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One interpretation of utopia is of an imagined state of perfection – in Jacoby's (2005) terms, a 'blueprint utopia' as opposed to an 'iconoclastic utopia'. An earlier writer on the university, John Henry Newman, wrote in another context that to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often. These words capture for me Barnett's elucidation in this book of the ideal of the university which he values, together with his realistic recognition of the difficult and continuous processes of change in thought which must be engaged in if that imagined ideal is to be realised. I think this is the essence of the *head in the clouds, and feet on the ground* stance which the author champions.

## References

- Jacoby, R. 2005. *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age*. New York: Columbia University.
- Riquelme, J. P. 1991. *Harmony of Dissonances: T. S. Eliot, Romanticism, and Imagination*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14748460.2013.802890>

**The right to higher education: beyond widening participation**, by Penny Jane Burke, Abingdon, Routledge, 2012, 226 pp., £25.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-56824-1, £90.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-56824-4

The Right to Higher Education sets out to 'move from deconstructing policy discourses to a concern with re/conceptualizing higher education access and participation' (34). This is an approach that is sorely needed if we are to address the entrenched inequalities in higher education. While it can be tempting to think that the problem can be solved by relatively simple measures such as fair admissions policies, attempts to tackle other areas of educational inequality indicate otherwise. The reasons for differential participation in higher education are multi-faceted and are rooted in the wider social and economic context. Finding a solution to the problem is even more complex requiring a new approach to policy, practice and theory.

Penny Jane Burke recognises this, not only in the content of the book but also in its structure. The four sections can be read in a sequence or independently allowing the author to illustrate and theorise the interplay between policy, practice and the wider socio-economic context. The first section begins with a chapter providing a useful analysis of key government policy initiatives which will be of value to practitioners, policy makers and academics, alike. It is here that we begin to see the real complexities that underlie differential participation in higher education. Burke illustrates how policies are informed not only by competing agendas around social justice and economic competitiveness, but also hegemonic

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discourses around class, 'race' and gender. She also explores the often overlooked impact of broader social movements, including feminism, in the struggle for access to education. Brief analyses of the situation in India and the USA are given along with numerous examples of policy initiatives from the UK which are used to illustrate continuities and discontinuities in the debate. The context for the radical changes to higher education funding introduced by the coalition government is usefully explored.

The next chapter considers theoretical approaches that can help us to understand, analyse and challenge some of the assumptions around widening participation. While she accepts the value of large scale statistical studies in providing a descriptive overview she draws on the work of Bourdieu, Freire, Foucault and feminist theory to explore the underlying issues arguing that '... such tools provide us with analytical frameworks to uncover the hidden forms of exclusion, discrimination and misrecognition at play that go beyond collecting information about inequality and diversity' (52). In the final chapter of this section, she does precisely that applying critical theory to the 'subjects of widening participation' to explore identity and subjectivity which she regards as central to understanding exclusion and inequality in education.

In Part 2, she considers research methodologies arguing strongly for a reflexive and inclusive approach that can support change and not merely describe the problem. 'Praxis emphasizes the crucial relationship between theory and practice, and argues for research that is collaborative and designed to create critical spaces of dialogue.' (83). Drawing on four of her own research projects she provides examples of this reflexive approach illustrating the strengths of the methodology in providing new theoretical insights as well as informing practice.

In Part 3 we see the real strength of the book's structure. Organised around four separate themes based on key policy discourses each chapter encompasses the wider social and economic context as well as theoretical understandings and explores how these interact with both practice and learners experiences. The first chapter in this section deals with 'Raising Aspirations' a common term in widening participation policy and practice which, she maintains, is based on a 'deficit' model that problematises non-participants. She re-frames this discourse by focusing on accounts of the various and often competing, aspirations of a group of young men already taking courses which could lead to a degree. She demonstrates the complexity of factors involved in their decision-making and aspiration-forming and argues for 'a theorized and nuanced approach to understanding formations of aspiration that accounts for identity, context and social relations' (119). The next topic for scrutiny is 'Fair Access' which has been a major theme of widening participation policy. While few would support *unfair* admissions' procedures Burke demonstrates that, like many other policies based on 'meritocratic' principles, rules, regulations and procedures cannot address the subjectivities of those setting criteria and interpreting the procedures. The next chapter explores the concept of 'Lifting Barriers' which she agrees has been helpful in highlighting some key problem areas but does not lead us to reflect on existing practices within higher education. Focussing on pedagogy and academic writing she calls for a participatory approach to enable students to engage with theoretical issues and develop their own meanings. She concludes this section by considering 'WP Professional Subjectivities'. Using interview extracts with WP professionals in universities she considers the constraints and possibilities of 'working at the edges' of the current system (173).

In the final section entitled 'Imagining the Future' Burke urges universities to develop practices and cultures focused on inclusion rather than exclusion. However, she makes it very clear that inclusivity does not equate to 'dumbing down' but can be a strategy for strengthening standards. She calls for the higher education sector to 'nurture, enrich and

fully recognize the importance of diverse forms of knowledge' and refers to Freire's concept of the 'circle of knowledge' where moments of understanding meet the production of new knowledge. On the final page of the volume (196) she quotes Freire as follows: 'The role of the university ... is to immerse itself, utterly seriously in the moment of this circle.'

'The Right to Higher Education' not only provides critiques of currently policy and practice but goes further to consider how widening participation could provide a focus for positive renewal and transformation of universities. As such, this volume is not only of value to those involved in widening participation but also for those interested in the development of the sector as a whole.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14748460.2013.802891>

**Higher education and the state: changing relationships in Europe and East Asia**, edited by Roger Goodman, Takehiko Kariya and John Taylor, Oxford, Symposium Books, 2013, 269 pp., US\$56 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-873927-76-2

Every higher education system in the world is in some kind of dynamic relationship with its own state: there is no truly global higher education, in the way that some companies operate around the world, with relatively scant regard (far too scant, in the view of some people) for individual jurisdictions. This applies to private as well as to public institutions, to research intensive and to mainly teaching institutions, to high status and low status ones. This is perhaps surprising: isn't it more likely that an organisation in the knowledge business, typically with customers and staff recruited from around the world, embedded in international networks, would be more global in its organisation and methods than, say, a chain of coffee shops?

This book, the result of a workshop held in Oxford in 2011, is a help answering this question. As the event was funded largely from Japanese sources, the 'East Asia' of the title comes down to Japan, with some coverage of Korea. A reader might, from the title, expect some coverage of China as well, where more analysis of the university/state nexus would be welcome. It is also disappointing that a scholarly book, offering different perspectives on similar problems, comes without an index: this is just the situation when an index is most useful, allowing the reader to track how different authors have dealt with the same themes.

These criticisms aside, there is much in this book of value both to those with country-specific interests (in Europe and East Asia) and those interested in the university/state relationship as a theoretical topic. John Taylor's introductory *tour d'horizon* identifies many of the problems to which other authors in the book return, and which help to address my own initial question. These include the tension between the university as a provider of both public and private goods; the extent to which the markets in which universities operate (and they all do operate in markets of one sort or another) should be managed by the state; the extent to which institutional autonomy underlies academic effectiveness, and how the state can deal with this; how university funding is reconciled (or not) with equity in terms of student access; and how university quality should be both conceptualised and managed in practice. This is a large tapestry, and Taylor weaves its various threads together in an assured and convincing fashion.