Higher education in Anglophone countries: why you would feel at home in any of them

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Overview

• Draw from variety of projects – mainly National Centre for Vocational Education Research projects – all free on web
  – *Higher Education in TAFE*
  – *Shaken not stirred: the development of one tertiary education sector in Australia*
• Two ways of organising tertiary education
• The Australian anomaly – tracked system in liberal market economy
• Growth of & rational for HE outside universities
• Commonalities among Anglophone countries
• Theorise using – Trow’s elite, mass, universal framework
• One sector emerging – hierarchical & stratified
  – Implications for students, teachers & institutions
• Challenges facing our institutions in one tertiary education sector
Two ways of organising tertiary education

• Differentiated systems – Northern European coordinated market economies
  – Tracked VET & HE – social partnerships match graduates & jobs relatively stable labour market destinations, allocate graduates to job vacancies & careers draw from differentiated knowledge base in each

• Unified systems – Anglophone liberal market economies
  – More fluid labour markets, market as mechanism to match graduates & jobs, graduates compete for same jobs, changing knowledge & skills, employers need industry-specific but also broader knowledge & skills, less differentiated knowledge base
The Australian anomaly

- Australian population about 23 million
- Federation – 1 Federal government, 6 states, 2 territories – complicated power sharing arrangements – cooperative federalism (!!)
- Australia unusual: has a liberal market economy, but a differentiated system in a relatively undifferentiated labour market
- Structure of tertiary education – two sectors
  - Higher Education
  - Vocational education and training
- Differentiated curriculum aligned with the sectors
  - Curriculum based – or input based in HE
  - Competency-based training in VET
Growth of & rationale for HE outside universities

- 2nd period – 1980s – creation of a unified university system
- 3rd period – 2000s - through 2nd, vocational tier of tertiary education
- ‘Vocational’ higher education – Mixed Economy Group in England
- More relevant applied provision & graduates more work-ready
- More supportive pedagogy for disadvantaged students
- This rationale in all Anglophone countries
Commonalities between Anglophone countries

- All two tiers of tertiary education even if don’t have sharp curricular division
- All have closer relationship with local communities & employers
- All have similar problems with universities – elitist
- All are lower status, funded at lower rate, teaching only
- All feel accreditation process forces them into the ‘university’ mould
- All under scrutiny, suspected of qualifications ‘not at same standard’

- UK & Australia angst over scholarship; question not so big in US
Commonalities between Anglophone countries cont…

• Teachers in all systems say they need: lighter teaching loads; more time to prepare & to engage in scholarship; & access to better resources

• Students in all more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds & be underprepared

• Students need to recognise that it is a ‘step-up’ to become HE students

• Everyone said biggest problem for their students – referencing!

• Important difference in Australia – we don’t have public funding
Theorising this: Trow’s framework: elite, mass & universal HE systems

- Elite – up to 15%; mass – 16-50%; universal – 50% & above
- Elite – prepare social elite
- Mass – prepare segment of population for broader range technical & economic leadership roles
- Universal – prepare whole population for rapid social & technological change in advanced industrial society,

Elite, mass & universal different aspects of one system, & sometimes in one institution (eg, medicine is elite everywhere)

Trow thought all this is good & necessary
Drivers for change challenging 2 divides

- Challenging divide between sectors, & between public & private providers
- Responding to changes in economy & society
- Increasing number of jobs require degrees as entry level qualification
- Loose ‘fit’ between labour market destinations & qualifications
- TAFE/FE /CCs will need to offer higher level qualifications to fulfil traditional role
- In Australia can’t sustain argument for curricular differentiation – challenging VET & HE divide
- These changes inexorable

- Government policy, targets & funding – challenging public/private divide

- Institutional aspiration also driving change
  - TAFE dumping brand, wants polytechnics/university colleges
  - Privates – want to use university in title in market
Student perspectives

- Students – enthusiastic about their program & teachers
- Same complaints hear from students everywhere about essays (agony), referencing (shocking), timing of assessment (why can’t lecturers coordinate)
- However – uncertain student identities
- Younger, tended to rely on views of others
- Students not really forthcoming about where they studied – uncertain identities
- For some HE in TAFE/private provider an insurance against risk
- Older students were clearer on reasons and goals, but even here, some felt more supportive environment important
Teachers’ perspectives & identities

• Teachers supported HE more than management, if that was possible
• Teachers identities problematic
• Wanted to identify with, & differentiate from, university lecturers
  – But we are never quite sure what to call ourselves. To call ourselves an academic means we work in a university and we don’t do that. Maybe I call myself a tutor or teacher … I feel a bit schizophrenic because of the different responsibilities as teacher, administrator, sound engineer and curriculum developer.
  – “The teaching staff [in TAFE institutes] are new … and they are more in touch with the world of work. They are more able to relate their teaching to practical outcomes. This is in contrast to professors who may be very smart and get published, but who are not in touch with the real world.”
  – “… all about people. There is no room for brilliant academics with no people skills”
One tertiary education sector emerging, but more hierarchical & stratified

- All compared their provision to ‘gold standard’ of universities
- TAFEs & private providers wishing to change sectoral designation
  - Didn’t come across any university that wished to do so
  - Structure of sectoral divide very important – includes or excludes
  - Can’t ignore the sectoral divide – it will exist
  - Government policy shape form of sectors (& divide) – enable or inhibit
  - Potential for new forms of inequality – the type of access that students have
  - Discourse of social inclusion replaced social justice – latter concerned with distributive justice
Challenges facing our institutions in one tertiary education sector

- What is higher education & how do we know when we see it?
- Responding to credential creep while not succumbing to mission creep
- Australia & UK – need more streamlined regulation of the sectors
- Differences between sectors qualitative, not categorical
- More attention to articulation & pathways – curricular coherence & support
- TAFEs/FEs/CCs will always be under scrutiny
- In Australia – need consistent policies & public funding for HE in TAFE – equity issue
- In Australia – build capacity in TAFEs
- Biggest challenge – build the capacity of our institutions to support new, hitherto marginalised students & to offer higher level qualifications