

Book Review

Douglas E. Mitchell, Robert L. Crowson, and Dorothy Shipps, eds. *Shaping Education Policy: Power and Process*. New York: Routledge, 2011. 312 pp. Cloth \$155.00, Paper \$47.95.

William Lowe Boyd, holder of the Harry L. Batschelet Chair at Penn State and a faculty member there for 28 years, was a prominent researcher in the field of educational leadership as well as a former president of the Politics of Education Association (PEA). When Boyd died in late 2008, PEA members honored his memory by commissioning thirteen essays assessing the changes in education policies and politics from 1950 to the present (focused almost entirely on the United States). The PEA organizers drew upon Boyd's unfinished outline of a book on American elementary and secondary education and solicited 20 authors and co-authors, mainly education policy analysts, to produce a thoughtful and useful volume.

The book particularly focuses on changes in the governance of K-12 education and its impact on school operations as well as their effectiveness. The collection is subdivided into six parts: historical and theoretical contexts (two essays); fundamental issues on structure, governance, and market forces (three essays); foundations of educational equity (two essays); powers and limitations of globalization (two essays); efforts to improve school performance (two essays); and the future of public schooling (two essays). While this review cannot examine each chapter individually, a few of the essays will be briefly noted to illustrate the diverse contributions in this book.

In the opening chapter, Douglas E. Mitchell writes of "The Surprising History of Education Policy 1950 to 2010" (pp. 1–22). After describing the state of K-12 education in the 1950s, he traces the growing centralization of schooling at both the federal and state levels. Mitchell identifies five major surprising changes from the 1950s to the present: (1) the increasing willingness and ability of the federal government to provide aid and direction at the state and local levels; (2) the shift from the civil rights concerns of the 1960s to the accountability of schools for student outcomes; (3) the growing support and use of public school choice; (4) the nationalization and even globalization of education policies; and (5) the changes in school teacher preparation and oversight. He then examines four contrasting, though sometimes overlapping, social paradigms often invoked by analysts to explain these education changes.

One of the strengths of these essays is that they provide an up-to-date synthesis and overview of the diverse literature on the governance of education since the 1950s. One of the best examples of this is

Betty Malen's chapter, "An Enduring Issue: The Relationship between Political Democracy and Educational Effectiveness" (pp. 23–60). She analyzes the recent expansion of the roles of the federal and state governments in education, usually at the expense of local decision makers. Malen emphasizes the diverse and complex ways that this has occurred, depending in part on the historical context as well as the specific configurations of power and leadership at the particular sites. She also notes the trend toward the increased involvement of policy elites and education experts rather than the influence of community activists and local parents. Historically, local school districts in practice usually managed to weaken or ignore federal and state policy directives, but now this is becoming more difficult with the growing emphasis on standardizing school practices and increasing accountability for improving student academic achievement.

Another noteworthy contribution is Kenneth K. Wong and Emily Farris's chapter, "Governance in Urban School Systems" (pp. 215–237). They argue that overall urban school governance has remained fairly stable for the past century in terms of a top-down organizational hierarchy. Most large city school boards continue to be popularly elected, though there are several major exceptions where the boards are appointed either by the mayor or jointly with the state governor. Wong and Farris utilize both regime theory and integrated governance under mayoral accountability to examine these issues. In cities with popularly elected school boards, efforts to reform schools necessitate assembling broad governing coalitions, including nongovernmental institutions. In practice this is difficult to achieve and maintain over the time needed for long-term school improvements. On the other hand, integrated governance under mayoral leadership and control of urban schools can help to mobilize political support for school reforms. The authors point to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's recent call for more mayoral involvement and control of urban education as reflective of the new accountability-based education politics.

The book concludes with a useful overview of the volume by the three co-editors: Douglas E. Mitchell, Dorothy Shipps, and Robert L. Crowson. The authors see federalization of educational governance as the major common theme of the essays. They also note that federal centralization is not a zero-sum game as states, and even local schools, have also increased their control over education. Partly this is due to the growing availability of detailed education information at all levels as well as the global pressure on the United States to improve its educational systems. The authors welcome the scholarly attention paid to new policy initiatives, but question the lack of studies of unsuccessful policies that have been abandoned.

Since the essays focus heavily on the relationship between school governance and education, they sometimes are unable to explore other important issues. This is particularly true of several broader educational changes that may affect schooling. The changing demographic composition of K-12 students, for example, might have been analyzed further. With the passage of the 1965 immigration bill, the proportion of the U.S. foreign-born population rose steadily. And the differential ethnic fertility rate also contributed to the increasing percentage of elementary and secondary students whose parents are immigrants or members of minority groups. As a result, policy makers and educators in the future will be faced with the challenges of educating a much more diverse student population.

Most of the essays appropriately focus on the growing educational role of the federal government since the 1950s. Perhaps the authors should have also considered further the growing public disillusionment with the repeatedly broken pledges by policy makers to reach the promised targets set forth in recent initiatives such as America 2000, Goals 2000, and No Child Left Behind. Will the public continue to support new comprehensive federal education programs, or will they become skeptical of exaggerated promises and the continued inability of many American schools to compete with their global competitors? And will the rapid increase of the federal debt as well as the rising costs of health care and the Social Security program limit the ability of the federal government to provide additional public school funding?

Since the 1950s, states and local communities have provided at least 90 percent of the monies for the substantial increases in elementary and secondary school funding. The current recession, however, has forced many areas to curtail their educational support. With the severe financial challenges facing many states and cities, will public schools receive sufficient funding to continue expanding their operations? And with growing income and wealth inequality, will wealthy parents focus even more on providing a high-quality private education for their own children, but neglect to fund public schools adequately for other less fortunate children?

As policy makers and education analysts seek ways to improve K-12 schools, they will benefit by consulting this balanced collection of essays. The book not only provides useful information about the past, but also suggests alternative ways of framing and analyzing these important issues in the future.