BECOMING AND BELONGING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD, AND HOW CAN WE MAKE IT OUR FUTURE?

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18 May 2022
TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION-BOUND HIGHER EDUCATION IS ...

...DYING??
STUDENTS REALLY WANTED TO GET BACK TO CLASSES
Patterns and predictions only work within closed systems.

The world is an open system.
HERACLITUS OF EPHESUS
(544-484 BCE)
‘ALL THINGS ARE IN FLUX, LIKE A RIVER . . . EVERYTHING FLOWS’

‘WHOEVER CANNOT SEEK THE UNFORESEEN, SEES NOTHING. THE KNOWN WAY IS AN IMPASSE’
THE NEXT PHASE OF HIGHER EDUCATION
GROWING IMPACT OF GEO-POLITICS

• Nativist politics: pushback against ‘globalism’ and in some countries, international students
• Brexit takes out Erasmus and Horizon, weakens academic recruitment
• US-China decoupling in science
• ‘Securitisation’ in science takes priority over collaboration, university autonomy and academic freedom
• Ukraine universities hit by invasion
• Russia closes up and breaks with international university networks

‘Scientific discovery, which is fundamentally borderless, is being politically bordered. Geopolitical tensions between the United States and China have spilled over into academic science, creating challenges for many scientists’ ability to fully engage in research and innovation’ – Jenny Lee and Xiaojie Li, Racial profiling among scientists of Chinese descent, 2022
THE SLOW DRIP THAT WEARS AWAY THE STONE:

EROSION OF RESOURCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION
IN ENGLISH HIGHER EDUCATION THE FUNDING OF PUBLIC GOOD IS PUSHED TO THE MARGINS
ARE WE FOREVER STUCK WITH THE MARKET MODEL OF HIGHER EDUCATION?
‘EMPLOYABILITY’ IS A TRAP

HIGHER EDUCATION IS MADE RESPONSIBLE BUT CANNOT CONTROL GRADUATE OUTCOMES
DEVELOPING A MORE POSITIVE UNDERSTANDING OF HIGHER EDUCATION
OUTCOMES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

• Higher education generates *direct* effects or outcomes in its own right in two main ways –
  - education
  - production and communication of knowledge

• Higher education is also associated with *indirect* or *mediated* effects which rest on its interactions with *other social sectors*, and where the value of the activity is externally defined. These outcomes include the production of skilled labour power (employable 'human capital'); the allocation of opportunities and credentials across populations; the formation of citizens of a polity; contributions to tolerance, international relations, etc. Higher education alone cannot create these outcomes; it does so in partnership with other organisations.
HIGHER EDUCATION AS STUDENT SELF-FORMATION: A MORE AUTHENTIC STUDENT-CENTRED EDNESS
Only the learner does the actual learning, becoming.

When going well, higher education is a reflexive process of self-formation and deepens, ongoing self-making, grounded in self-aware agency. When this happens it is deeply empowering, throughout life.

What distinguishes self-formation in higher education from self-formation in other domains is (a) the immersion in knowledge; and (b) for full-time students, numerous opportunities for varied sociability and encounters with multiple ways of seeing.

Essential elements of higher education as self-formation, which are integrated, are (1) the autonomy of the learner, (2) reflexive agency, (3) the will to learn, and (4) immersion in knowledge.
ANTECEDENTS OF REFLEXIVE AGENCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Confucius: The Confucian learner is engaged in a continuing and never finished process of self-perfection, explicitly informed by moral and ethical dimensions.

Immanuel Kant: Bildung and Enlightenment: ‘man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage through the exercise of his own understanding … without direction from another’ (Kant 1784/1992, p. 90)

Lev Vygotsky: ‘The true development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, it is from the social to the individual’ (1986, p. 136)

Michel Foucault: The self is the only object we can freely will ‘without having to take into consideration external determinations’ (2005, p. 133)

Albert Bandura: Self-belief, and ‘the most distinctive human characteristic is the capability for reflective self-consciousness’ (1986, p. 21)
NUMBER OF SCIENCE PAPERS IN SCOPUS (NSF 2022), BY TYPE OF COLLABORATION, WORLD: 1996-2020

GROWTH IN NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF INTERNATIONALLY CO-AUTHORED PAPERS, WORLD: 1996-2020
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SHARED OUTCOMES, SHARED RESPONSIBILITY
INEQUALITIES ARE DEEP-SEATED AND CANNOT BE OVERCOME BY HIGHER EDUCATION ALONE

THEY NEED A WHOLE OF SOCIETY APPROACH
CONCLUSIONS

1. The pandemic deeply confirmed the value of on-site learning and human relations in higher education.
2. We cannot know or predict the future in universities.
3. However, we can reasonably sure that geo-politics will disrupt higher education and science to at least some degree, placing university autonomy and academic freedom under pressure, in the UK and many other countries.
4. Resources will become tighter in UK universities.
5. We will continue to be plagued by myths, that higher education determines graduate employment, and determines social equity in the sector. We need to emphasis shared social responsibility for both these outcomes.
CONCLUDING CONCLUSIONS

6. Our positive vision of higher education should be grounded in the core activities where we have sole responsibility and accountability: education, and the production and communication of knowledge.

7. We can rework learning and teaching using the student-centred lens of higher education as self-formation through immersion in knowledge. Suggests a strong focus on reflexive student agency.

8. Education and knowledge are the foundation of higher education’s many indirect contributions, including preparation for work and careers. Higher education generates indirect outcomes in partnership with other organisations, including employers and professions. This shared responsibility must be made clear, but is a good story to tell – all support social engagement and partnership.
YOU ARE KIND TO LISTEN TO MY POOR THOUGHTS

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE DISCUSSION ...