

Higher Education, Globalization and the Re-structuring of the State: A Comparison between British Columbia, Ontario and Québec  
Fisher Donald, *University of British Columbia, Canada*

This book focusses on the relation between PSE policy and its implementation across three case study provinces from the early 1980s through to 2010. By documenting this relation in the PSE systems of British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, we lay the basis for a comparative analysis that in turn, allows us to clearly connect policy environments to outcomes. Our policy sociology orientation inevitably directed our gaze to the structural context and the play of social forces in both the creation of the policy environment and the restructuring of the state formation. We used an analysis of state PSE policy as a point of entry in order to locate these policies within what emerged as the key structural trends -- namely, globalization, marketization, and academic capitalism.

Our thesis regarding the broad political economy of PSE is that, over the last two decades, the adoption of neoliberal ideology has been a major cause of some dramatic changes in PSE policies. Five policy themes dominated our comparative analysis: (1) accessibility, (2) accountability, (3) marketization, (4) labour force development, and (5) research and development. Following Bourdieu (1988), we have been able to document a number of “key moments” in PSE policy-making when governments changed direction. Four of these moments stand out and each is housed in the larger structural force of globalization and the force of political ideology. The first two occur in Ontario in 1995 and in British Columbia in 2001 with the election of governments with clear commitments to neoliberal ideology. The third moment occurred in the mid-1990s and had an impact on all three provincial governments as the federal government dramatically reduced its indirect, unconditional general funding of PSE and simultaneously began to dramatically increase its direct, conditional funding of R&D. Finally, the fourth moment occurred in the mid-2000s and had an impact on all three provincial governments as healthy economies and the global importance attached to PSE translated into rapid increases in provincial funding for PSE for the rest of the decade. This trend was encouraged in 2008, with increased federal allocations for PSE.

In general we find that PSE policy at the federal and provincial levels has been driven by a changing political-economic imperative. Political ideology is at times a critical factor and at other times is overwhelmed by larger structural forces such as globalization and marketization. We argue that, as PSE has become more central to the legitimation and accumulation functions served by the state, so PSE policy has become more closely tied to economic and social development. If R&D and labour force development primarily serve the accumulation function of the state, then accessibility and accountability serve its legitimation function both directly and indirectly by guaranteeing individual economic security (Spitzer 1987; Sears 2003).

Simultaneously, we have documented how all three provincial governments have consistently been concerned with accessibility. Provincial governments recognize their responsibility for the provision of access so that individuals can obtain postsecondary credentials and thereby attain some degree of economic security. Yet here, too, the force of globalization is clear as these governments utilize the general faith in markets to justify the increase in tuition fees. The anomaly here is Québec, where successive administrations have either chosen or been pressed to maintain low tuition fees. In these ways, provincial administrations use PSE policies on

accessibility to legitimate their governments while at the same time appearing to be accountable for individual economic security.

As we attempt to explicate the role of PSE policy in the restructuring of the State we use a model with three axes, each containing two cells. These axes are (1) provincial/federal, (2) legitimation/accumulation, and (3) accessibility/accountability. Our primary interest is in the series of relations that start at the provincial level, but we include the federal level because of the inter-relationships described above. Where variation between provinces exists we argue that, in the main, this is due to political ideology, in particular the force of globalization and neoliberal ideology. The four sets of provincial relations in our model are as follows: (1) accessibility/legitimation, (2) accessibility/accumulation, (3) accountability/legitimation, and (4) accountability/accumulation. In the first relational set, administrations across the political spectrum in all three provinces have consistently used PSE policies on accessibility to legitimate their governments. This has occurred in a number of ways, such as the increases in funding to move the participation rates into the “universal” category; the extension of degree-granting status to more institutions, thereby changing the structure of the PSE systems in both Ontario and British Columbia; and changes in tuition fee regulation associated with the election of neoliberal regimes. In the second relational set, again accessibility fulfills an accumulation function at the individual level as the opportunity to obtain credentials both academic and vocational is extended to a larger share of the population. We argue that PSE state policy on accessibility at the provincial level has primarily been aimed at achieving greater economic security for individuals. The connection between educational opportunity, the accumulation of what Bourdieu would call “cultural capital” and getting a job has become part of our taken-for-granted assumptions about modern society. It is in this way, we argue, that all three provincial governments have made PSE more central to the way they fulfill the legitimation and accumulation functions at the state level.

In the third relational set, we have documented the different ways that administrations have used PSE policy to make the systems more accountable to the state and, in turn, accountable to the population at large. Quebec, more than the other provinces, has practiced a strict internal accountability regime, followed by Ontario. British Columbia has been the least inclined to adopt measures that apply to all institutions in the system. We argue that all three provinces have used PSE policy as a means towards attaining general accountability to the electorate and, thereby, have contributed to its legitimation function. The final relational set is most prominent in Ontario and Quebec, which have adopted clear science and technology policies that align with the federal initiatives around “innovation” and that have led to significant investments in R&D at the provincial level. Successive governments in both provinces have thereby made themselves accountable in a collective sense for linking the production of new knowledge to economic development. In so doing, these PSE policies have contributed to the accumulation function at the collective level both provincially and (by extension) nationally.

## References

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