practices for Lifelong Learning, 2001. Deo H. Poonwassie and Anne Poonwassie. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing. 312 pages. ISBN: 1550771256.**

Review by Katherine McManus

The clear statement of purpose by Poonwassie and Poonwassie in their preface indicates a sense of mission to their compilation. They "intended to contribute to the study and practice" of adult education by assembling those Canadian academic voices who have, to a great extent, shaped and guided the field. They intended their text for an audience of beginning students at colleges and universities, in order to give those students some guidance to the basic issues and practices as well as the more elusive discussions of philosophy and theory. Fundamentals of Adult Education achieves its purpose and goes well beyond it.

Poowassie and Poonwassie created three sections and each section includes several chapters by well-known Canadian adult educators. The first section, "The Foundations of Adult Education," includes a chapter by James Draper, Gordon Selman, Mark Selman, Donovan Plumb and Michael Welton, and Karen Magro. This section alone provides the reader with an overview of past, present, and future considerations revolving around philosophical, developmental, and theoretical issues that have been the focus of debate in the field for decades.

The second section, "The Practice of Adult Education," while providing a rather broad stroke approach nevertheless captures the essence of practice in a field that seems destined to always defy description. The text includes the salient topics related to practice, such as: "Needs" and "Prior Learning" assessment as well as "Facilitating" and "Planning" programs. It also includes chapters that provide a more general discussion of the field of practice.

Finally, in the third section, readers are treated to several chapters on the "Issues in Adult Education." There are more chapters on issues, perhaps as a reflection of the field itself. Adult education as a field of study can be characterized by its own self-reflection and that is in evidence in this text. Within the section on issues, the reader will find issues of access, professionalism, the role of women, and the debates regarding training vs. education.

In general, Fundamentals of Adult Education provides a tremendous overview of the field of adult education today. While it would be an invaluable text for beginning students, it also offers the adult educator who has worked in the field for many years a useful and thought-provoking re-introduction to the field of study.

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