

Terms of Inclusion: Equity and the Higher Education Environment

Keynote Address delivered to the One-Day Symposium:¹
'Inclusive Futures: Visions for Student Equity in Higher Education'
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Introduction

I want to begin by thanking Rob, Baden and Soenke, not just for inviting me to speak at this symposium but also, and more importantly, for arranging the symposium itself. Over the past 20 years or so there has been a paucity of research and researchers with interests in student equity issues in Australian higher education, which is somewhat surprising given that the Australian government led the world in this area with the release in 1990 of its policy statement, *A Fair Chance for All*.

I am encouraged that researchers, such as Rob, Baden and Soenke, are again turning their research imaginations to this task and am hopeful that others will follow their lead. We need good research in this field and this needs to be of a kind that approaches the issues from a range of perspectives and in keeping with the cultural and contextual differences evident throughout Australia.

We also need forums, such as this one, in which researchers, practitioners, senior managers, students and interested others can share and discuss the issues with one another.

Before I take up that challenge myself – to share with you what I think is the principal equity challenge for Australian higher education – I want to make one, perhaps two, further observations about this symposium. My reading of the public debate on student equity is that it has moved on, from discussions about who should be given access to university and in what numbers, to what their increased presence in university will mean for higher education.

I think the turning point in this debate – from access to participation – was the federal government's 2009 budget statement, when it became clear that the targets² for the sector, set by the Deputy Prime Minister earlier in the year, were to be accompanied by funding incentives.³

Rob, Baden and Soenke's HEESP-funded project, from which this symposium is derived, clearly speaks to this more recent turn of events and it is a credit to their foresight that their project was formulated before the shift in public debate and before the release of the Bradley

¹ The symposium is part of a project funded under the Higher Education Equity Support Program (HEESP), conducted by Southern Cross University's School of Arts and Social Sciences, in conjunction with SCU's Centre for Peace and Social Justice.

² By 2025, 40% of 25 to 34 year olds to hold a bachelors degree or above; by 2020, 20% of university students to come from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds.

³ In particular, an enrolment loading for every low SES student, starting from mid 2009 at around \$100 extra for every enrolled low SES student and rising in 2012 to around \$1000 extra for every enrolled low SES student.

Review, which placed some of these ‘inside-higher-education’ issues on the broader policy agenda.

I should make clear, though, that even though the focus of the debate may have shifted, there is still much for us to consider and do in relation to who gains entry to university and, by implication, who does not. It is important for us to continue to have the first debate, about higher education access.

In fact, we would do well to conceive of these two debates as one of the same. Mary Kelly – QUT’s Equity Director – has often said to me that the reasons that some people do not see university as an option are often the same reasons that university students decide to leave. In other words, we hold too fast to ‘the point of entry’ to university as a marker between the issues.

I intend to traverse these two accounts in my comments today. My central argument is that higher education is set to be **different**, but if it is to make a **difference** for students from equity groups, we will need to think **differently** about higher education itself. That is, the challenge for equity in a universal higher education system is to valorize more than just the diversity of student bodies included. It also needs to legitimate the knowledges and the ways of knowing these bodies embody.

In making this argument, I will cover three main areas:

- The first outlines what I see as the broad changes to higher education that arise from the Government’s new policy settings for the sector;
- The second takes up the issue of how students are relatively positioned in higher education, particularly students from low socioeconomic backgrounds but also students from other under-represented socio-cultural groups;
- The third is focused on the core of higher education – on teaching and learning – including the possibility of introducing not just different students but also different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, first as matters of equity but also as matters of expediency.

The third is probably more germane to my argument than the first and second, although these help to contextualise the latter.

Strategically, it makes sense to address equity issues in higher education at its core. Currently, the bulk of our equity effort within universities is in developing support services, transition programs and extra-curricula activities for equity students, which are inevitably peripheral to universities’ mainstream activities.

To be clear, I think that student support, adjusting administrative processes, extra-curricular activities, and the like, are incredibly important in enabling those from under-represented groups to find success at university. However, success of this kind is always on someone else’s terms.

I will return to these matters but I want to begin first with what I think is the inkling of a change within many OECD nations in the purposes of higher education, in how these have been traditionally conceived.

A qualitatively different higher education: The 40% attainment target and an expanded role for HE

We stand at the beginning of a new era in Australian higher education. It is a watershed moment. At least, that's if Australian universities are able to achieve the attainment target set by the Australian Government, of 40% of 25 to 34 year olds with bachelor degrees by 2025. If we achieve this – and we are currently running at about 32% (Gillard 2009a)⁴ – it will be the fifth expansion phase of Australian higher education since its inception in 1850.

- The establishment phase began with the formation of The University of Sydney, the first university in Australia, and the creation thereafter of most of the others now in the Group of Eight,⁵ which created opportunities for some Australians to gain a higher education without having to travel overseas.
- The second expansion followed the Mills (1950), Murray (1957) and Martin (1964) reports of the 1950s and 1960s, with the creation by the Menzies Federal Government of Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs)⁶ to address the nation's human capital needs and a growing 'baby boomer' population with expectations of accessing higher education.⁷
- The third expansion phase occurred from about the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s. This was a period in which most states established new multidisciplinary universities.⁸ It was also the period in which they agreed to transfer financial and administrative responsibility for their universities to the Whitlam Federal Government. What followed was a substantial injection of funds into the system, creating more places to appease the increasing demands of the expanding middle classes.

⁴ In announcing the 40% attainment target in March 2009, Julia Gillard referred to the percentage of 24 to 34 year olds with a bachelor's degree as 32%. In the Bradley Review (2008: 18), the 2006 figure was quoted at 29%.

⁵ The establishment phase of Australian higher education spanned almost 100 years. The Universities of Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide were founded in the mid 19th century. (The University of Tasmania, not one of the Go8, was founded in 1890.) The other five Go8 universities were founded in the 20th century, the last (the Australian National University) in 1946.

⁶ From 1960 to 1966, most states established Institutes of Technology: RMIT (Vic; 1960), SAIT (SA; 1960), NSWIT (NSW; 1964), QIT (Qld; 1965), WAIT (WA; 1966). While these later became universities or parts of universities under the Dawkins reforms, at the time they were not part of the provision of higher education.

⁷ The creation of CAEs followed the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS), which was introduced to offer vocational or academic training to men and women who had served with the Australian armed services during the second world war. Not specifically directed at expanding higher education, the CRTS operated from 1944 to 1951, providing payment of tuition and other fees, including a living allowance for those undertaking full time training.

⁸ Macquarie (NSW; 1964), Flinders (SA; 1966), La Trobe (Vic; 1967), Griffith (Qld; 1971), Murdoch (WA; 1974).

- And the fourth phase came about via the Dawkins reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which, through amalgamations and other strategies, raised CAEs, Institutes of Technology, and Teacher Training Colleges to the status of universities, effectively creating more university places, as did the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) which helped to fund the sector's expansion more generally.

In Trow's (2005: 244) terms, higher education in Australia, as in most other OECD nations, shifted across these four periods from an elite (0-15%) to a mass (16-50%) system. The proposed fifth expansion of Australian higher education will inevitably move us into a system of universal higher education (that is, over 50%), and it will be a qualitatively different phase from its predecessors, in at least two ways:

- First, in what influences access to higher education;
- And second, in the imagined social and economic benefits that it provides.

For the most part, the first four phases of expansion were prompted by the demand for higher education exceeding its supply. This was particularly the case leading up to both the Whitlam and the Dawkins reforms. Indeed, it was in the lead up to the latter period that the term 'unmet demand' (Rayner & Whittaker 1985) was first coined, at a time of high retention rates in the nation's secondary schools and pent up frustration by a growing number of eligible applicants who were denied access to university.

Today the scenario is quite different. It is true that demand for higher education remains greater than its supply, but only marginally. About 94% of eligible applicants were offered a university place in 2008 (DEEWR 2008: 18). At 6%, current unmet demand is nothing like the record highs of the 1960s / 1970s and the 1980s / 1990s, and is rapidly trending down from the most recent peak of just over 16% in 2004.

It is possible that some of the demand for higher education has been diverted into VET, given the 2% rise in that sector's student population from 2007 to 2008, most notably by 15 to 19 year olds (NCVER 2009: 8). This is at the same time that most Australian states have raised the minimum school leaving age to 17, so that student retention rates are quite high. At the same time, the Federal Government has placed a 'learn or earn' requirement on young people receiving Youth Allowance.

It is in this context that the Federal Government's 2009 budget, announced that it has lifted the cap on the number of students that universities can enrol,⁹ effectively allowing demand to determine supply.¹⁰ In fact, the concurrent 40% target will require universities not just to soak up the current unmet demand but to create demand that currently does not exist.¹¹

⁹ To ease transition into uncapped enrolments, the cap will be lifted progressively: from 5% to 10% in 2010-11 and removed altogether from 2012 (Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 17).

¹⁰ The University of Western Australia and the University of Adelaide have already announced that they intend to lift their undergraduate student numbers by about 5000 each.

¹¹ There are some that suggest that expansion across the sector of this magnitude will just not be possible (Gallagher 2009; Hilmer 2009). For example, in 2008, Australian universities received 216,134 eligible applications for 132,552 places (Universities Australia 2008: 5). To meet the 40% target, the number of additional places would need to increase by 50,000 to 100,000 per annum,

We are now entering a period in which universities will be required to manufacture demand for higher education, to address ‘unmet supply’. **The effect will be to shift the emphasis from achievement to aspiration as the primary determiner of university access.**

The second qualitative difference that an expanded higher education system throws up is its increased role in preparing Australians, and citizens in other OECD countries, for a different economy and society.

Australia is not alone in the move to greater higher education attainment. In fact, the Australian government is setting targets in this area in order to chase down benchmark OECD nations (see Table 1). In the ten years from 1996 to 2006, Australia slipped from 7th to 9th in the list of countries whose 25 to 34 year olds hold bachelor degrees; a slide that Bradley (2008: 18) suggests will be accentuated in the absence of immediate remediation.

As Julia Gillard has noted, “other comparable nations have set exacting targets for participation in recent years. For Germany the target is 40 per cent. For Sweden and the UK it is 50 per cent. For the Irish, it’s 72 per cent.” (Gillard 2009a).

These participation and attainment rates are in the realm of universal higher education (over 50%) and have parallels with the introduction of universal schooling in the nineteenth century. Then, the motivation was to ensure an elementary education for all, albeit justified in the context of “the needs of an expanding and changing [industrial] economy” (Williams 1961: 161), which required large numbers of specifically prepared workers.

As Foster explained at the time, “upon the speedy provision of elementary education depends our industrial prosperity” (Foster 1870, in Williams 1961: 162).

Today, OECD nations are no longer leaders in the world’s industrial economy – having ceded that position to countries like China and India – and have set their sights on dominating the global knowledge economy.

Still, justifications for increased participation in higher education have a familiar ring:

Individuals who participate in higher education are enriched not just intellectually through engagement with local, national and global communities, but also economically by gaining access to challenging, highly-skilled and well-paid jobs. ... Of course, their success benefits the whole society with its contribution to national productivity. **An effective higher education sector, which makes greater use of Australia’s human capital, enhances national productivity and global competitiveness.** (Bradley et al. 2008: 27)

Julia Gillard has argued similarly that:

Investing wisely in knowledge, skills and innovation is one of the best means available to ensure long-term prosperity, leading to both overall economic growth and to better education and work opportunities (Gillard 2008)

depending on which forward estimates are assumed. Even at a minimum, this far exceeds the current number of eligible applicants. Moreover, it has been estimated that to create the places for these students would require the equivalent of six or seven additional universities the size of the University of New South Wales (Gallagher 2009; Hilmer 2009).

In Australia and many other OECD nations, higher education has taken over the mantle from schooling, and probably also from vocational education and training institutions, as the mechanism through which to produce a new citizenry and a new economy. It is being sold as having benefits for individuals as well as for the nation, particularly in terms of economic prosperity.

Equity, where and how: the 20% participation target and the terms of inclusion

However, not everyone is as sanguine about these higher education benefits, particularly for people from under-represented groups, even when they gain access to higher education. There are at least two reasons for this.

- The first has to do with the differentiated and stratified nature of Australia's higher education system and the differentiated benefits it imparts to students;
- The second concerns the terms of inclusion in higher education for students from under-represented groups.

Regarding the first, most are now familiar with the equity participation target the Australian Government has set for the sector: by 2020, 20% of university students are to come from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. It is important to note that this is a target for the sector. It is not the case that each institution's student population will be required to emulate this 20% target.

As Julia Gillard has noted:

... every higher education institution must play its part. Our elite institutions have by far the lowest proportion of low socio-economic status enrolments. While **uniformity will never be possible or desirable**, every institution should be able to improve its social inclusiveness. (Gillard 2009b)

Notwithstanding its current performance, each university will be required, through its individual compacts with government,¹² to improve on its current enrolment of low SES students. To sweeten the deal, the government has introduced financial incentives for universities in the form of enrolment loadings for every low SES student they enrol: \$100 extra per low SES student from mid 2009 rising to \$1000 extra per low SES student in 2012.

This should deliver a financial windfall of sorts for universities with high levels of low SES student enrolments. However, the outcome for low SES students themselves is uncertain.

This is because universities with the lowest enrolment of low SES students tend to be the ones that impart to students the most social and economic benefits. Go8 or elite universities have notoriously low rates of low SES student enrolments.

¹² The Australian government plans to introduce mission-based compacts between individual universities and the federal government to "help set performance targets for each institution in relation to quality, attainment and participation by students from under-represented groups" (Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 47).

Whereas, regional universities in particular, but also significant metropolitan institutions, have high rates of low SES student enrolments, or rather, rates that are comparable with the representation of people from low SES backgrounds within the broader population.

The same can be said about undergraduate courses or fields of study. Low SES students tend to be well represented in fields such as nursing and teaching but comparatively less well represented in medicine and law. Similarly, students from low SES backgrounds are more highly represented in undergraduate than in postgraduate courses.

The point here is that higher education is not all the same and an expanded system is likely to further accentuate the differentiation and stratification of outcomes for university students according to their socioeconomic status. This is irrespective of targets and incentives to enrol more students from low SES backgrounds, unless the government-institution compacts can be used to lower student enrolment variations by equity type across institutions and fields of study, while maximising low SES student participation.

This is only one aspect of the new terms of inclusion. A second involves how students from under-represented groups experience higher education and how they are viewed by it. Nothing in the current policy settings seem directed at ensuring a more equitable distribution of students from low SES backgrounds across the system.

And even if this could be achieved, it would “tells us little about whether the new entries are incorporated into unchanging centres of higher learning” (Ramirez 2006: 444). Indeed, universities are often described as impenetrable environments and “as chilly climates for underrepresented groups” (Ramirez 2006: 445).

For Indigenous, regional and rural, and low SES students, these are not simply questions of adjustment. They are also about what to adjust and what to retain. Typically, it is institutions that seek to make adjustments to students, to support them in ‘rising to the challenge’ of higher education.

But what if these adjustments are such that for equity groups there is more to be lost than to be gained from higher education? Instead, what if the adjustment required was to the system, to create an alternative system of higher education that enabled students to retain their socio-cultural identities?

For example, with the introduction of mass schooling in a largely Protestant United States:

The Catholic hierarchy did not want to lose souls, but it was sufficiently committed to American ideals of progress and learning that it constructed an elaborate system of mass schooling for Catholics. (Ramirez 2006: 439)

Similar approaches have been taken up in higher education. It is not uncommon to find universities around the world with alternative organising logics,¹³ typically informed by religion and gender, but also ethnicity and even poverty.¹⁴

¹³ Connell (1993: 50-54) argues that there are three curriculum logics: 1. *The logic of compensation*, which involves (a) bringing the disadvantaged up to the standards of the advantaged, and (b) which may require increased resources; 2. *The logic of oppositional curriculum*, which (a) rejects the

But setting up alternative higher education institutions is not the only way to think about how to adjust higher education to take account of different kinds of students. It should also be possible, even desirable, to change higher education from the inside, to unsettle “the centre-periphery relations in the realm of knowledge” (Connell 2007: viii).

In the past, and in much of the present, universities have tended to make assumptions about the knowledges and understandings of their students, even in relation to those who have come from privileged backgrounds. Higher education learning environments and student experiences have been informed by what Paulo Freire (1996: 52) has termed a ‘banking concept’ of education: with academics making deposits in the minds of their students from which they (both) are able to make later withdrawals.

There has been little regard for what students bring to university, to the learning environment and experience, and little regard for what they are potentially able to contribute. Knowledge has been assumed to reside in the cloisters of the university, in the hands and heads of its dons. Indeed, universities and their scholars have positioned themselves as the legitimate, almost exclusive, producers of knowledge.

But we are beginning to understand that this is not necessarily the case, at least in some cases. For example, Australian higher education is starting to come to terms with the importance of Indigenous knowledges, although this is more prevalent in places like Canada and in parts of Africa. Apart from a distinctive body of knowledge, Indigenous peoples also have different ways of engaging with and expressing knowledge, for example through narrative.

Narrative is not a teaching or research method traditionally employed in universities. Indeed, it has been and still is regarded by many as ‘unscientific’. Yet there are things that all students can learn from a narrative approach. Even in this past year, since student equity has become hot on everyone’s lips, I have heard several Vice Chancellors whose discipline origins are in the hard sciences, express their personal and institutional commitment to student equity through a narrative of their own circumstances.

Narrative has explanatory power that should not be under-estimated.

Similarly, international students are now very much part of the landscape of Australian universities. Their very presence, and in such numbers, has changed Australian higher education for domestic students, for the most part for the better. They have challenged our epistemologies and ontologies and prompted many Australian academics to think differently about the kind of higher education offered to all, not just to students who come from overseas.

mainstream curriculum as it produces unequal outcomes, (b) involves a curriculum that is separated off from the mainstream, and which (c) aims to be ‘a collectively produced body of knowledge by a group reflecting their own experience and history’; and 3. *A counter-hegemonic curriculum logic*, which aims to generalise the viewpoint of the disadvantaged to reconstruct the system as a whole.

¹⁴ For example, see the International Islamic University, Malaysia (<http://www.iiu.edu.my/>); Islamic University of Science and Technology, India (<http://www.islamicuniversity.edu.in/>); the State Islamic University Jakarta, Indonesia (<http://www.uinjkt.ac.id/>); Sonoda Women’s University, Japan (<http://www.sonoda-u.ac.jp/>); the SNTD Women’s University in India (<http://www.indiaeducation.ernet.in/insitutions/profile.asp?no=U00434>)

Internationalising the curriculum may be regarded by some as a matter of translation, positioning teaching staff as interpreters. But for many Australian academics it is more importantly about recognising and being informed by different ways of thinking about and engaging with the world, informed by the social and cultural backgrounds of their international students.

These are matters of pedagogy as much as they are about curriculum. Improving the student learning experience is not simply about teaching students about foreign places or Indigenous knowledges, although there is certainly a place for that.

Rather, it is about the need for a curriculum that provides room for different ways of thinking about, and different ways of engaging with knowledge, and indeed inserting different kinds of understandings that perhaps have not been part of Australian higher education before. It is about how we structure the student learning experience in ways that open it up and make it possible for students to contribute from whom they are and what they know. It is about an enriched learning experience for *all* students.

Principles for teaching and learning: knowing and ways of knowing

There are at least three different sets of teaching and learning principles that have gained currency in the higher education environment, albeit in different higher education systems. In comparing them, three things are worth noting.

First, not all principle-sets are the same and they do not agree on the ideal number, but there are at least three principles that seem to be consistent across each set.

The narrative that weaves these together is that:

- **Curriculum design:** There is a diversity of learners and ways of learning, which need to be taken into account when designing learning and learning activities;
- **Pedagogy:** Learners learn best when learning activities require them to be actively engaged;
- **Assessment:** Assessment should have a pedagogical intent, making a contribution to students' learning and not just serving an institutional purpose of allocating grades.

These seem eminently sensible, almost 'motherhood' statements, with which few would disagree. They – and many of the other principles – are also informed by a particular constructivist theory of learning, which posits that people learn through their experiences, through activity, by doing.

This, then, is my second observation. In the main, these principles share a particular philosophical orientation that emphasises the role of the individual in the learning process. George Kuh, the founder of the US National Survey of Student Engagement, provides the perfect illustration of this way of thinking.

Kuh has often asserted that:

When we control for factors such as students' socioeconomic backgrounds, parents' education and students' measured level of academic achievement prior to university, it

turns out that **how much students learn is not a function of who they are, it's a function of what they do.** (Kuh in Leech 2009: 3; *Campus Review* 7 July 2009)

Of course, if we are to take 'a sophisticated approach to equity' (Bradley et al. 2008) as Denise Bradley encourages us, stripping back learning to what individuals do is at the heart of the higher education problematic for equity groups.

It imagines that **what** people are asked to learn has no bearing on **how well** they learn it. It fails to take into account that **who people are**, in relationship with others and where they are located, has a bearing on what they already know and what they count as worthwhile.

It is like imagining that an Indigenous person has no connection with the land, other than a European notion of ownership that allows for land to be bought and sold or acquired by force. It is like suggesting to a working-class person that knowledge can be generated outside contexts of practice or that contexts of practice rely on abstract knowledge to inform action.

It is in fact hard to imagine how **who people are** can be disentangled from **what they do** and, hence, what they might learn from the experience.¹⁵

Thirdly, and to be fair, buried in these sets of principles are three that hint of a more critical constructivism that moves us towards socio-cultural, even political understandings of teaching and learning. I deliberately want to emphasise what I see to be the possibility of an equity principle in each of them.

Consider then:

- **Student-faculty contact:** which signals a level of significance for students in the higher education environment, in their own terms; students matter, time spent with them in intellectual discussion matters, engagement with who they are matters;
- **Informal learning:** which acknowledges that students learn things outside the official boundaries of education systems and that these knowledges and ways of knowing have value, that they have something to contribute to higher education;

¹⁵ I have recently had the pleasure of reading a pre-publication book manuscript written by Derrick Armstrong and his colleagues (Sage, 2009 in press), in which each of them provide a personal account of the development of their interest in 'inclusive education', the subject of their book, as a kind of epilogue. I was particularly engrossed in Derrick's account, which illustrates very clearly and strongly the relationship between what he did (e.g. welder, taxi driver, student, academic) and what he learned (welding, driving, inclusive education) but also how both of these were related to who he was (working-class, English). One does not drive taxis if one is born into the aristocracy! Rather, one learns to wait for one's inheritance (see <http://sixtyminutes.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=833424>). I have also recently come across a book by Ernst von Glasersfeld (1994) titled *Radical Constructivism: A way of knowing and learning*. The first chapter contains a wonderful narrative of the author's early years of learning, born into the home of an Austrian diplomat at the rather awkward time of the end of the first world war and into a world rich with language. Again it illustrates the strong relationship between who he was (the son of an Austrian diplomat who, through the shift in national boundaries, became a Czech), what he learned (which was closely related to where he was and when) and how well (French less well than German, English, Italian, etc). Because of the fortunes of war, his father, once an Austrian diplomat became a Czech photographer. What clearer evidence is needed of the relationship between who you are and what you do?

- **Research for teaching:** which is not research that determines what to teach (and learn) but which informs the teaching and learning experience, which informs teachers about how to engage with different knowledges and ways of knowing, including research about what students know and how they know.

One way of translating this acknowledgement of marginalised knowledges into real world curriculum is through what is known as a *funds of knowledge* approach (Moll et al. 1992; González 2005). This includes recognising that all students come with valuable understandings that can contribute to the education of others.

The approach requires identifying and inviting students' knowledges into the learning environment and using them to develop curricula. Students are then positioned differently, because they are now expert in the kinds of knowledges that inform the learning experience.

Complementing this approach, Lew Zipin (2009) argues that we also need to identify *funds of pedagogy*. It is not just the knowledges from students' different socio-cultural groups but also the ways in which students learn in those groups, which need to be taken into account.

Finding a way of bringing those into the formal learning environment is far more challenging to the logic of higher education. To bring in different content is one thing. To bring in different ways of knowing at a deeper level is more threatening.

A third approach is potentially a hybrid or fusion of these funds (González 2005). It involves lightly framed, open curricula and pedagogy that allow for student contributions, without these being predetermined.

Such an approach has implications for:

- The repositioning of lecturers, peers, academic literature, fieldwork, and so on, as resources for students' learning; and
- The repositioning of disciplines and traditions as resources to aid the understanding of issues, problems, themes, etc.

Of course, these are tentative ideas that need fleshing out in the higher education context but they have significant potential to re-inform the way we currently do higher education.

Conclusion

To conclude, let me try to pull all this together in these last few minutes. In my mind at least, I have made three main points:

- First, we are headed for a fifth expansion of higher education in Australia, of 'unmet supply' and therefore aspiration as a key driver of access to university. The intention is to shore up the nation's economic prosperity by creating more knowledge workers for the knowledge economy. The hope is that people from equity groups will be swept up in the expansion;
- Second, Australian higher education is differentiated and delivers differentiated benefits to students. Students from equity groups tend to be located in parts of the system that deliver the least benefits. However, even in the best of locations, the terms of their inclusion are such that 'who they are' is often excluded from 'what is to be done';

- And third, a more sophisticated approach to student equity and social inclusion entails the creation of space in higher education not just for new kinds of student bodies but also for their embodied knowledges and ways of knowing. It applies not just to Indigenous peoples, their knowledges and ways of knowing, but has relevance for the epistemologies of all socio-cultural groups, including people of low socioeconomic status.

The sun is currently shining on student equity in Australian higher education and on social inclusion in Australian education more broadly. There is an air of expectancy, a sense that things are now possible in a way that they were not possible before. A plethora of equity forums, such as this one, are appearing right across the Australian higher education landscape.

There is also an increased sense of a joined-up education system, at least conceptually if not structurally, and particularly with regard to social inclusion. Funds to undertake research and implement programs are flowing relatively freely. There are many seeking information about what to do and many are appearing with apparent answers. Equity has become sexy again.

But the sun will not shine forever. Things could be very different for student equity in three years time, even one year from now. To ensure that equity is not just a fad, that it is embed into the very fabric of higher education, we will need to make hay while the sun shines. We will need to be active and strategic in rewriting the terms of students' inclusion. Thank you.

PANEL SESSION: “Visions for equitable and inclusive University cultures”

(2 mins; 356 words) This session is about transcending the constraints of the present and talking about some big picture ideas and visions. **Panel members:** Prof Trevor Gale; Prof Janet Taylor, Director Teaching and Learning at SCU; Associate Prof Baden Offord, Co-Director, Centre for Peace and Social Justice at SCU; Dr Jeff Nelson, Director of Research, Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples at SCU; chaired by Jenny Dowell, Mayor of Lismore.

For some time, Lisa Delpit (1996: 163-165) has championed a ‘two-ways’ or ‘both-ways’ education in schooling. For example:

In many Aboriginal schools, there has been a conscious exploration and development of notions of ‘two-ways’ or ‘both-ways’ education; perhaps universities, too, should be exploring more consciously and deliberately how this can be achieved – and this is a task not only for Aboriginal education units, but for the whole university. (Kemmis 1997: 12)

A ‘two-ways’ approach to (higher) education is predicated on a commitment to socio-cultural diversity. “Valorized diversity raises questions about what counts as knowledge and these questions in turn influence what is taught in universities and colleges throughout the world” (Ramirez 2006: 444).

Drawing on Delpit, we can argue that universities and their educators need to:

- Acknowledge and validate students’ ways of expressing their knowledge of the world, and to add to this other ways of knowing and expressing this knowledge;

- Acknowledge that official knowledge can require students to choose between an allegiance to 'them' or 'us', and to find ways in which to saturate dominant forms of knowledge with new meaning so that there is space for students to retain a sense of themselves;
- And openly acknowledge that education systems produces inequitable outcomes, based not on merit but on sponsorship, and then provide students with the resources to work the system.

There is evidence in higher education of a 'both-ways' approach bearing fruit. For example, women's and feminist studies have not only successfully valorized new forms of knowledge in higher education but positioned women as equal even if different subjects. Similar arguments can be made in relation to the emergence of race and ethnicity studies. And we have already seen the influence of the dramatic influx of international students into higher education in Australia, the UK and the USA, with universities internationalising their curricula, not simply providing students with language and cross-cultural support. In a similar vein, the importance of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing is starting to gain traction in higher education but we are yet to see the generalization of this principle to include students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

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