

A Bernsteinian analysis of the 3rd wave of higher education expansion since the Second World War.

Leesa Wheelahan
University of Melbourne
Australia

Anglophone countries such as Australia are on the cusp of the third major expansion of higher education since the Second World War. The first period of expansion was in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. New universities were established in the United Kingdom and in Australia along with a new higher education sector – colleges of advanced education in Australia, and polytechnics in the UK. The United States greatly expanded its existing system of community colleges and universities. The second period of expansion was in the 1980s and 1990s. The UK and Australia merged their colleges and universities to create an expanded unified *university* system, while the United States once again expanded its existing system.

The third period of growth in other Anglophone countries is now occurring in the second, vocationally oriented sector of tertiary education. Further education colleges in the UK have a ‘special mission’ to offer vocationally oriented two-year foundation degrees and to increase participation by students from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education. Some 10 states in the US have authorised their community colleges to offer full degrees, and so go beyond their traditional two-year associate degrees. Similar developments are occurring in other Anglophone countries. Ten of the 59 Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes in Australia now offer associate degrees and degrees. TAFE is the public provider of vocational education and training in Australia, and while higher education in TAFE is still small it will almost certainly grow as a consequence of government objectives to expand participation in higher education.

The paper will use a Bernsteinian analysis of the structures of knowledge and the pedagogic device to analyse the way in which this new form of higher education mediates access to knowledge. It draws on recently completed research on the development of higher education in TAFE in Australia (Wheelahan *et al.* 2009). The rationale for the growth of higher education in TAFE, and for similar institutions in other Anglophone countries, is twofold. The first is that it will offer more vocationally oriented higher education programs than universities thus serving industry’s ‘need’ to have a more highly educated workforce with vocationally specific skills. The second is that it is a key mechanism for increasing access to higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The paper uses Martin Trow’s (1974) famous distinction between elite, mass and universal higher education systems to associate different kinds of knowledge with each, and the way in which such knowledge is implicated in social power. Trow described a higher education system in which half the population or more of the relevant age group participates as a universal system, while a mass system has between 16-50% participation, and an elite system has up to 15% participation. Trow argues that the nature of higher education institutions, curriculum and pedagogy

changes as the system moves from being elite to mass and then universal. The purpose of elite systems is to prepare the social elite, and this is reflected in a curriculum that is based on 'shaping the mind and character' of students through highly structured concepts of academic and professional knowledge. Institutions are relatively small and homogeneous with clear boundaries that mark the academic community off from the rest of society. In contrast, the purpose of mass systems is to transmit knowledge and to prepare this segment of the population for a broader range of technical and economic leadership roles. The curriculum is modular, more flexible, and consists of semi-structured sequences within institutions that are comprehensive with standards that are more diverse and boundaries that are more fuzzy and permeable. The purpose of universal systems is to prepare the whole population for rapid social and technological change. The boundaries between formally structured knowledge and the everyday in the curriculum begin to break down, as do the distinctions between the educational institution and other aspects of life, including the workplace (Trow 2005: 64). Most industrialised countries have been progressively moving from elite to universal systems over the last 30-40 years in response to changes in society, the economy and technology.

Trow's (2005) later insights were that elite, mass and universal components co-exist within a universal higher education system, with each playing different roles. His analysis is useful for understanding the hierarchical structuring of higher education. Applying a Bernsteinian analysis to Trow's framework reveals the way in which external and internal relations of classification and framing structure institutions, culture, pedagogy and curriculum and the way that distributive rules differentially mediate access to powerful knowledge for social elites and deny this access to the working class (Bernstein 2000).

This paper uses this analysis to argue that the apparently meritocratic goal of higher education for all disguises different levels of access to knowledge. This is achieved through a number of mechanisms which include:

The marketisation of higher education and the commodification of knowledge so that the specification of knowledge is through its specific use-value to 'customers';

The increasingly pervasive 'genericism' of curriculum in all sectors of education which replaces access to knowledge as the *raison d'être* of education in favour of developing a 'perpetual trainability' (Bernstein 2000: 59);

The emphasis on social inclusion in higher education rather than social justice. Social inclusion asks questions about those who are excluded and tries to identify their deficits as the basis for interventions. It does not ask questions about the nature of inclusion, different types of participation or the outcomes that result. In contrast, social justice asks questions about the social distribution of access to different types of education, the outcomes of education, and the relations of exclusion and inclusion.

The co-option and incorporation of apparently progressive discourses of universal higher education by neo-liberalism. It will show that this leads to an anti-intellectualism disguised by democratising discourses around recognising new forms of knowledge in the academy, and legitimated through the putative bringing together of the theoretical and the practical.

The paper will show that despite universal higher education, different relations of classification and framing exist within elite, mass and universal higher education institutions or components of the system. It will use Bernstein's concepts of performance, competence and generic pedagogic modes to analyse these different forms of participation in higher education, the different institutional contexts of each, and the different social outcomes they mediate.

References

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