



**Higher Education in the UK and the USA since Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan:
Converging Models?**

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ABSTRACTS

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The English Experiment in Market-based Higher Education - ideology and reality disconnected

Abstract:

The UK government's proposals for new arrangements for financing HE in England represent a new ideological development. The Dearing committee's settlement in 1998 introduced student fees on the basis that the benefits of higher education were shared between student and state and therefore the cost should be shared. The new arrangements make the student entirely responsible for meeting the costs, and although the case that this has not been argued by the government, the logic of the Dearing settlement would appear to be that there is no public benefit from the education of higher education student.

Despite this apparent ideological shift, the reality in England is that the government will continue to subsidise student education, though only by providing subsidies for loans that students will be provided in order to pay their fees - direct funding of University teaching is to cease. There is a different ideology at work here, more recognisable as based on neoliberal economics, which relies upon market dynamics and consumer choice as the drivers for quality improvement and cost containment.

This paper will explore the new ideologies and their implications, as well as the contradictions and difficulties they pose when applied in public higher education.

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The consumer model of higher education: The 'BA-lite' awarded in the US, UK, and Canada

Abstract:

The results of various studies suggest that the study time necessary to earn a BA has declined over the past few decades to the point where full-time university students need only treat their studies as a part-time commitment, and they can still obtain high grades and graduate. Data obtained and analysed by the author from the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) show that on average Canadian and American students now spend 12-13 hours in out-of-class study and assignment completion, regardless of institutional size. With an additional (maximum) 15 hours of in-class time, the average time spent on 'becoming educated' is less than 30 hours per week, not the 40 hours historically associated with a full-time commitment. These figures correspond with results found in several European countries, most notably the UK. These trends are discussed in terms of the spread of mass higher education encouraged by the neoliberal influence on universities to market themselves as vendors of credentials to student consumers, whose 'satisfaction' trumps educational standards.

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The Quality of the Student's Learning Experience:

A strategic dimension of American and British higher education systems in the early 21st century

Abstract:

This paper examines the strategic role that the quality of the student's learning experience has come to play in the American and in the British higher education sectors via national student surveys. Starting with a general analysis of the different approaches of quality assurance issues in the two countries (Rhoades & Sporn 2002), the paper considers the increasing weight given to the student voice through the institutional assessment of student satisfaction and of student engagement in the early 21st century, with the National Student Survey (NSS) in the United Kingdom and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in the USA. The rationale, theoretical foundations and contents of each survey are studied in turn and a brief syntactic and lexical comparison is drawn (Higher Education Academy 2007; Kuh 2001; Détourbe 2011). The strategic part played by the student voice is then analysed against quality assurance principles on the one hand and educational principles on the other. Thus, in the US, the focus on student engagement appears as a reaction by educators to long-standing productivity-oriented quality assurance mechanisms whereas in the UK, state-driven quality assurance mechanisms put student satisfaction at the heart of a system in which reputation indicators are paramount. Interestingly though, some British universities are considering assessing student engagement too, raising new questions about the meaning of student surveys amongst already heated debates about the role and purpose of higher education in the UK (Collini 2011, 2012; Thomas 2011; Vernon 2011).

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Education Markets in English and American Universities

Abstract:

The paper examines the fundamental differences in the way higher education markets work in England and America, differences that underscore the limited utility of the idea of an "Anglo-American model of higher education." While there are certainly some similarities between the two higher education markets, the differences are more compelling.

One of the most obvious differences is the size and importance of the private sector in the two countries. Many of the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the U.S. are private, whereas the private institutions in England are fewer and much less significant.

However, the main focus of the paper is on differences between the American public higher education sector and its English counterpart. These differences reflect the multiplicity of government agencies that play a role in American public higher education as contrasted to the much more centralized system in England. The result is very different policies in the two systems.

By close examination of the very different higher education markets, then, we argue that the two systems are so distinct that the concept of an "Anglo-American model" of higher education obscures rather than clarifies the relationship between the two systems.

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Higher Education in the UK under Tony Blair as seen through the media

Abstract:

This paper, through an analysis of the various articles related to education, published in *The Economist* and the *New Statesman* from 1997 to 2007, aims at pointing out the main issues at stake in higher education during the *New Labour* mandates. In this period where the objective was to have 50% of students between 18 and 30 enter university and where the question of top-up fees gave rise to a vivid debate, the issue of financing both of the institution and, on an individual level, of studies, appeared as the central question described and commented by the media. The paper will thus try to sketch the image media discourse (both articles and letters to the editor) give of higher education.

It will see how the example of the U.S.A is repeatedly used in these magazines, most often as a model or to promote the *New Labour* policy.

Finally, the paper will focus on the way socio-economic and political magazines depict the new role of higher education which is to create riches and to be cost-effective in a new knowledge economy.

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The Evolution of Funding Policies in American and British Elite Universities

Abstract:

This paper, which examines how the elite American and British universities have dealt with the reforms that were initiated during the Reagan and Thatcher Eras, focuses primarily on the links between institutional autonomy and the diversification of funding sources. First, the historical differences between the Ivy League universities and Oxbridge in what concerns their modes of governance and funding are pointed out. Those different modes were to accord more independence from government interference and allow the leading American universities to play a more active role in the changes to their higher education system. Similar methods of governance and funding have recently been gaining ground in Oxford and Cambridge. This article, which takes Harvard and Oxford as a dual-case study, analyses the different evolution of financial management in the elite American and British universities, whilst underlining their points of convergence.

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Higher Education in Protest: Do current and former students differ from people who have never gone to University?

Abstract:

At the end of 2010, just when everybody seemed to assume that students and campuses are no longer political, the UK was confronted with a resurgence of the student movement, with many demonstrations organised in central London, some of which turned violent. Several universities were occupied by students for weeks. Survey data collected at major protests in the UK in the last two years within the framework of the European project Caught in the Act of Protest (Klandermans et al. 2009) show that two out of ten demonstrations were student demonstrations where more than 60% of participants were full-time students. Moreover, an average of 15% of participants at all protests were full-time students and 82% of participants hold a BA or a higher degree. These data seem to suggest that universities steadily foster participation in protests, and that perhaps the UK student movement was only in abeyance (Taylor 1989). But what is due to universities in explaining protest participation? The literature is divided. In this paper we address this issue by asking: are there differences between current students, former students and people who have never gone to university among participants in protests? Our findings contribute to the literature explaining student participation in protest with campus-based politicisation (Crossley 2008) and the importance of networks in general (Diani and McAdam 2003) for understanding politicisation. Full-time students differ from former students and non-students only in terms of being more embedded in networks. Our results therefore seem to disprove the idea of campuses as radicalising places (e.g. Rootes 1980). On the other hand, there are no significant differences between former students and non-students, which seems to suggest that higher education does not have a long term impact on protest participation.

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The student experience in the US and the UK: A depressing picture of decline?

Abstract:

This paper will start by considering the wealth of available evidence that would seem to paint a depressing picture of decline in higher education on both sides of the Atlantic. Drawing on recently published sources from the US and the UK, this paper will summarise the key data presented. 5 Whether it is grade inflation, hours spent studying, or evidence of instrumentalism, the claims are the same - a decline in the student experience, a decline in outcomes and a decline in standards. However, the paper will go on to question both the veracity and the interpretation of this data, and whether we actually have sufficiently robust mechanisms to reliably make such claims. Finally, it will also consider whether any problems that do exist are in fact special to the US and the UK, and 10 whether, rather than declining, some problems may actually have existed for some considerable time.

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Higher Education in the UK and California: Issues of access, equality and achievement in a time of Excellence

Abstract:

Higher education in the US and the UK has gone through significant changes during the past three decades, notably the transition to a mass system. As higher education has expanded, its value as a public good has been increasingly associated with national competitiveness and individual upward mobility. Given its size and efficiency, California's system offers a particularly relevant comparative model for UK higher education. The paper will first look at both higher education systems and show that their distinctive histories and cultures have led to opposite policies and reform processes: on the one hand, the UK has tended to unify a highly decentralized and autonomous system, on the other hand, California has sought to maintain the diversity of its tripartite structure of public colleges and universities. Yet, one sees a pattern of convergence in the continuing effort to broaden access and opportunity while responding to government mandates and global economic forces: in both countries, recent reform movements have tended to solve the dilemma of achieving expansion and performance. The notions of academic excellence and equality of opportunity will provide a framework for highlighting common patterns of development of higher education and higher education policies in the 21st century. The paper will more particularly focus on the multiple routes to higher education in the UK and California to show that the democratization of academic access is relative and hides persisting inequalities. The analysis will emphasize the fact that through their responses to global changes translating into distinct, yet comparable, dynamics of expansion, both systems tend to reproduce and maintain existing social stratification and cultural differences. Finally, it will strive to find how to combine the goals of economic competitiveness with the needs of an increasingly diverse student population and gain insight into the future of higher education as related to academic excellence and equality of opportunity.

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Access and the rise of accountability in the governance of public universities in the US

Abstract:

Since the 1990s, as a consequence of changes in federal funding and the new financial responsibilities assigned to state governments, US states have had to adjust their higher education policy and governance, and define more precisely the objectives they expected their public colleges and universities to meet. In spite of a diversity of situations, some general trends can be defined. This paper first studies the evolution of state governance of higher education in the US, as states have had to decrease their share of the budgets of public higher education institutions and at the same time strive to maintain some degree of affordability. They have done so by getting more involved in defining general policies for higher education, setting common goals and accountability measures related to student success. The analysis focuses on three very different states, California, Illinois and West Virginia, and compares the state governance choices made and their implementation of performance assessment. The paper finally considers the consequences of accountability policies on access to higher education in the US.

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The Moral Projects of Neoliberalism and Higher Education Reform in the US and the UK

Abstract:

If one of the ultimate goals of neoliberalism was to “change the soul,” as Margaret Thatcher famously put it, higher education reform has become one of the means through which this change has been orchestrated both in the UK and the US. Over the last few decades both systems have seen substantial changes to their autonomy and social role through the introduction of a variety of new practices, such as knowledge transfer systems, devolved budgeting arrangements, research assessments, new public management, an increase in user fees and student loans and the introduction of new accountability agencies and mechanisms. This paper links the changes occurring in higher education in both countries to neoliberal forms of governmentality and political efforts to generate a new moral order. The first part of the paper traces the recent history of higher education reform efforts in both countries and links them with specific neoliberal national and transnational knowledge society policies. The second part of the paper examines how these reform efforts are connected to the larger neoliberal political agenda of “decollectivizing” society and generating a new social arrangement built on markets, individualism, contractualism and consumerism.

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The Issues of Access and Inequalities to Higher Education in the UK and the US

Abstract:

How are the discourses of student selection different or alike among at highly selective universities in the UK and the USA? And what does this tell us about the differences and similarities regarding the underlying ideas of merit and who is worthy to study at a highly selective university in the two countries? This paper is based on interviews with admissions officers at Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Columbia in the US and tutors from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the UK. The analysis also draws on published materials (websites, prospectuses) from the different selective universities and compares the kind of key-words used in describing the values of the admissions process. The paper discusses the constructions of the idea of merit in university enrolment in the two contexts. Current developments in British higher education – in particular, the introduction of higher tuition fees from 2012 – are also discussed. In conclusion, similarities and differences between the two systems with regards to admission to highly selective universities are summarised and analysed to see whether the two countries are converging in their admissions discourses.