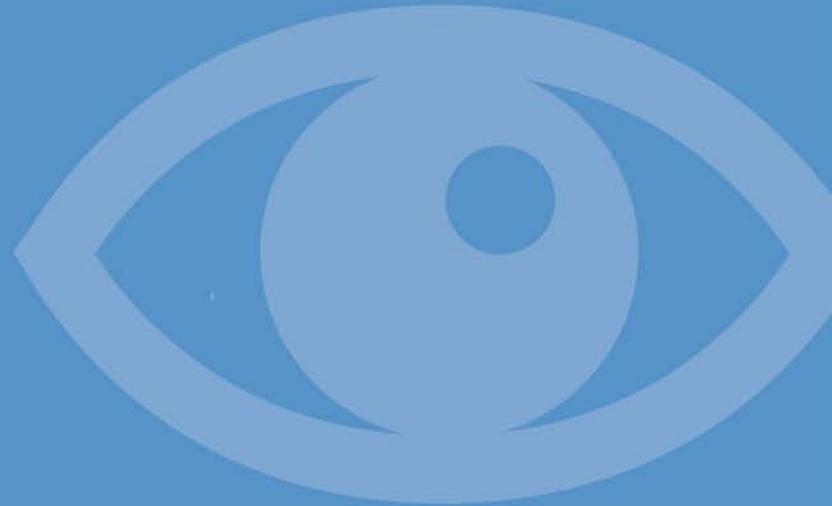


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SRHE News

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SRHE

Society for Research into Higher Education
Advancing knowledge Informing policy Enhancing practice

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Editorial: Valuing Research into Higher Education

Advancing knowledge, informing policy, enhancing practice

It was an occasion to celebrate in every sense when the Society staged a Colloquium at Church House in Westminster on 26 June 2015, to celebrate its formation 50 years earlier. As part of the preparations SRHE Fellow Michael Shattock had been commissioned to write a study of SRHE over its first 25 years. He explained that:

The SRHE was born out of the ferment in the world of British HE that had been generated by the Robbins Report ... [but] it was not the intellectual driver. This came from a different source, a concern about the health and welfare of the student body. ... Dr Nicholas Malleon, the University of London Student Medical Officer and Director of Research in Student Problems ... the acknowledged inspirer and founder of SRHE ... stated that he wanted to create an organisation “to bring together the researchers [in higher education] and those who were users of research, whether as teachers, administrators or civil servants”.

Higher education research in the UK was at that time the pursuit of a very few academics in what was still a small elite HE system, but the researchers into HE came together in the Society's first governing body, packed with luminaries including Malleon as Chairman, Lady Ethel Venables (Aston), Ernest Rudd (Essex), Lionel Elvin (Director, London Institute of Education), Chelly Halsey (Oxford), Claus (later Lord) Moser (LSE), later to become SRHE President, and Graeme Moodie (York). Shattock points out that “only three of the 13 members could be described as professionals in the discipline of education and the membership was primarily drawn from ... other disciplines.” The Society was formally created by a Memorandum of Association on 31 December 1965, with signatories including all of the above. The last surviving member of the signatories was Claus Moser, who died this year. His [obituary](#) in the Guardian quoted a friend who said ‘Claus was really about 7 or 8 different people’ with his wide interests in the arts, higher education, government, banking and much more; it was our good fortune that he would give so much time to SRHE.

There were some other beginnings you might remember in 1965: the [Council for National Academic Awards](#) was established and the [Secretary of State for Education and Science, Tony Crosland](#), issued [Circular 10/65](#) requesting local authorities to convert their schools to the [Comprehensive system](#). Martin Luther King led the marches in Selma and Lyndon Johnson made his ‘Great Society’ State of the Union speech, but then put US troops on the ground in Vietnam. The Beatles invented stadium rock by performing at the Shea Stadium in New York, [Bob Dylan](#) controversially went electric at the [Newport Folk Festival](#) and released *Like a Rolling Stone*, and the Rolling Stones issued *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*. University students moved easily from music to marches, whether for civil rights or against the war; in 1965 these things could still readily be joined up. But in the year when Craig Breedlove set a new land speed record of 600.601 mph on the Utah salt flats, change was speeding up everywhere.

In higher education, most of the 2015 world's universities did not yet exist. Most UK universities are not as old as SRHE. In 1965 many of the 'new universities' post-Robbins were still at the planning stage, the would-be polytechnics were still anticipating their 1966 White Paper, and 'alternative providers' were a distant dream, or nightmare. 50 years on, the 'top 50 under 50' in world university rankings include such established names as: Nanyang Technological University, Singapore; Hong Kong University of Science and Technology; City University of Hong Kong; Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology; Maastricht University; University of California, Irvine; University of Calgary; Simon Fraser University; Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; Universidad Autonoma de Madrid; University Ulm; and the University of Newcastle, Australia.

How has the Society fared over these 50 years of tumultuous change? Michael Shattock is in no doubt:

In 2015 the Society has a much more secure base than it had in 1990 and is flourishing in a way that its founders in 1965 could only have dreamed of. The Society may not be so engaged in wider policy issues as it became in the 1980s and early 90s but it remains committed to the internal world of higher education in ways which resonate with the ideas of Nicholas Malleson and his colleagues when they founded the Society in the white heat of the post-Robbins debates.

How then should SRHE celebrate its 50th birthday? Director Helen Perkins set out the programme's four broad aims: to bring together individuals from different groups inside and outside HE; to raise the profile and value of research into HE; to look forward to a research agenda for the next 50 years; and to support the Society's role as source of knowledge and expertise for a worldwide community of researchers.

The papers in this special issue of *SRHE News* include all the presentations at the Colloquium, which had some 250 participants from more than a dozen countries, and several different generations spanning the last 50 years. Jill Jameson's wise and well-judged Introduction led to SRHE Fellow Simon Marginson's (UCL Institute of Education) brilliant keynote address. He argued persuasively that despite its sincere best efforts higher education cannot compensate for society: "there is less room at the top, the middle cannot grow, and there's not much the selection function of higher education can do in the face of class and power". 'Contemporary reflections on research themes' saw Marcia Devlin (Federation University, Australia), Bruce Macfarlane (Southampton), Mary Stuart (Lincoln), Rajani Naidoo (Bath) and Jeroen Huisman (Ghent) overcome the limitations of the brief time allowed to give us thought-provoking overviews of, respectively : learning, teaching and the curriculum; academic practice, identity and careers; the student experience; transnational perspectives on HE and global well-being; and research on higher education policy. There were three 'Perspectives from the new generation of leading researchers': Paul Ashwin (Lancaster) 'Going global – opportunities and challenges for HE researchers'; Penny Jane Burke (Roehampton/Newcastle, Australia) on access and widening participation; and Kelly Coate (King's College, London) on reflective teaching. The Colloquium then adjourned to a Reception at the nearby House of Lords, hosted by SRHE Vice-President Baroness Sharp of Guildford and SRHE President Professor Sir Robert Burgess.

The Colloquium challenged us to think again about higher education and its benefits. There was a memorable soundbite in Kelly Coate's presentation: 'Academic development is a project to save the heart and soul of the university.' So what has the university become? 50 years ago, the Robbins Report set out the purposes of higher education, in terms which included the promotion of 'the general powers of the mind'. Much later, former SRHE President David Watson examined the benefits of HE and argued that Robbins had been vindicated in making that claim. Now, after 20 years of mass higher education in England we have a higher and higher proportion of graduates in the general population. Watson would surely argue that the success of HE has produced large numbers of people who are open-minded, tolerant of diverse perspectives, and who we might therefore expect to be very resistant to the growing inequality which was the focus of Simon Marginson's address. We seem to have a paradox. Mass HE has produced a mass graduate population who are massively compliant with growing massive inequality. Has massification failed? This perhaps is one of the questions SRHE might tackle to respond to Shattock's coded criticism that in 2015 we are not sufficiently 'engaged in wider policy issues'. But note also his observation that we are flourishing in ways the founders of SRHE could only dream of. 'Valuing research into higher education', indeed: the Colloquium, adroitly steered by Helen Perkins, Paul Johnson (Institute of Fiscal Studies) and Manja Klemencic (Harvard), succeeded superbly. The Council, Director and staff must be congratulated on conceiving and staging an event worthy of the SRHE's distinguished history.

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Editorial policy

SRHE News aims to comment on recent events, publications, and activities in a journalistic but scholarly way, allowing more human interest and unsupported speculation than any self-respecting journal, but never forgetting its academic audience and their concern for the professional niceties. If you would like to suggest topics for inclusion in future issues, to contribute an item, or to volunteer a regular contribution, please contact rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk. We aim to be legal, decent, honest, truthful, opinionated and informed by scholarship. We identify named individuals with their employing institutions. *News* content is written by the editor except where authors are identified or sources are acknowledged. *Comments and suggested additions to editorial policy are welcome.*

Future editions of SRHE NEWS

Copy deadline for SRHE News Issue 23: **31 December 2015**

Contributions and comments from SRHE members keep *News* in touch with what is going on in higher education research around the world: please let the editor know of any personal news or contributions you would like to submit for future issues. Just email rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk

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Introduction *Jill Jameson*

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Alexis de Tocqueville, the French political historian, once observed that 'When the past no longer illuminates the future, the spirit walks in darkness'. Echoing such a theme, Ron Barnett wrote to us in 2011 of the need to 'reawaken the spirit of the university', since, as Derrida observed, 'Spirit is flame': it needs air to breathe (Barnett, 2011: 153-4). Mike Shattock has similarly reminded us of Lord (then Sir John) Fulton's comment in 1964 that the Robbins 'Report itself provided such light in the dark places of the past that few would regard it as tolerable to be without a continuing scrutiny in future' (Shattock, 2015:3). In remembering that era of the awakening of research into higher education, this 2015 collection of 'think pieces' airs the spirit of fifty years of shared histories in the scholarship of research inquiry within and into higher education in a 50th Anniversary edition that celebrates the many achievements of research into higher education as a field.

The Society for Research into Higher Education and its global membership of scholars has nurtured and developed that field with assiduous endeavour during 1965 – 2015. We have imagined and re-imagined higher education, both stratified and massified, within and beyond 'the university', we have investigated its students and staff, debated and challenged its research agendas, its complexity and diversity, its national and global rankings, its policies, leadership, management, resourcing, scholarship, academic practices, its aims, purposes and scope. We have reflected, been inspired, argued, fought, won and lost many scholarly and personal battles in this process. Yet always, as a learned society, we have returned to our main purpose: to advance knowledge, inform policy and enhance practice in research into higher education across the UK, Europe and the world. It has been an extraordinary achievement that this endeavour has endured and looks favourably positioned to expand and develop further, despite, as Simon Marginson notes below, the 'formidable and increasing social and political obstacles to the achievement of greater social equality and the meritocratic dream' of attainment through higher education for all. In recognising, as Helen Perkins observes in her Foreword, 'our core objective of improving the quality of higher education', we facilitate for higher education researchers around the world the illumination and new understandings that are achievable from shared knowledge, rigorous inquiry, critical discourse and research publication.

Within and beyond the many important debates captured in this volume by leading scholars on inequity, social mobility, learning and teaching, academic practice and identity, student experience, massification, marketization, transnational political and economic analysis, higher education policy and diversity, a common aim emerges. This is the aim, as a learned society, of continuing the scrutiny, initiated by the Robbins Report, of research into higher education in the present and onwards towards the next fifty years. We carry forward here multiple scholarly works that represent those critical, rigorous and meaningful research debates over the last five decades. The memorial celebratory pieces in these pages act as sentinels of knowledge to inspire, inform and warn us of new developments in higher education. During the events the Society is running this year we chart the history of advancing knowledge, informing policy and enhancing practice in research into higher education across the UK, Europe and the world. As Mike Shattock reminds us, 'The SRHE was born

out of the ferment in the world of British higher education that had been generated by the Robbins Report' of 1963. Although there have been many transmutations, ups and downs along the way, that ferment has never ceased. Long may it continue.

Keynote Address

Equality of opportunity: the first fifty years *Simon Marginson*

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Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-first Century* (2014) clarifies the distinction between (1) societies in which incomes are relatively equal and/or there is a high degree of middle class growth and social mobility, which includes (albeit in different ways and for rather different reasons) both the Scandinavian countries and emerging East Asia; and (2) societies like the United States or the UK that are relatively closed in character, with highly unequal wage structures, growing capital concentrations, and static middle classes that are under considerable pressure to defend their past-gained economic and status positions. Arguably, in societies of type (1), in which social stratification is looser, higher education has a greater potential to shape the pattern of social opportunities and outcomes. Piketty's contribution is to explain the political economic mechanisms that shape social openness and closure, in different parts of the world and over time, and to demonstrate that between the 1950s-1970s the USA and UK were relatively open in terms of elite formation and social mobility, as open as Denmark, Netherlands or China today. The 1950s-1970s were the high-time of the formation of modern mass higher education, and of the key ideas that shaped that system formation—above all in the 'Californian Model' the promise of equality combined with excellence in a meritocratic society, as epitomized in the 1960 California Master Plan, in a related jurisdiction the 1963 Robbins report in the UK, and the scholarship of Clark Kerr (1963) and Martin Trow (1974). Human capital theory also evolved at its time, embodying the meritocratic premises that educated attributes constitute productivity, and marginal productivity drives wages.

We have long known that inequalities in families and in schooling pattern tertiary opportunities, that unequal social agency plays out again in the transition to work, and that wage determination is shaped by industrial power and gender stratification, but the assumption that education is accountable for an end-on transition from higher education to work, within a system in which everyone goes to the starting blocks with an equal chance, still shapes policy and public expectations—though presumably, City of London bankers and hedge fund managers no longer look to the universities (if they ever did) before giving themselves another bonus and sending it to the offshore tax haven of their choice. It has become increasingly difficult to secure greater social equality through higher education, not just because the 1960s equality of opportunity project has been rearticulated through neo-liberal policy settings, or even because social democracy has faltered in the English-speaking countries (though Scandinavian equality policies would help), but because as Piketty shows, capital has accumulated, grossly unequal wages are furthering the concentration process, unequal wage income for 'meritorious' managers turns into unequal traditional wealth in the next generation, and the private fortunes are protected by finance sector

capture of tax and spending policies. In short, there is less room at the top, the middle cannot grow, and there's not much the selection function of higher education alone can do in the face of class and power.

Questions of inequality and education are central to the work of many of us, as emancipationist democrats as well as educators and researchers. The keynote reviews the approach to equality of opportunity in higher education, and in relations between education and work, in the context of societies in which there are formidable and increasing social and political obstacles to the achievement of greater social equality and the meritocratic dream of fairer social inequality.

Learning, teaching and the curriculum *Marcia Devlin*

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This abstract covers three aspects of research in learning, teaching and curriculum over the past 50 years: research issues and their drivers; the impact of this research on policy and practice; and future priorities. What follows are my observations and thoughts on these aspects, which are shaped by my experience, beliefs, values and preferences.

My observations relate to: changes in higher education *per se*; learning theory; the role of discipline-based research; the nature of research collaborations; dissemination and impact; and possible future priorities.

Changes in higher education *per se*

One important defining feature of the past 50 years of research in learning, teaching and curriculum has been that the context of this research has changed so fundamentally. In 2015, we find ourselves on the trajectory predicted by Trow (1972) of higher education expansion and transformation from elite, through mass, to universal access.

A massified system has meant that not only are there more students but also, alongside the internationalisation of higher education, that students are from a far wider range of social and cultural backgrounds than the cohort who attended Western universities 50 years ago. This has changed research into learning, teaching and curriculum in these universities significantly and irreversibly. Naturally, this research has increasingly focused on how to best teach and assess students from a range of diverse backgrounds.

Some research effort has been devoted to understanding the experiences, perspectives and needs of so called 'non-traditional' and international students in a massified, internationalised system and to informing relevant policy and practice within institutions and beyond. The focus has increasingly been to facilitate achievement for all students, not just those with the social, cultural and English language capital to understand the tacit expectations of them and respond accordingly.

Learning theory

Over the past 50 years, a plethora of learning theories, models, concepts and ideas have underpinned higher education research in learning, teaching and curriculum. Some that have had currency at one time or another in the past 50 years include, in no particular order: deep and surface learning; Vygotski's Zone of Proximal Development; cognitive theory; Andragogy; problem-based learning; inquiry learning; Bloom's Taxonomy; cultural historical activity theory; metacognition; Garder's multiple intelligences; phenomenography; constructivism; learning styles; behaviourist theory; transformative learning theory; cooperative learning; motivational and humanist theories; brain friendly learning and socio-cultural theories. There are many more but this list is illustrative of both the wide range and the number of those considered appropriate at one time or another over the past five decades.

It strikes me that, like religion, each theory, model, concept and idea has its believers and non-believers, its evangelists and critics, its worshippers, if you will, and its nay-sayers. It also strikes me that, like fashion, some of these theories, models, concepts and ideas have come and gone, and come back into vogue again at a later time in some form.

As I reflect on this particular observation, I now understand why, despite my experience of research having grown over the years, I have had increasing difficulty answering the question from newer researchers interested in examining learning, teaching and/or curriculum, "Which is the best learning theory to use in higher education research?"

Discipline-based higher education research

There has been an explosion in discipline-based pedagogical research over the past fifty years. I am referring to the growth in work by colleagues in the disciplines of chemistry, engineering, humanities, media, nursing and psychology, to name but a few disciplines, to explore and better understand learning, teaching and curriculum in their particular neck of the academic woods. If it is difficult to keep up with 'generic' higher education research, it is impossible to track specialised work of this kind across disciplines. That said, discipline-based higher education research in learning, teaching and curriculum has allowed those in specific discipline fields to benefit from the focused and specialized work.

This work has also brought immeasurable benefit to higher policy and practice more broadly, as well as to research, with an influx of additional learning theories, models, concepts and ideas, the application of existing theory within discipline contexts, as well as an increased breadth and depth of methods that are deployed to conduct, and therefore improve, research in higher education. One example is some of the increased rigour in higher educational quasi and experimental research that has come about through the application of aspects of the scientific method.

Research collaborations

Research collaborations have changed considerably over the past half-century. My own experience highlights some of the shifts. My first collaborative higher education research experience was with a senior academic with whom I worked for many years at the same institution, who kindly offered me an opportunity to join an experienced team and then mentored me. This was and is the traditional way. My most recent is a current collaboration with a junior colleague who lives on the other side of the country, whom I met online via social media and with whom I worked through email to pull together a geographically dispersed research team with complementary skills and submit a

successful grant application. Our team is multidisciplinary, meets by teleconference, has debates and makes decisions via email and engages with our communities via social media. This story is increasingly repeated across countries, languages, disciplines and worldviews.

Dissemination and impact

The role of social and other new media has fundamentally changed not only the way research teams are formed and work, but also the way in which research outcomes are shared, discussed, understood and implemented to facilitate change in policy and practice. No longer the purview of an elite few who undertake the research and a slightly larger group of elite few who read the findings in dense and terribly clever academic journals, higher education research findings have increasingly reached the masses over time. In the case of research into learning, teaching and curriculum, this is particularly welcome as it has relevance to all academic staff who teach, whatever their location or discipline.

The impact of research depends in large part on dissemination and uptake. There will be an increasing need to 'cut through' the volume and noise of the Internet to reach those who need to be reached to change policy and practice. Those who can do so will be those with sophisticated understandings of: how to select, collect and curate disparate findings; how to translate findings written in 'academic-ese', or in the style and language familiar to those in one discipline, into plain English; and marketing to particular audiences and doing so in a digital context.

Future priorities

Given the complexity outlined above, one of the major priorities for the future is to ensure that higher education research on learning, teaching and curriculum is meaningful and useful to the many and not just the few. As well as more thinking about facilitating better uptake of findings, this might also necessitate a focus in the immediate future on so-called twenty-first century learning in higher education. This would include further exploration of how higher education can assist students and graduates to experience success and fulfillment in an increasingly digital and global age such as through digital and media literacy, deep cross- and multi-cultural understandings and the ability to innovate.

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Academic practice, identity and careers *Bruce Macfarlane*

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The word ‘traditional’ is possibly the most over-used term in the higher education discourse. In common with nearly all institutions that have endured for any substantial length of time, such as the Church of England or the Conservative Party, the University has been adroit at re-inventing itself. The latest re-imagining is that ‘traditional’ universities are research-led institutions. This myth has comparatively recent roots linked to the growth of an audit culture, expansion and stratification on an international basis, and academic performativity at an individual level. These trends have collectively re-shaped the nature of academic practice and identity over the last 50 years.

An insight into how priorities have changed among academics during the recent past is provided by Halsey and Trow’s seminal study, published in 1971, of a then still small and elite British higher education sector drawing on data gathered in the mid-1960s (at a time when the SRHE was being formed). They found that British academics were overwhelmingly oriented towards teaching rather than research. A mere 10 per cent were even ‘interested’ in research while just 4 per cent regarded research as their primary responsibility (Halsey & Trow, 1971). The study concludes that ‘elitist teachers’ constituted the dominant ‘academic type’ predominantly interested in teaching rather than research and opposed to the expansion of the system. Nor was it just British academics that saw their role as primarily about teaching rather than research. Writing about American academics as late as 1979, Logan Wilson asserted that even though ‘assigned teaching loads...normally allow ample time for research, the majority consider teaching to be more important than research’ (Wilson, 1979:234).

Very many articles in early issues of *Studies in Higher Education*, first published in 1976, focused on undergraduate teaching picking over very practical issues such as the use of lectures, examinations, and various forms of educational innovation. The language of this time was all about ‘university teachers’. The virtual disappearance of this phrase in the modern lexicon tells us a lot about the way in which the subsequent separation of government funding for research and teaching has led to a radical shifting of academic priorities, part of an international trend evidenced by successive *Changing Academic Profession* surveys.

Analysis of the academic profession in the 1970s, in the aftermath of the campus radicalism of the previous decade, is sometimes characterized in terms of a division between the forces of conservatism and liberalism (Ladd and Lipset, 1975) or in attitudes towards the expansion of the higher education system (Halsey and Trow, 1971). Sadly today the very idea that the socio-political views of academics should be sought, let alone listened to, might seem at best, quaint or at worst, irrelevant. This is partly about the way in which the public role and status of the academic has shrunk.

The divisions today within the academic profession are more usually expressed in terms of contractual or stratified status: research or teaching contracts, tenured or untenured, full or part-

time, and, the career critical division between those who have been submitted or omitted for national research audit exercises (eg PBRF in New Zealand, the RAE in Hong Kong or the REF in the UK). The expansion of higher education has not only led to increased inequality between students in a highly stratified sector. It has also had much the same effect for academics. The realities of casualization and the pressures of performativity have shaped a more inward-looking 'academic profession'.

This inward turn marks not just the declining role of academics as public intellectuals but also the atomisation of academic practice and identity. This fragmentation or 'unbundling' of academic labour has resulted in the parceling of work into discrete and specialized niches. Only around a half of academics in the UK or Australia are now on 'all round' contracts involving teaching, research and service. This means that the other half are a disparate collection of para-professionals who might research OR teach OR, perhaps, manage. The line between an 'academic' and an 'administrator' is also fuzzifying as part of this fragmentary process (Whitchurch, 2008).

Some of the early articles published in *Studies in Higher Education* essentially constituted personal reflections on what it means to be a university academic. They are part of a lost world of scholarly dialogue about academic identity. In 'Reflections on Working in a University', Adam Curle (the first professor of peace studies at the University of Bradford) makes no mention of phrases or agendas which might predominate if such a piece were to be penned today (eg 'workload', 'impact case study', 'research grant', etc). Instead, the article provides a critical reflection on his own development from 'middle class English academic, subtly conscious of status, class, and colour, believing – albeit criticizing – the values of western civilization...' (Curle, 1977:10) to a later realization that his 'attitude toward students had the same omniscient superiority that had tainted my attitude towards people in the countries where I had worked on development problems.' (p 11). Such a candid self-analysis is all too rare today as modern para-professionals, including full professors, scurry around meeting the demands of a performative culture.

Today Curle's idiosyncratic meanderings would probably face instant rejection from *Studies in Higher Education* given its lack of a 'methodology' section, empirical evidence or other sufficiently respectable social scientific clothing. Such conventions now predominate and have positively contributed to achieving the hope expressed by Tony Becher, in his opening editorial in the first issue of *Studies* in 1976, for higher education to 'constitute as valid a field of intellectual enquiry as can any specialized discipline' (Becher, 1976:2). Yet, at the same time, much of the scholarly dialogue from the 1970s and early 80s reminds us what has been lost. These authors addressed a key question too rarely considered today: what does it mean to *be* an academic?

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Looking back to look forward at the student experience *Mary Stuart*

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Attempting a review of work on the student experience over the last 50 years is daunting. The concept of the 'student experience' is so defuse and covers so many areas that any review would be partial. However I will attempt to discuss what themes I believe to be important as they have emerged in research on the student experience in HE along with what questions have been asked by researchers of these themes and how these themes and questions relate to the rapidly, it seems looking back, changing higher education landscape.

I wish to place this discussion in the context of what I believe are the two overarching policy narratives which have shaped higher education since 1965 which have therefore driven the research and impact agendas for the student experience. The relationship between policy and research is complex, sometimes with research questions developing because of new policies and sometimes with research influencing new policy. However all research on the student experience can be seen as deriving from the processes of the Massification and Marketisation of higher education, the two meta-narratives for HE in the last 50 years. I will begin with Massification.

The concept of Massification in HE comes from Trow (1970) in his seminal discussion of the stages of the development of higher education; elite, mass and universal. Clearly the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) which recommended the opportunity for all who had the ability to benefit from HE to be able to take a degree was the justification for expansion. Robins needs to be seen in the context of a much wider global growth in HE including in the USA and other parts of the Western world post the second world war. It was recognised that if countries were to compete successfully higher level education for more people was necessary. Equally, although Robbins agreed with the policy, recommending grants for students rather than paying fees as students had done up until the 1960s, was a recommendation from the Anderson Review in 1961.

However the increase in the number of Universities, the introduction of grants for students and the creation of the polytechnics in the later part of the 1960s and early 1970s provided many more opportunities for students to get into higher education. Core debates on the student experience and students which are still discussed in research and the media developed at this time. What is currently called widening participation, widening access or social equity in HE was discussed in relation to the expansion with Kingsley Amis commenting that 'more was worse' (Tight, 2012), an idea still current in debates today. The 'new' students were seen as different and even Robbins said of the new students that 'too many entrants cannot themselves express themselves clearly in English and have an inadequate understanding of basic mathematical principles' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963: para 570). Research on student support and the needs of students began to emerge partly as a result (Myers, 2013) but there was little discussion as such, until the 1980s, on issues of student diversity, such as gender, ethnicity, class and disability.

The most rapid expansion of higher education in the UK took place in the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s. This expansion brought in more and diverse students; women who had missed out on higher education earlier in their lives because of prejudice about women's role in society; minority ethnic students from aspirational parents and the reclassifying of professional qualifications into higher education. New qualifications to enable mature students gain access to HE were developed in

particular the Access movement which provided extensive research opportunities (Ryle and Stuart, 1994) Research into the student experience during this phase was dominated by investigations into women's education (Thompson, 2000) and adult and part-time learners (Taylor and Ward, 1986; West, 1996) , picking up on the changing nature of the student body. Part-time students of course always paid (subsidised) fees themselves.

During the mid 1990s Sir Ron Dearing, later Lord Dearing, was asked to undertake a review of higher education. The report in 1996 recommended the re-introduction of fees for full-time undergraduate home students. Many of the recommendation from Dearing were taken up by the new Labour government in 1997. This created considerable interest in researching the impact of fees on student behaviour and student debt itself became an area of considerable interest for researchers (Callender and Jackson, 2004) , particularly when fees were increased and income contingent loans were introduced in 2003. The policy was influenced by research and practice in Australia (Chapman, 2006) and the work of Barr and Crawford (2005) in the UK. Equally significant in terms of creating further research questions from the Dearing review affecting the student experience was the development of the Institute for learning and teaching , latterly the Higher Education Academy, and the new Labour government's commitment to reaching the 50% of under 30 year olds having some experience of HE. This shifted the research questions away from mature students to younger students and the creation of school, college and university partnerships to raise aspirations and attainment to enter HE created a new interest in HE research in the experience of students before they came into Higher Education (Kintrea, St Cair and Houston, 2011).

Questions of social equity in higher education are global and many of the issues raised in research in the UK were also highlighted in research in other countries (Osborne, 2003). Concern about retention of particular groups of students led researchers to explore work from Tinto (1993) in the USA on 'persistence' and concepts of learning from Australian researchers such as Prosser and Tigwell (1999) and Ramsden (2003). Debates between researchers became keen. Quinn and Thomas (2006) argued that research and institutions were creating a deficit model of students from 'widening participation backgrounds' rather than exploring the institutional 'Habitas' which 'othered' difference (Archer, Hutchins and Ross, 2003). Concepts such as 'belonging' (Wilcox et al, 2005; Stuart, et al,2011a) began to circulate and researchers have increasingly discovered the importance of the role of friendship and personal relationships (Ecclestone, 2007, Stuart, 2006). Alongside this work further research on the student experience beyond the classroom has suggested that different students engage beyond formal study differently with their institutions (Little, 2006; Stuart et al, 2011b) As a result many institutions developed their practice around the early stages of a student's time in HE, increasingly providing support for induction and the first year experience began to affect practice in Universities (Yorke and Thomas, 2003).

Higher Education has always had a market but this market historically focused on tariff, with students 'buying' institutions with their final school grades. However, marketisation in HE began to develop when UK Universities were allowed to charge fees for International students in the 1980s. This started a significant growth in the recruitment and retention of students from emerging countries whose HE systems were during the 1990s and 2000s not yet sufficiently developed to cope with the demands of their growing middle classes. Research into cross cultural understanding, learning systems and internationalisation asked necessary questions to support the increase in international recruitment in UK institutions. (Turner and Robson, 2007).

Marketisation in English institutions expanded significantly through policy changes between 2010 and 2015. While new Universities have continued to be established throughout the last 50 years, the significant change has been the increase in private and for-profit providers. At the same time the government had increased fee levels paid by income contingent loans to 9,000 pounds and lifted the

cap on numbers of undergraduates who could be recruited by any one institution. Research on the student experience moved into areas of marketisation and neo-liberal agendas in HE and new researcher on 'student choice' developed (Reay et al 2005; Stuart, et al, 2012b), exploring and critiquing rational choice theory and suggesting that 'choice' is dependent on experience and access. Further work on the critique of neo-liberalism and questions of social justice is new growing as the sector changes further (Burke, 2012) and critiques of marketisation approaches to teaching and learning from Ashwin et al (2015).

As value for money is an increasing theme of policy makers in HE concern has been expressed about higher education as a motor for social mobility and research into social mobility, class and HE has expanded (Stuart, 2012a; Blanden et al, 2005). Recently research suggests that there is a hollowing out of lower middle class jobs in Western societies due to technological change and globalisation (Sissons, 2011). This will affect opportunities for further social mobility. At the same time other researchers have explored ethnicity and attainment in HE (Broeke and Nicholls, 2007; Richardson, 2008 and Stuart et al, 2011a). Researchers such as Wakeling (2010) have also argued that postgraduate study has a real class bias towards the middle classes. This work has affected recent policy announcements to create a loan system for PGT and PGR students. Most recently there is real interest in how HE can demonstrate its value for graduate employment (Brennan, (2004). The OECD has conducted research into graduate attributes through its AHELO project and there is clearly scope for further research in this area of 'learning gain', which the higher education funding council currently calling for pilot studies on learning gain.

Research into the student experience has expanded considerably alongside the expansion of higher education itself. Insights into different student experiences of access to HE, completion of study and success for graduates has highlighted the need for more understanding and appreciation of different experience within the HE environment and has changed practice in institutions (Yorke and Thomas, 2003). However further work in the area of HE and social justice is still needed to ensure institutions and policy makers are addressing issues of equity. As new forms of higher education emerge, how the student experience changes and what opportunities or barriers these new forms provide will provide further research questions in the future.

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Transnational perspectives on higher education and global well-being

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The contribution of HE to global wellbeing was not always accepted. A view long held by the World Bank and other powerful actors was that investment in HE would bring limited social and economic benefits to developing countries. This view, which led to large scale disinvestment, was successfully challenged and in 2000 the World Bank itself positioned HE as a crucial engine for economic and social development¹. In the context of the knowledge economy, the assumption is that HE will enable low income countries to 'leap-frog' over intermediate developmental stages and improve their positions globally². At the same time, the formidable obstacles to the development of high quality systems of HE in many developing countries are recognised³. In this context, the provision of HE by foreign and corporate providers may be seen as an attractive solution in countries where governments are unable to readily acquire resources to commit to HE.

But to what extent can trans-national HE contribute to global wellbeing? Important strands of contemporary research respond to this question by situating HE in the context of the dominance of neo-liberalism and geo-political power struggles. At the same time, such research has shown that HE has always had a relative autonomy and that universities can contribute to social change in the most draconian societies⁴.

Analysts have referred to the geo-politics of the 21st century as an era of 'new imperialism.' While classical rivalries were legitimated by ethnicity in the colonial period or the war on communism in the cold war period, it is religion that is now deployed to explain conflict⁵. Rising powers such as China, a one-party state with a giant economy or Brazil, with its opposition to armed US interventions and its forging of a regional identity with Cuba and Venezuela have potential to disrupt global power relations⁶. The Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Our Americas spearheaded by Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Cuba has an anti imperialist and anti-neoliberal stance. In an era of neo-liberal deregulation, international organisations and transnational corporations wield increasing power on all aspects of public life including HE.

HE stands at the centre of these developments. The intensification of the struggle for positional advantage in the global economy and the competition for highly skilled knowledge workers have contributed to a fierce competition within and between national systems of HE. I have referred to this as the competition fetish. In addition, researchers such as Buchanan have been highly influential in the application of neo-liberal market mechanisms and public choice theory to higher education. I and others have shown that creation of a global market in HE of course a rigged market which is twisted with strong protectionism to create an un-equal playing field⁷.

Researchers have also analysed other types of competition in HE. These come with their own set of rules based on institutions already judged to be 'the best' and include 'excellence' or 'world class' policies and are re-enforced by global rankings which exert an influence on all institutions, even those in developing countries which have little capacity to feature in such rankings.⁸

While research advocating pro-market neo-liberal policies has influenced policy and practice, research that has been critical of such trends has been largely marginalised. Such research has indicated that the transformation of higher education into a commodity may result in developing countries particularly those with weak regulation becoming mass markets for low quality education with attendant effects on development and global wellbeing. Research that has raised concerns that transnational education may lead to the erosion of indigenous values and culture has been more influential. Development organisations and universities in high income countries increasingly recognize the danger of reproducing unequal imperial type relations and have taken steps to reflect more critically on power and culture.

Given the above, what are the research priorities going forward?

Firstly we need to undertake research that exposes some common myths that are presently clouding debates on HE and global wellbeing. Modernity is not a single, unified homogenising process and the West is not the only yardstick by which success is measured. Market fundamentalism and the competition fetish are not inevitable⁹. In addition it is not so easy to divide the world between the powerful global north and the powerless global South. My analysis drawing on the scholarship on uneven and combined development shows us that there are connections between high status universities low income countries which are detached from their surroundings and linked to the higher education power centres of the north and the black holes of under-resourced institutions located in the richest countries in the north but dislocated from power¹⁰. At the same time we have to expose the myth that public institutions always work in the interests of the public good.

In the same way we need to be wary of constructing a reified binary between dominant 'Western' and 'indigenous' knowledge. A binary logic contrasting American and European culture with 'non-western' cultures; or modernity with tradition denies the multiplicity of peoples' lives and discourages criticism of intergroup conflict. There is also the danger that equating knowledge in a simplistic manner with ideology or culture will result in us losing all mechanisms to evaluate knowledge.

Third, even more fundamental is how we define education's contribution to the development of world societies. We are currently witnessing world-wide attacks on public systems of HE. The blame for pervasive poverty, growing unemployment and social unrest is laid at the door of HE rather than seen as an outcome of policies related to predatory capitalism. HE plays a part here but it would be a grave error to believe that HE in isolation can contribute to global wellbeing. It is therefore very important to link HE to wider development and global wellbeing strategies.

The research field is characterised on the one hand by macro global political economy analyses. Intellectual giants such as Robert Wade shows us how global power relations shrink the development space open to low income countries. We also have approaches such as the capability and human rights approaches which place people at the centre of education and development¹¹. This body of work could also be usefully linked to an analysis of the wider social structure in which people interact. The 'Wellbeing Regimes' framework offers significant potential as it analyses macro structures above the state such as multi-national corporations and those below the state such as religious and civil groups¹². By linking the work on capabilities and human rights to the wellbeing regimes framework we can focus on how the mutual connections between a reconfiguration of the global system and the empowerment of local communities and individuals across national borders can contribute to the sustainability of human relationships and global wellbeing.

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Research on higher education policy *Jeroen Huisman*

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Research on higher education in general, apparently, is alive and kicking. Tight (2012) calls higher education “big business” and other authors refer to the massification of higher education (read: more students, more staff, potentially more researchers interested in higher education) but also to the increasing importance of higher education and research in contemporary society to signify increasing interest in higher education research.

The growth is also evidenced by an increase in journals focusing on higher education (Altbach, 2009) and in the growth of research centres on higher education (Rumbley et al., 2015). Although that growth may be uneven: with considerable growth in new economies in e.g. Asia and Latin America and stabilisation in (Western) Europe and the US, Rumbley et al (2015, 7) argue that “higher education is fast moving from the margins to the centre of much discussion and debate among policymakers around the world”.

Elsewhere (Huisman, 2015), I argued that behind this growth there are patterns of diversity, some of these to celebrate and others to worry about. This diversity is e.g. visible in the organisation of our field (e.g. disciplinary versus theme-based) , in who is involved (researchers from the disciplines, specialised higher education researchers, applied researchers/practitioners) and in who funds/supports research on higher education. I will take the diversity as point of departure to reflect on research on higher education policy.

The diversity of the theme itself: a celebration

Even if we think that market mechanisms do not belong in higher education, one of the positive results of marketization is that higher education policy studies have been broadened from doing “another policy evaluation project” to a rich set of studies that also focus on how, why and to what extent governments increasingly rely on market mechanisms, but also focus on how stakeholders beyond governments are playing an increasingly important role in higher education (as they do in other [semi-]public and even in private sectors). In other words, higher education policy is broadened to depict “... a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule; or the new method by which society is governed” (Rhodes, 1996, p. 652-653). I welcome this development for it allows us – higher education researchers – to broaden our scope and to see policy (change) as part of the larger politico-administrative fabric.

The disciplines and the field specialists: some concerns

The labelling “another policy evaluation project” above, does not do justice to the richness of approaches to policy analysis in general. The disciplinary journals and book series (in political sciences, public administration and public policy, and economics) continue to explore in greater depth aspects of the policy process. Not everything that happens in the disciplines should be welcomed by default, but one should admire the continuing creativity depth of further exploration

of key facets of the policy process. To give a couple of examples: I have put Jordan and Turnpenny's (2015) "The tools of policy formulation: Actors, capacities, venues and effects" and Thissen and Walker's (2013) "Public policy analysis" on my list of books to read. Interestingly: although I cannot present the full evidence of this, my impression is that higher education policy researchers make very limited use of the rich toolbox offered by the disciplines (see also Huisman, 2009). This relates both to the use of general policy theories (as developed by e.g. Sabatier, Kingdom, and Baumgartner and Jones) and the more specialised literature on elements of the policy process (e.g. policy design, policy implementation, policy evaluation). I have the impression that much more synergy can be realised if we would rely much more on the advances made in the disciplines, instead of developing another short-range idiosyncratic explanation of higher education policy.

Who does the research: overall a celebration ... but some concerns

Another impression, again one that would need further substantiation, is that much research is carried out by those who have not been "educated" in the core policy disciplines or as higher education (policy) researchers. I emphasise the value that this brings to our field. Insights from scholars from the humanities (particularly history) and social sciences (anthropology, sociology) have greatly contributed to refined insights in higher education policy and its impact. One of the downsides of the diversity is, however, that it is difficult – even for seasoned scholars – to keep abreast of everything that appears in sometimes very specialised journals. E.g. I would never have come across the illuminating work of anthropologist Strathern (1997), if I had not been nudged by a colleague. And if an interesting source has been discovered, it is not always easy to come to terms with it, for it often requires a deep(er) understanding of the discourses in that particular discipline.

The value this diversity of backgrounds brings is sometimes distorted by contributions from those that think they can speak authoritatively about higher education, for the simple fact that they have "experiences" in that field. Many higher education managers and institutional leaders suffer from this misplaced authority. Most of these contributions are not very productive, because they do not go beyond anecdotes and storytelling and are seldom embedded in the broader knowledge we have on the specific topic.

The love-hate relationship between research and policy/practice

But maybe this is a benign form of "scholarship", for at the same time I think that some higher education policy research does not take sufficient distance from its object of study. Higher education (policy) researchers are studying something they are also subject to. This can bring along tensions and it may be difficult to stay impartial. However, this seems to me key if one of our aims as policy researchers would be to improve policy and practice. We need to continue to speak truth to power (with reference to Aaron Wildavsky's 1979 book title), while at the same time adhering to Merton's values of disinterestedness and organised scepticism.

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Going global – opportunities and challenges for HE researchers *Paul Ashwin*

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Globally participation in Higher Education is rising rapidly. UNESCO figures for enrolment in tertiary education show that globally, participation rose from 19% in 2000 to 32% in 2012. It is also increasingly an international phenomenon; for example, the number of students studying abroad more than doubled from 2.1m in 2000 to 4.5m in 2012.

The increasing numbers of students internationally has contributed to greater scrutiny of higher education, as it has become a key focus of national and international policy makers. This scrutiny has led to unparalleled information about HE. This greater information presents higher education researchers with both challenges and possibilities because it both tells us more about higher education whilst also simplifying its complexities.

If we take the quality of higher as an example, the recent Yerevan Communiqué from EU Higher Education Ministers declared that “Enhancing the quality and relevance of teaching and learning is the main mission of the EHEA”. This both elevates the status of teaching and learning whilst also raising pressing questions about how we judge the quality of teaching in higher education.

Positions in national and international higher education league tables have become a dominant way of representing this quality. Their attraction is understandable: they travel across a number of contexts and audiences as well as having resonance for prospective students and their families, employers, policy makers, academics and universities, and international bodies. However, their shortcomings are equally obvious: they tend to involve unrelated and incomparable measures that are brought together into a single score by algorithms and weightings that lack any statistical credibility. Crucially, the stability at the top of the league tables reinforces privilege: higher status institutions tend to take in a much greater proportion of privileged students. League tables strongly and wrongly suggest that students who have been to these institutions have received a higher quality education. So even as league tables gives us more information about higher education, they are distorting our understanding of its quality. It also distorts our understanding of teaching: making it about history and prestige rather than about the ways in which students are given access to powerful knowledge.

Given the problems with League Tables, another attractive way of examining quality is to compare students' learning outcomes from higher education. The idea here is that comparisons of the quality

of higher education are based on what students can actually do when they graduate. This raises questions about the extent to which student learning outcomes can be standardised across national and disciplinary boundaries and the extent to which they should reflect the particular and authentic achievements of individual students. There are strong pressures for standardisation in order to allow the measurement of the performance of higher education institutions, and to ensure equitable higher education for all students regardless of which institution they study in. The legitimacy of these demands needs to be recognised given the investments that societies and students make in higher education.

On the other side of this tension, is the view that what is higher about higher education is the personal relationship that students develop with disciplinary and professional knowledge. It is this which provides the transformative aspects of higher education that is so highly valued by students, governments and societies. Thus if standardisation leads to a focus on identifying outcomes that are measurable across contexts rather than outcomes that reflect the way in which students' identities are transformed by their engagement with disciplinary and professional knowledge, then the danger is that we lose more than we gain.

The danger of the increase global information about higher education is that the individual, durable and stable elements of higher education that can be easily measured are given a greater value than those that are collective, complex, changing and country-specific. As higher education researchers, we need to engage with such tensions critically, constructively, collectively and courageously. Critically because we need to challenge the tendency to value only what is measurable and carefully identify the ways in which different simplifications, including our own, offer a partial picture of the world's complexity. Constructively because we need to respect and take seriously the concerns of those both inside and outside of higher education research with whom we may strongly disagree. In doing so, we need to offer alternatives ways of addressing these concerns rather than simply dismissing them through critique. Collectively because we need to recognise and emphasise that the value of higher education research comes from the communal bodies of knowledge that it produces rather than individual researchers or projects. Courageously because our contribution to higher education research is always in the process of becoming. This means that our successes and failures are temporary and, as a community, we need to continually work to show the value of what higher education research can offer. This requires us not to underestimate the challenges involved in offering all students a transformative higher education experience but also not to forget the possibilities offered by the power of higher education to transform students' understanding of the world and their position within it.

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Questions of access and widening participation continue to pose significant challenges for policy-makers and practitioners in higher education with enduring and persistent inequalities at play. Research has a central role to play in shaping the future directions of equity policy and practice, creating innovative methodologies and providing detailed and nuanced analysis to examine and unearth the root causes of ongoing inequalities. Research has traced the ways that inequalities are exacerbated by the multiple uncertainties and complexities characterising contemporary higher education, with profound changes being shaped by externally imposed and interconnecting political forces including globalisation, neoliberalism, neoconservatism, corporatisation, neo-patriarchy and neocolonialism. In this contemporary context of higher education, there is increasing pressure for universities to position themselves as 'world-class', to aggressively compete in a highly stratified field driven by discourses of 'excellence' and to address the expectations of an all embracing league table culture striking at the very heart of university research and teaching. The ways that 'excellence' is placed in tension with 'equity' is unspoken and both 'excellence' and 'equity' are reduced to measurable outputs. Against this hyper-competitive and hierarchical landscape, concerns about widening participation, equity and social justice have been narrowed to aspirations of employability, efficiency and competency, with a strong emphasis on business and economic imperatives and logics.

Widening participation policy and practice has been preoccupied with concerns about 'fair access' and 'raising aspirations' of those classified as 'disadvantaged', 'vulnerable' and/or 'excluded' but simultaneously constructed as 'bright', with 'potential', 'talent' and 'ability'. Such perspectives of widening participation have been extensively critiqued by higher education researchers for failing to address the structures, systems, practices and cultures of educational institutions that are deeply complicit in the social reproduction of inequality and exclusion. The politics of recognition, which profoundly forms processes of selection and exclusion and sensibilities of (not) belonging, is concealed from view. The increasing levels of instrumentalism and utilitarianism shaping discourses of widening participation have been challenged for failing to engage significant and complex questions relating to the right to higher education, not only about *who* has access, but also the *purposes* of and what it *means* to participate in higher education in the twenty-first century. Although most universities now aspire to showcase their 'diversity', this is often couched in the language of the market and the growing levels of the commercialisation of higher education. Such frameworks fail to problematise the ways that diversity is entangled with historical inequalities and the politics of difference and recognition.

Universities are increasingly encouraged to develop 'evidence-based' policy and practice but this locks policy-makers and practitioners into constrained and reductive ways of thinking about equity issues. 'Evidence' emphasises generalisability and objectivity, with a strong focus on the tangible, observable and measurable and is often embedded in those technologies of classification that perpetuate rather than challenge polarising discourses and dividing practices. Evidence is clearly important in uncovering patterns of inequality but only provides restrictive knowledge and insight.

The formation of policy and practice for access and widening participation requires a broader 'research-informed' framework, informed by interdisciplinary perspectives and methodologies, that aim to capture the contextual and subjective layers of inequality, which are often *unwittingly* reproduced through taken-for-granted practices or assumptions. Lived and embodied experiences of inequality are difficult to 'evidence' and measure because these work at the everyday level of lived experience and emotion. Generating knowledge about the ways that insidious inequalities work requires a range of fine-tuned research methodologies that are designed to explore the fluidity of power and social relations, the complexity of intersecting differences and socio-cultural contexts, the ways that social practices and processes might be historically embedded and taken-for-granted, as well as to trace, map and quantify patterns of inequality that are intersecting, multiple and contextual.

Research in the field of equity in higher education has noted that widening participation policy discourses tend to focus on *outreach and access*, projecting the problem as 'out there' - outside universities - paying little attention to *participation in higher education*. This ignores the ways that universities are often deeply complicit in perpetuating inequalities and exclusions through standardising and homogenizing technologies, related to aspirations for 'excellence'. Indeed, some researchers have uncovered the ways that the discourses of 'inclusion' operate as a form of symbolic violence, forcing those seen as 'excluded' to conform to the conventions, expectations and values of dominant frameworks and identities and to participate in a process of 'transformation' into normalised personhoods (Archer, 2003). The limited forms of support provided to students from under-represented backgrounds tend to be remedial in nature, informed by polarising discourses (Williams, 1997), designed to 'fix' and re/form those students identified as 'non-standard' into 'legitimate' students. Similarly, new technologies of managerialism (such as key performance indicators, targets and workload formula) are used to regulate the practices and identities of teachers, researchers and professional staff. Students and staff thus learn that to be a 'participant' in higher education requires the continual working of and on the self, to conform to the institutional requirements and expectations which are framed by external technologies of regulation connected to neoliberal forms of globalisation (such as university world rankings).

Hegemonic policies and practices work to silence and make difference and inequality invisible, often through references to social inclusion, widening participation and diversity. Difference tends to be reduced to the marketing images of happy university students from 'Other' kinds of backgrounds. Diversity is often constructed as unproblematic and desirable, whilst difference is to be controlled through standardisation and disciplining processes. The anxiety about the closeness of the 'Other' to those deemed to be legitimate university participants is often expressed through narratives about the 'dumbing down' of HE pedagogies, the 'feminisation of HE' and the assumed lack of discipline, passion for learning and aspiration often associated with students constructed as non-standard from Other social backgrounds. Those seen as deserving of higher education must conform to and master the normalising and disciplining practices of HE pedagogies, participation and practices.

We need a praxis-based approach to equity - that brings interdisciplinary and critical research in dialogue with policy and practice, in a reciprocal, iterative and collaborative framework. The field of research in equity in higher education must be brought into closer relation with equity policy and practice to build collaborative processes that aim to uncover and challenge the exclusionary effects of technologies of regulation, standardisation and homogenisation. Such a praxis-oriented framework requires critical and reflexive attention to the affective, cultural, subjective and symbolic dimensions of higher educational access and participation, to processes of misrecognition, as well as to forms of redistribution.

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Those of us who research higher education, and universities in particular, are endlessly offered rich sources of data from one of the most enduring and fascinating institutions in the world. Higher education is an unusual site of research, given the wide range of disciplines that can be employed and the diversity of approaches that can be taken. It is unusual for other reasons too: here in the SRHE we continue to develop as a very strong community of higher education specialists, but we know that almost anyone who works in academia might fancy trying their hand at doing higher education research, most likely in their classrooms but increasingly with other groups such as administrators or managers. Some of us may despair at the lack of knowledge and depth that higher education research 'amateurs' bring to bear on the field, but others of us encourage novices to get involved, mainly through the postgraduate programmes in academic practice that have become embedded in many institutions. Therefore another distinctive feature of higher education research is that we speak to many audiences through our publications. Mainly - as in common with other disciplinary specialists - we like to talk to each other, but our books and articles are increasingly used in those academic practice programmes just mentioned, and so a wide range of other disciplinary experts are now engaging with our work.

It is not just the textbooks on teaching (eg Ashwin et al 2015) that end up in the hands of our colleagues across our institutions, but it is also the scholarly output of many of the speakers here today. We share this work with others in order to encourage reflection on academic practice and to promote change. I will hesitate before using the somewhat dreaded term 'impact', but I do believe that most of us are here because we value the role that higher education plays in society and we want to continue making positive changes for students and staff in universities. Our belief in the value of higher education then becomes something we want to share with our colleagues who may work in universities but who may identify more with their own disciplinary communities than with their employing institutions.

Yet those of us who do try to promote critical reflection on our practices in higher education soon discover how challenging it is to shift entrenched views as we bump up against old habits and traditions. The 'new' and the 'old' exists side-by-side in universities and this dichotomy engenders another unique feature of higher education research. Particularly in the contemporary context, those of us working in universities are facing enormous prospects of change, yet much of our day-to-day lives continue on in ways that would still be recognisable even to medieval scholars. There are a number of aspects of university life where it is possible to talk in terms of radical, unprecedented change while at the same time we continue on with very familiar practices.

Just to give a quick flavour: technology is one obvious example of an aspect of university life that prompts excited discussions about how a radically new approach to higher education is on the horizon. Technology does offer the potential for teachers to transform their practice, for example, and yet within universities blackboard and chalk are still sometimes used as teaching tools (unlike primary schools). The university itself is another enduring feature of higher education in spite of decades of discussion about its imminent ruin and death. The university as an institution might continue to exist today, but those of us researching higher education tend to write from quite

defensive positions, lamenting the neo-liberal influences on academic life, managerial practices and the corporatization of universities. We note the lack of an articulation of humanitarian values and a social justice ethos. As Bob Lingard argued at a recent conference in Lancaster, the 'world-class university' as a concept is an empty signifier; or as my colleagues Alan Cribb and Sharon Gewirtz suggest, the 'hollowed-out universities' of today lack intrinsic value and have 'no distinctive social role and no ethical *raison-d'être*' (Cribb & Gewirtz 2013: 340).

These paradoxes require a fine balancing act: we need to be cognisant of the importance of tradition, wary of over-hyped claims that radical change is on the way, and yet maintain the ability to foster purposeful change in the face of challenges to our core values. Working with those outside of the field of higher education research is necessary but difficult. Part of my motivation for ruminating on the value and impact of higher education research is because I believe it can and should encourage reflection and change amongst the wider academic community. Those who are not thinking, reading, reflecting and researching on higher education are allowing the value of universities to be ignored and eroded. Here in the SRHE there have been many discussions over a number of years about how we can turn our research into a positive force for change, particularly in relation to policy. I am suggesting we can also use our research more effectively to influence thinking and inform practice amongst our colleagues. We need our audiences to be broad so that together we can re-assert the role of universities in a contemporary climate which demands a clear articulation of purpose.

References

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