

**CHANGING PRINCIPLES AND GOALS OF UNIVERSITIES:
QUESTIONING TRAJECTORIES**

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ABSTRACT

The argument of the article is that in a period of about thirty years the social purpose, the epistemic and pedagogic practices, and the political position of the English university have all changed; but that the patterns of assumption and practices about societies and universities which have begun to stabilise in England are not extraordinary and extreme. The implicit theme ('implicit', because there is no space to pursue the full comparative argument) is that we are now at some time-distance from 1980 and, even if England was in that period interpreted as an 'extreme case' its patterns can be seen currently as an early case of several 'routine' social processes that were about to happen in a range of societies and university systems. The article sketches the patterns of the political pressures which have influenced why the English university system has changed in the ways it has. Some of these pressures are easily visible in changing discourses, notably the political proposition that 'there is no alternative' to seeing the global (and wealth) as defined by a shift from the dominance of industrial economies to the emerging dominance of knowledge economies. The effects on education were fairly obvious, not least in the external surveillance of the university by agencies which measure 'quality' of teaching and research. It is argued that the core of the change included a shift between two major ideologies: from notions of a large and welfare State to a small and evaluative State; and from an educational ideology which stressed equality for educational opportunity as a social good, to another ideology which stressed effective and efficient educational systems for economic purposes. The article concludes with some brief reflections on the seriousness, societal and pedagogic, of these changes which – if the gloomy thoughts are accurate – have implications for a range of societies and for the young of those societies.

KEY WORDS

Economic and social crisis; The English university; Thatcher; Ideologies of educational effectiveness and educational efficiency; Changing universities.



SISYPHUS

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2,

2013, 38-53

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INTRODUCTION

'Changing principles and goals of universities' is, of course, a pun in English. The title includes both description (they are changing, they have been changing) and the implicit intention to change – change as purpose, 'changing' as a participle which indicates deliberate action. Similarly 'questioning trajectories' means that the direction in which higher education systems or university systems are moving can be questioned from outside; but also that universities themselves might be asking questions about old ways of disciplinary thought, developing new ways of thinking about teaching and new styles of leadership; and thus new visions of what it is to 'educate' the young.

Both of these – the changes and the trajectories – can be good or bad. Currently there is a great deal of writing which indicates that things are bad – but that there are good solutions to put right what is wrong.

These 'solutions' – all offered with enthusiasm – include: a return to the liberal arts; a need for universities to ally tightly with governments and business in a triple helix aimed at creative innovation; a necessity to shift to 'robust and relevant' research which will assist policy decision-making; and a clear necessity to move up some international scale which measures 'the quality' of universities so that the university and by extension the nation

can survive in a world of knowledge economies. Some of these solutions need better management; others need high fees for students; or new private-sector universities; or 'more' (universities, that is). Or universities can help in (Third World) 'development'. There has been a recent emphasis on the need for 'world class' universities and 'international research cooperation' and 'internationally mobile academics' and 'internationalisation' or 'Europeanization'. All of these motifs are visible in the literature (Altbach & Balan, 2007; Epstein et al., 2008; Hoecht, 2006; Marginson, 2007a, 2007b; Naidoo, 2008; Peters & Besley, 2007; Rizvi, 2009; Salmi, 2009).

In other words, there is a scatter of solutions, all offered with some confidence. At the same time, ideologies exist or have been developed, which indicate why certain patterns of solution – strategic policies – are the only correct ones; whether these are a return to the old and true purposes of university education (the liberal arts) or the new and true purposes of the university which is – apparently – to function as a business within international economic relations. Increasingly in England for example, the message is clear: universities will be construed, and measured and rewarded as-if they were economic institutions (Besley, 2009; Besley & Peters, 2009).

Why is there such shrill confidence about particular solutions – and what is happening to young people while all this is going? Indeed, amid this confidence that there is a crisis and the solutions are known (of course there are several versions of 'the crisis' and a plethora of 'solutions') what is going on – sociologically and politically?

TRAJECTORIES OF APPROACH

There are several ways into the analysis. Let me mention three, initially. All, in different ways, catch the imagination and the theme of youth.

The first is a brief sketch of my own educational history. As a young person, I attended a 'grammar school', a state-funded academic school located at the secondary level of UK education. From such schools, I, and all my young family relatives and all of my classmates could sensibly aspire to go to university. The school that I attended took about 20% of the age cohort and the university sector at that time in the UK took about 5% of the age cohort. There was a generous system of university scholarships for young people who achieved the qualification (basically, 3 'Advanced Level' passes in academic

examinations taken at about the age of 17 or 18) necessary for university entry. After being accepted as a student in the London School of Economics and Political Science, I was taught intensively in personal tutorials and small seminars for undergraduates (this is, people studying for bachelor degrees); very intimate small undergraduate seminars – to the point where I received a stern written reproof from a senior academic for missing three of his seminars on Wednesday afternoons in my final year of undergraduate study! (I confessed, partially¹; and returned to my academic responsibilities.)

Now when I look at large classes in a range of English universities I realise that I am looking at something like 40% of the age cohort – and the students or their families are in large measure paying their own fees. I also recognise that in my own institution (the Institute of Education of the University of London) which is the largest specialist institution for the study of education in the UK, a doctoral candidate has a right – stated in internal documents and advised in national ones – to a tutorial for one hour every two weeks. Only that: one hour every two weeks. And there is no guarantee that a particular department will run a weekly doctoral seminar. Things changed. What changed, sociologically?

The second way into the theme is to recall a couple of good analyses around the time of the Robbins Report (1963) a report on higher education in the UK.

One analysis was by R. H. Turner (1961). He drew a distinction between ‘sponsored’ and ‘contest’ mobility. ‘Sponsored mobility’ has several sociological characteristics and details (which define the precise ways in which systems characterised by sponsored mobility controls ambition) but its core characteristic is its early selection of a potential elite and their careful socialisation and academic training. Turner illustrated this concept from the UK; with admission to university being one definition of success though not necessarily the point of ‘sponsored mobility’. (In principle, ‘sponsored mobility’ as a concept can be used retrospectively and analytically for comparisons; for example to assess styles of selection in schools and universities and cramming institutes that led towards the choice, and shaping, of future imperial administrators for India). In contrast – and Turner illus-

¹ I had been going to the ballet performances in the afternoons at Covent Garden. This I confessed in writing. I refrained from mentioning that watching Nureyev and Fonteyn dance was more inspiring for my own sense of how I should be trying to write than reading and discussing the ponderous academic writing which that particular ‘senior academic’ produced in what, in my view as I had to read the books, was excessive quantity.



trated this theme from the USA – ‘contest mobility’ keeps students in the ‘race’ for as long as possible, by deferring final points of selection; at least metaphorically giving all a chance, for longer, to succeed (with admission to university being one definition of success, though not necessarily the point of ‘contest mobility’). Again the theme is extendable to the selection of US political elites, a principle modified from time to time by the emergence of powerful political oligarchies (such as the Kennedy and Bush families). A second good paper of the epoch was by Martin Trow (1970) which defined (elite and) mass and universal higher education systems. Trow pointed out that ‘elite systems’ which took a small percentage of the age cohort were changing into ‘mass’ higher education systems and a few of those (USA, Japan) were becoming ‘universal systems’. This comparative line of analysis is well illustrated in *From Elite to Mass to Universal Higher Education* by McConnell, Berdahl and Fay (1973).

Thus, not least by using the perspectives of these analyses, it was looking as if by the mid-1970s the basic patterns of educational systems in the industrialised world were becoming clear. Elite systems changed into mass systems (at school and university levels) and were understandable in terms of their age-cohort percentages in educational institutions, their styles of controlling ambition, and their mode of relation to selection for work and political elite selection. Yes, of course there were differences for Sweden and Denmark, and Italy and Greece, and Argentina and Brazil, and the ‘communist’ systems had some interesting mixtures of contest and sponsored mobility – but clearly a great deal of progress had been made in analysis...

Retrospectively, that is clearly not the case, and there is a third *aperçu* available to help grasp what needs description. In the autumn of 2013, my own Institution will run a major set of lectures on ‘Celebrating Robbins’ which will be addressed by several professors, including two Knights of the Realm who are also Professors. The aspiration and acknowledgment is perfectly correct: the Robbins Report (1963) was a major national Report which stressed the necessity to expand the UK university system to meet “social demand”. This was defined as providing, within higher education, places for all qualified candidates (because they were qualified and they were candidates). The policy argument was about social opportunity in a democracy and not – although Lord Robbins himself was an economist working at LSE – a perspective drawn primarily from economics and economic growth. So a celebratory note is perfectly justified.

However, there is an alternative question which can be asked – how on earth did we (the UK) get ‘here’ from ‘there’? How, sociologically as well as politically, do you finish up with your university system in its contemporary configuration if ‘The Robbins Report’ (1963) is your starting point? Is that a definition – in the absurd English managerialist phrase – of what ‘going forward’ means?

Not in ways that might have been hoped for, perhaps. The basic answer to the question is that ‘The Rules’ changed – in other words, there was a seismic shift in political assumption and a basic shift in thinking about what education was for and how it should work. In a sonorous phrase – but one that is very difficult to operationalise – ‘the grammar of education’ changed.

The consequences for ‘education’ and the young were and are dramatic. So how did we ‘go forward’ and what did we find when we got there/here?

“GOING FORWARD”

In England between 1870 and 1944, more or less, there was created a mass educational system and between those dates, there was a shift in power from control by the church to control by the state.

- there was also in this period, a shift in emphasis from providing elementary education after 1870 to providing mass secondary education in and from 1944 onwards. Thus we can see a state project devoted to the creation of mass education, increasingly – as time goes – emphasising secondary education and the theme of equality.
- these broad tendencies also were quite widespread and affected, at different times and speeds, Prussia, France, the United States and, very dramatically, Japan.

We have grown accustomed, following the work of educational historians, to think of these movements as part of a *political* project of (nation) state formation. As a consequence we tend to overlook other ways to think about the topic – such as the fact the schools themselves were constructed in an industrial metaphor and for industrial societies. By stressing ‘state formation’ we overlook the actual style of the educational systems themselves, which were not ‘democratic’ in the sense that Dewey subsequently developed. These were educational systems were also part of an adaptation to the economic formation termed ‘industrialization’.



If we are to understand the trajectory of changes in English education we need first to note the nineteenth century model of the (state) school as locally controlled; routinely organized under a good teacher – a Head Teacher; with Her Majesty’s Inspectors checking quality; and after 1944 with examinations (for secondary school destination) at the age of 11, a school leaving age which gradually moved up to about 15 years of age, and some tough examinations for university entry. As indicated this model was shaped within a growing ideology of equality of educational opportunity (after 1870 onwards) that became sharply defined by 1944 and the embracement of mass secondary schooling.

Around the late 1970s, this model of an educational system moves into crisis (and ‘youth’ started to be redefined).

THE ‘ECONOMIC’ CRISIS

The political crisis of the late 1970s looked to be an economic crisis. By 1979, national politics were dominated by very visible themes of class war – notably disputes between the industrial trades unions and the government; and old models of an economic system with ‘the commanding heights of the economy’ organised as ‘nationalised’ industries: industries such coal, iron and steel, the railways, airlines, water boards, electrical generation, and so on. Strikes in major large-scale industries, several of them (such as the car industry) in severe decline and in need of State help, and the inability of the Labour Government in the late 1970s to resolve such conflicts and to re-start economic growth, led in 1979 to the election of the first of Mrs Thatcher’s Conservative administrations. Thus, it is quite sensible to suggest that the electorate brought Mrs Thatcher to power to solve a very severe economic crisis (and she did). However, with hindsight it is also possible to suggest, analytically, that what was being put into place was far more than some solutions to an economic crisis².

The struggle was to redefine the spectrum of politics; and the nature of

2 In Britain, after 1945 both main political parties embarked on a ‘modernity project’ which finally spilt around views of the State. From 1979 the intensity and scale of change in political philosophy, in the role of the State, in the central value system, in efforts to reshape the economy, and in the shift of the political spectrum to the Right reversed the earlier effort in 1945 to create a ‘Big State’ – a welfare state with nationalised industries and a great deal of economic planning.

the State; and a 'reading of the global'. There was a move, politically, to the Right. This included the rescue of nineteenth century themes of competition and reward and punishment. It was also a move to the Right in the sense that tradition of politics of Conservatism to build 'One Nation' which had run from Disraeli to Macmillan was broken by Mrs Thatcher, the radical. There was also a move away from a 'welfare state' model of how to govern towards (in the vocabulary of Phillip Bobbitt) a 'market state'.

The 'reading of the global' also changed. I use the expression 'reading of the global' normally to identify what different generations of comparative educationists 'see' when they look overseas: Nazi or Italian fascism; Soviet Revolution; 'colonies', or later the Cold War and 'development' or maybe post-coloniality.

Outside of comparative education, in this moment around 1980, English Conservative Party politicians were 'seeing' the problems of international economic competition in the European market, competition from the 'Asian Tigers', and the long and steady economic decline in Britain's economic position among nations (Sanderson, 1972, 1999). The solutions are now well-known: action needed to be taken because the State was too big and public spending too large. Oligarchies were to be broken up: the miners' union, the steel industry, the railways, the law, medicine and the National Health Service and the education service itself (because schools and universities were judged to be professionally dominated bureaucracies).

The State would establish the rules of competition (Neave, 1988, 2009), and it moved to a new discourse about choice, fairness, transparency, effective and efficient schools – a discourse which also framed the policies of New Labour under Mr Blair whose election slogan 'education, education, education' left obscure exactly that which needed to be made explicit: in what ways did Labour versions of 'education' vary from the Conservative versions of education at that time?

In fact what was happening in education was clear and was clear quite early. There was a shift in its 'grammar' – the discursive assumptions about of the purpose of education, the definition of what it was to be well educated, and the principles of practice (the ways in which educational institutions were to 'deliver the well-educated', and how they were to think about what counted as good teaching and learning...).



THE 'EDUCATIONAL CRISIS'

Within English³ education there was a shift from equality of educational opportunity, to effectiveness and efficiency as the new meta-principle of education. The practical operating core principle was the concept of 'the market'. Schools were graded and national 'league tables' of relative performance began to be published; like football teams – but of course useful if 'parents' become 'consumers' of schools. To make 'the (educational) market' work, there were huge structural shifts: a National Curriculum was created; there was to be National Testing of children at 7, 11 and 14 and 'Local Management of Schools' was invented, where finance and management were delegated to school level so that each school could compete and adjust to the market. The practical consequences were immediate. Head Teachers became managers. Local Authority power, especially over the finance of education, was limited and "opting out" became possible – 'opting out' of local control; that is, schools could choose to be directly financed and controlled from London. Her Majesty's Inspectors were largely replaced by a new quango, the Office for Standards in Education which carried out inspections and graded schools on detailed and explicit criteria, by visiting them with teams of assessors. Teacher training passed into the hands of what was (then) a new Teacher Training Agency, which was influenced by the Government rather than university traditions. Teacher training is now strongly linked to schools and the practice of teaching. There has been an expansion of private education and the growth of several new kinds of schools notably 'academies' and 'free schools' which appeal either to the possibility that children will be better trained for specific jobs or will be in schools much more dominated by parents than before.

Universities were also forced into the market place: formerly as much as 95% of university money came from the public purse. Now universities compete strongly for a range of funded research income and consultancies and for the fees of overseas students⁴. National measurement of the performance

3 The Scots have their own educational traditions and a different class base and a different sense of what it is to be 'a nation'. And they have their own poets who emphasise a very human form of democracy. At the level of policy as well, the Scots have been less enthusiastic than the English about rushing down the historic path loosely called neo-liberalism.

4 In principle, recruitment of overseas students can be unlimited and their fees can be retained by each university as 'profit'. The fees of home students – though fee levels can be set by individual universities – are not such a simple matter of cash accountancy and retention of 'profit'. Home student numbers are subject to complex controls. Currently English students have to pay tuition fees in Scotland; Scottish students do not.

of individual academics and departments was also introduced – and tenure was abolished. The reasons were clear.

There had been recognition by politicians, their advisers and by pressure groups, of the importance of analyses (not least by OECD and the World Bank) which were specifying a changed world economy (Cowen, 1996). Though not in that vocabulary, the crisis of late modernity had been recognised. The economic reading of the world emphasised the European market, as well as an international market which included Asia and the Pacific Rim.

The economic results in a twenty-year period included the destruction of the nineteenth century industries in the North, where towns became archaeological industrial museums, and there was a massive growth in service industries. There were new millionaires, a strong pound, and new records established in the value of shares on the Stock Exchange and greatly increased economic inequality. By the time of the new alliance between the Labour Party and business, in the late 1990s, there was both major outward investment (into the USA) as well as major inward investment by the European Union, Japan and South Korea into the regions of Britain. By the late 1990s it was northern Europe, rather than Britain, which was looking at labour discipline, which was having currency problems, and which was in a low economic growth period. The ‘crisis of late modernity’ had it seemed been negotiated. But what is the nature of that crisis and what challenge, including its educational challenge, does it pose to Britain and other countries?

SO WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The problem is that the world changed and universities – the proper role of universities – was, relatively rapidly, redefined in a mono-optical way, which stresses economic problems rather than the political and the social.

Late modernity is a moving target and it is clear that its sociology and economics is far from crisply understood either theoretically or at the level of policy. Few predicted the widespread collapse of ‘The Banks’ and the extraordinary form of economics called ‘quantitative easing’⁵.

⁵ In the old days, ‘quantitative easing’ was not offered as an example of good economic practice. ‘Quantitative easing’ (a very non-traditional and undisciplined way of central banks inserting money into the



Certainly, in the economic system, the simplest characteristics of late modernity can be perceived as globally mobile capital, mobile sites of production and highly (and internationally) mobile labour. In this sense, for example, Taiwan can locate its industry in South China. We have also seen the insertion of the former “Eastern bloc” into the capitalist world economy – with Cuba following slowly. We have seen the emergence of major regional economic blocs, for example, the European Union, the North American Free Trade Association and MERCOSUR; and some of the difficulties of sustaining such blocs, e.g. the current economic difficulties of Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. Emphasising the implications for both economic and political power, at the world level, of the very large economies (BRICs) of Brazil and Russia and India and China is also fashionable (though clearly Brazil’s current boom has some similarities to that of Portugal earlier and India has a very strange mix of agriculture, manufacturing and service industries). However – if we ignore such gloomy anxieties – the current academic and political consensus that we live in a time of “knowledge economies”, characterised by research and development and major economic rewards from innovations in renewable energies, biotechnology, complex information languages.

What is less clear is the political dimensions of late modernity. Above all, there is little discussion of the emerging sociology of a knowledge society (as compared with a ‘knowledge economy’). At the same time, older political formulations have come under strain with new emphases on minority identities within ‘nation states’ such as Spain, the UK and France where claims to special identity are being stressed by the Catalans, the Scots, and the Bretons. More subtle changes are occurring in the permeability of borders which are more and more penetrated by major diasporas, such as the Turks in Germany, the Africans in Italy, the Maghrebians in France and Asians into Britain and Canada. If the trend continues, we will be seeing smaller and smaller political units within larger and larger economic blocs.

Thus some political and social challenges for education can be sketched:

- Are we seeing – amid large new regional units – a cultural retreat into nationalisms? Ideas of the economic market do not deal with this prob-

economy via commercial banks, pension funds and so on) used to be called in a simpler older form) ‘printing money’. The consequences of that, which included the runaway inflation that tended to accompany the practice – as in the Weimar Republic – were offered to us as students at LSE as ‘a lesson learned’.



lem. Thus the State is confronted with a problem of cohesion, not least because, under the pressures of 'the market', the existence of an underclass and minority identities is ignored.

- Are we seeing, in England and in Europe, the collapse of the Enlightenment Project and faith in science and reason? Are we seeing the growth of insistent positional knowledges – those of feminist, gay, ethnic and religious minorities? Are we seeing the 'collapse of canon' – an agreed corpus of European literature, high cultivation, and a sense of history? The Durkheimian problem of social solidarity remains a classical challenge to States and education systems.
- However, are we also seeing the State-driven nineteenth century university education systems of Europe (dedicated to the creation of nations and later social goals of equality of educational opportunity) finally breaking up? The university itself, so long protected by various theories as a special place with academic institutional autonomy and 'academic freedom' for individuals, is changing (Rothblatt, 1997).
- Universities are being increasingly absorbed into national and international Research and Development industries. And as the university attenuates, so do the cultural forms of the high status parts of education systems, the universities.
- What we are seeing is the closer and closer management of university systems – new rules of performativity are being created and probably they will lead to tighter and tighter links between universities and (capitalist) economic systems. In England (and in Australia and New Zealand), university systems are now, in their cultures, increasingly like business systems, reflecting after two or three decades of reform the capitalistic late modern economic systems in which they are embedded.
- What we are also seeing is a shift in educational discourse. The new vocabulary includes 'assessment and efficiency', students as 'consumers', measurement of 'value-added product'. The vocabulary of 'management' and 'market niche' has become audible. The crucial words include the 'performance' of the educational system. We speak of the market-driven university systems of Australia, England and New Zealand. They provide flexibilities in training a skilled labour force in a new economic world characterised by mobile production sites, niche marketing, mobile capital, and mobile labour. As Mrs Thatcher pointed out 'there is no alternative'... which is a very powerful ideological position.



- We are seeing the growth of an admiration for management, and management by objectives, and the handling of ‘risk’ (Deem, Hillyard & Reed, 2007). The proposition that educational excellence will follow from good management – both external to the university by national systems of quality control and inside the university by skilled management teams which can define good teaching, good research and the good academic – is a frightening proposition.

To reach this point, the English State has managed a number of remarkable shifts:

- A major expansion of the numbers in the university system.
- A shift of university finance from state support to a ‘mixed economy’ of some state support and other monies earned in the market place (of consultancies, research-contract work and student fees).
- A new domination over educational discourse, around the theme of economic globalisation and the redefinition of students as consumers, academics as producers and research as something which has ‘impact’.
- It has redefined what universities will transmit – skills (rather than knowledge) and it has.
- Established surveillance in the name of effectiveness and efficiency rather than offering direct and full support for universities which was its traditional role, at the same time.
- Asking that universities now become market-like in their self definition: they are in domestic and international university-markets, and are increasingly being expected to behave as if they were profit-making institutions within national and international assumptions about new modes of governance (King, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Overall, then I am arguing that – in England – we have seen a shift in the cultural form of education systems and university systems, a shift into a market metaphor; and possibly onward to a cobweb model of a networked learning-diffusion mode as new technologies for instruction take shape.

We are also seeing the English State gradually withdrawing from the provision of public services – including university education – and concentrat-



ing upon establishing the rules for its delivery by others. We are seeing the gradual withdrawal of the state from its historic mission of the provision of equality of educational opportunity and a new emphasis on the control of educational content and the transmission of learning.

We have moved from the nineteenth century model of using university education as part of state formation. We are now using universities as part of the formation of economic power. In the late nineteenth and for much of the twentieth century, the English state provided education (and later, universities) in the name of social justice, which is a civic idea. Our ideas and our metaphors are now economic.

One possibility is a social crisis as the divisive power of socio-economic stratification in the new knowledge economy compounds the existing social fractures of English society – regional, class and ethnic – because of the ‘success’ of neo-conservative reforms in education, a trajectory which has not so far significantly altered regardless of which of the two or three main political parties (Conservative, Labour, and Liberal) have held power.

One possibility is that we have abolished ‘youth’. Youth is now a student, who is a customer, in the market for ‘skills’ which will lead to employment in a knowledge economy – except that it does not. This is a promise between generations, and contemporary political leaders in a number of countries have managed to alter university systems – without being able to offer young people employment. This is not a breakdown in the ‘social contract’; but it is a sad violation of the promises made for the last twenty years about the necessity for and the advantages to be gained from university reform.

Of course, I understand the counter-argument: that the new style of university reform did not go far enough, fast enough...

And of course I understand that notions of the public good and the university-as-a-public good are intensely political and it is difficult to step back far enough to see why and how these visions and social processes involve the *translation* of the public good into the internal culture and interior structures of university as a public good. What is clear and startling is that these social processes are penetrative, right down to pedagogic relations and what counts as good research and a good professor and who decides that.

They always were (Bernstein, 2000).



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