



EDITORIAL

Social justice in the enterprise university: global perspectives on theory, policy, ethics and critical practice

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The global rise of the enterprise university (Marginson & Considine, 2000) reflects the increasing dominance of neoliberal discourses within the field of education (Connell, 2013; Bennett et al., 2012). Although seemingly economic in focus, neoliberalism is a comprehensive socio-political paradigm that informs our sense of ethical responsibility and social justice. Neoliberal concepts of timeliness, accountability, individual entrepreneurship, efficiency, calculability, productivity and competitive achievement permeate universities and, some would argue, the subjectivities that higher education longs to produce (Clegg, 2010).

For this special issue we sought perspectives that grapple with the philosophical, social, theoretical and practical aspects of social justice and equity work within the context of the enterprise university. Rather than focus on a lament of a (non-neoliberal) past and associated descriptions of the increasingly neoliberalised environment, we worked to garner explorations of the various forms of social justice and equity work that are conducted in this landscape and the opportunities and tensions that arise as a result. The papers gathered here represent some of the possibilities available. Taken together, the contributions provide a variety of analyses: from a broad overview of the international widening participation agenda; to an exploration of its discursive impact on teaching practice; through to more fine-grained analyses of individual and institutional practices in various settings. What several of the contributions highlight is the way in which the neoliberal university has responded to the widening participation agenda with a market expansion orientation. They illustrate the ways that equity has become a somewhat elastic concept in neoliberal times. They also contribute important details and insights about divergent and subversive alternative practices.

Stephen Ball (2012) highlighted the tensions that are inherent in doing social justice work in the context of the enterprise university. He noted that within this environment, accountability, performativity and notions of individuality reshape sensibilities and make sense to ‘the neoliberal bits of my soul’ (2012, p. 19). While a focus on social justice within the academy is generally considered to be irreconcilable with the demands of the neoliberal university, Fovet and Giles ask us to consider whether critical theory and neoliberalism can be made to work together. In their unpacking of the dynamic tension between critical theory ambitions and neoliberal pragmatism in higher education disability service provision, they demonstrate that these do not always offer incompatible solutions for meeting students’ needs.

Like Fovet and Giles, Sandberg’s contribution also comes from Canada and illustrates that it is possible to find space for subversion within the enterprise university. Sandberg provides an eloquent and provocative description of ‘the Alternative campus tour’. The alternative tour functions, at his large city university, as a palimpsest; the campus tour is repurposed from a branding or orientation exercise to a embodied critical teaching activity that offers a multi-layered

exploration of the campus and the land that it is situated on. Sandberg's description of the operation of the alternative tour demonstrates its potential for unsettling the public history of the university by uncovering the uncomfortable stories, the patriarchal and colonial histories, which are not part of the official campus narrative.

In a shift in geographical focus, Peacock's contribution provides a critical analysis of one example of a widening participation program in the Australian context. Peacock argues that although the outreach program he describes is run to further the equity agenda currently operating in higher education in Australia, the complex social relations at play result in a conflation of widening participation outreach activity and behaviour management imposed upon the students of the low socio-economic status local high school selected to participate. Peacock employs ethnographic and interview data to provide a picture of the program, and suggests that whatever this activity is achieving for the university, it is not sufficient to disrupt existing limiting relations between social class, gender, rurality and educational achievement in this context.

While Peacock's focus is on aspiration, Burke, Stevenson and Whelan provide a Foucauldian analysis of the effects of the widening participation agenda on teaching practices in higher education in England. Their interviews with senior academics across 11 universities in England leads them to argue that the neoliberal discourses of teaching excellence they identify resonate across an increasingly globalised and marketised international higher education landscape. Presently, these are enacted in tension with widening participation and equity goals, not only in England, but also more widely. They argue that 'excellence is not necessarily in tension with equity... Aspirations for pedagogical forms of 'excellence' must attend to the complexities that diversity and difference pose as part of any project for equity in higher education' (p. 46).

Whitty and Clement's contribution provides a broad overview of the widening participation agenda as it has been enacted in the both the United Kingdom and Australia. They describe the policy shifts and policy borrowing in the two countries that have changed university education from being a minority proposition to being available to a significant proportion of the populace. Their analysis suggests that the equity agenda has produced mixed results in the two countries, and that the policy levers utilized have not yet resulted in an equitable share of the benefits and privileges of a university education being extended to all of those brought into university by the widening participation agenda. They conclude their contribution (and indeed, this special issue) with a broad outline of both the policy work and research agenda that still need to be pursued if widening participation is to be meaningfully, rather than problematically, synonymous with equity and social justice.

The contributions proffered here provide a range of perspectives and insights into the dilemmas and difficulties of doing social justice work within the enterprise university. Collectively—and importantly—they show us that social justice work is not always and everywhere incompatible with neoliberalism; otherwise, as Foucault reminds us, other ways of being and knowing would not, and will not, be intelligible, imaginable and possible. Rather than showing that the neo-liberal entirely closes down ways of thinking and doing, this special edition outlines important commitments and practices, highlighting the complexity of the present. It reflects the diversity of work on widening participation in higher education across the globe. Indeed, it is vital to recognise the rich diversity of work on equity in the neoliberalising university (Canaan, 2013) so that it remains a visible and valued part of its core principles and work into the future.

While much of the analysis regarding neoliberalism—particularly as it operates in the enterprise university—highlights its deleterious effects, Connell has previously reminded us that neoliberalism does capture 'an important feature of education, that it is a creative process oriented to the future' (2013, p. 104). Given this, much needs to be done to ensure not only that the

importance and benefits of equity in higher education are known, but that the knowledges offered within higher education continue to be relevant for all people – and are, therefore, worth knowing.

References

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