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REVISTA DEL CEDESP

CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS Y DOCUMENTACION SOBRE LA EDUCACIÓN

SUPERIOR PUERTORRIQUEÑA

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SALUDO

Estimado lector

La revista electrónica del Centro de Estudios y Documentación sobre la Educación Superior Puertorriqueña (CEDESP) pretende llevar a nuestros lectores una visión amplia de lo que ocurre en educación superior.

Este primer número lo hemos dedicado a las áreas de investigación y desarrollo de políticas públicas, en y fuera de nuestro país. Para ello hemos recopilado en nuestra revista, trabajos de colegas de Australia, Sur África, Canadá, México, Estados Unidos y Puerto Rico, referentes a la investigación sobre educación superior y su relación con el desarrollo de políticas públicas en el área.

Esperamos que este vehículo de comunicación nos acerque en la discusión de asuntos emergentes del campo educativo, así como, permitirnos crear un espacio de discusión sobre situaciones críticas y apremiantes de atender en el campo de la educación superior.

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INTRODUCCIÓN

Waldemiro Vélez Cardona, PhD

La investigación sobre educación superior como fundamento de las políticas públicas ha sido un importante tema de discusión al nivel internacional desde los últimos años del siglo pasado¹. Esta situación, aunque no ha pasado del todo desapercibida en Puerto Rico, tampoco ha recibido toda la atención que hubiéramos deseado.

Para atender esta situación, y otras de parecida importancia, se creó el Centro de Estudios y Documentación sobre la Educación Superior Puertorriqueña (CEDESP). Por eso, en su primer Seminario Internacional, dicho Centro se propuso reunir a algunos de los más importantes estudiosos del tema a nivel internacional. Intentamos traer a la discusión la situación de diferentes países y regiones del mundo que anteriormente eran bastante desconocidas en Puerto Rico. De esa manera podríamos mirar en un espejo más grande y profundo a la hora de hacer recomendaciones sobre como cerrar la brecha entre investigación y toma de decisiones en el ámbito de la educación superior.

En este primer número de la Revista del CEDESP recogemos casi todas las ponencias presentadas en el mencionado Seminario². Éstas se destacan por su

¹ Ver las referencias que se presentan al final del artículo de Vélez y Aponte en esta Revista.

² La única ponencia que no se incluye es la de Jussi Välimaa, **On the Social Dynamics of Finnish Higher Education Policy Making**,

agudeza y creatividad para abordar el tema que nos ocupa, siempre desde las particularidades de cada país, pero sin dejar de reconocer el estado del debate a nivel internacional.

En el primer artículo se presenta la experiencia de Puerto Rico y se titula: El impacto de la investigación sobre educación superior en la gestión y manejo de las instituciones y en el desarrollo de políticas públicas: la experiencia de Puerto Rico. En él los doctores Vélez y Aponte se plantean algunos de los problemas que se han confrontado en el país para el desarrollo y consolidación de una comunidad de investigadores sobre educación superior que tenga una incidencia decisiva sobre las políticas públicas. Entre éstos destacan la falta de continuidad de cualquier esfuerzo dirigido en esa dirección. A ellos les parece que la creación del CEDESP en el 2003 busca subsanar, en parte, esta situación.

Al comienzo de su ensayo Vélez y Aponte plantean que, en primer lugar, es necesario *establecer el trasfondo conceptual que enmarca la problemática que nos hemos planteado investigar y que se trata de recoger en el título de este documento. Es ineludible hacer un inventario de los debates alrededor de la temática que nos ocupa en la literatura, como también considerar lo que acontece en Puerto Rico y en otros países alrededor de la situación y futuro de la educación superior.* (p.2) Además entienden que, en segundo lugar, es importante que podamos *trazar la trayectoria de los esfuerzos de investigación de la educación superior*

debido a compromisos editoriales previos del autor.

realizados en Puerto Rico en el pasado.
(Ibid.)

Con eso en mente, y después de presentar un trasfondo conceptual y recoger algunas de las experiencias más importantes con relación al vínculo entre investigación y políticas públicas en el marco de la educación superior, presentan la propuesta de dividir el devenir de la investigación contemporánea sobre educación superior en Puerto Rico en tres etapas: 1) el periodo que va de 1942 a 1966, el que está, sin duda, marcado por la creación y funcionamiento de la Oficina de Investigaciones Pedagógicas del Consejo Superior de Enseñanza en 1945; 2) el periodo de los años de 1966 al 1993, en gran medida influenciado por las políticas públicas sobre educación superior que se establecen en la nueva Ley Universitaria (Ley 1 del 20 de enero) de 1966; 3) la etapa que comienza con la Ley 17 del 16 de junio de 1993 y se extiende hasta el presente, marcada en parte por la creación del CEDESP.

Para cada etapa los autores presentan un reducido número de investigaciones, no con el propósito de hacer una lista exhaustiva, sino simplemente con la intención de colocar una especie de marcadores que ayuden a orientar al lector sobre el tipo de investigaciones que se estaba realizando en cada periodo. El desarrollo de una lista exhaustiva de publicaciones sobre educación superior es una tarea que se propone realizar el CEDESP, con la colaboración de los diversos sectores de la comunidad de educación superior en Puerto Rico.

En su investigación Vélez y Aponte notan que la investigación sobre

educación superior fue paulatinamente desconectándose de las políticas públicas en Puerto Rico. En la primera etapa analizadas las investigaciones, mayormente realizadas al amparo del Consejo Superior de Enseñanza, tenían la intención clara y expresa de servir de base para las políticas públicas. Incluso, algunas de ellas incluían un borrador de la legislación que debía someterse para atender la problemática que era objeto de la investigación.

En la segunda etapa los autores notan que, con el paulatino desmantelamiento de la oficina de Investigaciones Pedagógicas del Consejo Superior de Enseñanza y la mayor dependencia de contratistas externos, en gran medida provenientes de los Estados Unidos, se comienzan a reducir las posibilidades de que una comunidad de investigadores se consolide y produzca investigaciones que tengan incidencia directa en la toma de decisiones. Ese hecho, tal vez ha marcado de manera decisiva las pasadas décadas.

En la última etapa la falta de continuidad, no sólo en los esfuerzos por promover la investigación, sino también en el desarrollo de una agenda consensuada con perspectiva de largo plazo, ha incrementado el abismo que parece existir entre la investigación sobre educación superior y las políticas públicas hacia el sector.

En el segundo artículo titulado *Higher Education Research as the Basis for Public Policies, The Case of Australia*, Simon Marginson nos acerca a los factores que han determinado la investigación sobre educación superior en Australia, durante los pasados 30 años. Entre estos se destacan los campos

de estudio más relevantes y el cambiante papel desempeñado por las diferentes disciplinas de las ciencias sociales, entre las que va ganando preponderancia la economía, tanto en términos de políticas públicas como de investigación.

Además, Marginson presenta el impacto de las políticas neoliberales en las prácticas investigativas, no sin destacar la importancia de que se desarrollen investigaciones críticas y autónomas que puedan ponderar los efectos que vienen teniendo las políticas neoliberales en el desenvolvimiento de la educación superior en Australia. De ahí que sea, según el autor, de particular importancia que se analice la relación entre la investigación sobre educación superior, por un lado, y los debates públicos que se vienen generando en torno a las políticas públicas sobre educación superior, por el otro.

El autor señala que es importante considerar el hecho de que la investigación sobre educación superior en Australia se realiza con un marcado matiz institucional –con sus fortalezas y debilidades. Esto, dentro del contexto de que dicha investigación es auspiciada mayormente por el gobierno nacional, lo que presenta el reto de realizar investigaciones autónomas a las instancias más vinculadas con el propio gobierno. Es decir, se presenta una posible tensión entre la investigación sobre educación superior y el gobierno nacional que es su principal auspiciador.

Con lo anterior en mente Marginson plantea que para que, pueda fortalecerse la investigación sobre educación superior, es preciso que ésta cuente con unas bases más sólidas en términos de su autonomía. Para esto el autor sugiere

que la investigación haga un uso más creativo de acercamientos disciplinarios mixtos como, por ejemplo, con relación al importante problema de definir, medir y evaluar los resultados de la gestión educativa.

Finalmente, Marginson hace un llamado para que se desarrollen análisis sintéticos que estén cada vez más informados por la investigación, y que éstos sean utilizados como herramientas para la elaboración de las políticas públicas, la recolección de nuevos datos en diferentes áreas y se propicie una mayor colaboración internacional en la investigación sobre educación superior. En ese contexto presenta cinco sugerencias para mejorar la investigación sobre educación superior en Australia, lo que a su vez podría hacer que se convirtiera en un más cercano referente para las políticas públicas hacia el sector. 1) La constitución de un colectivo autónomo de investigadores, 2) El uso de modelos y métodos mixtos en la investigación, 3) Promover una mayor vinculación entre la investigación y el juicio de los expertos, 4) Ampliar las áreas de investigación y recogido de datos, y 5) Fortalecer el recogido de datos e información y la elaboración de análisis sobre los resultados de la gestión educativa.

Resulta evidente que estas recomendaciones muy bien pueden ser aplicables a la situación de Puerto Rico y de muchos otros países del mundo. De una u otra manera el CEDESP está prestando atención a cada una de ellos. Esperamos que la comunidad de educación superior en Puerto Rico se vincule decididamente a estos esfuerzos. Sobre todo esperamos que esta Revista

pueda acoger y promover incesantes investigaciones que den cuenta de la situación de nuestra educación superior y sienten las bases para trabajos colaborativos, de carácter comparativo, con colegas de otros países y regiones del mundo.

El tercer artículo de la Revista presenta la situación de la investigación sobre educación superior en Sur África y su relación cambiante con el desarrollo de las políticas públicas. En su trabajo, *The Shifting Relationship between Higher Education Research and Policy Making: Lessons from the South African Case*, George Subotzky plantea que la relación entre la investigación sobre educación superior y las políticas y prácticas en dicho sector ha sido objeto de mucho debate y reflexión en Sur África.

Luego de presentar un trasfondo teórico y conceptual sobre la relación de la investigación sobre educación superior y las políticas públicas, Subotzky comienza a discutir la experiencia de Sur África. Señala que dicha relación está directamente moldeada por la trayectoria de los desarrollos políticos y propone tres posturas principales para caracterizar la brecha que separa a la investigación de las políticas: 1) la perspectiva bipolar estricta (*strict bipolar view*), 2) la perspectiva bipolar moderada (*soft bipolar view*) y, 3) la aproximación integrada (*integration approach*).

El autor divide en cuatro periodos el desarrollo de los procesos que conducen al establecimiento de políticas, con el fin de identificar las condiciones cambiantes que formaron la relación investigación-política en la educación superior de Sur África. El primer

periodo se ubica mayormente en la década de los 80 y se caracteriza por una crítica de izquierdas al estado apartheid. Durante este periodo, los científicos sociales progresistas se enfocaron principalmente en nutrir la crítica erudita en las universidades. Se procuraron vínculos con los movimientos sindicales y los activistas en el exilio. Su preocupación teórica principal se concentró en los asuntos relacionados con raza y clase social, en el contexto de la educación superior. El segundo periodo demarcado por el autor se sitúa en los años 1990 a 1994 y tiene como característica principal los esfuerzos por adelantar negociaciones y prepararse para un nuevo gobierno. Aquí los académicos progresistas pasaron de la crítica a lo existente a proponer un nuevo marco para el desarrollo de políticas públicas, en el contexto de las primeras elecciones democráticas. El tercer periodo (1994-1996) está marcado por la construcción de un nuevo marco normativo y de políticas que sirvieran de base para la transformación necesaria de la educación superior sur africana. El último periodo destacado por Subotzky parte de 1997 y se extiende hasta el presente. Aquí el mayor énfasis se pone en la implantación de las políticas públicas para el sector de la educación superior. Para esto se requiere el establecimiento de estructuras directivas, la sección de educación superior del Departamento de Educación y el establecimiento de un Consejo de Educación Superior, entre otras. Además, se requiere la operacionalización de los planes tri-anales y atender la crisis gerencial que se presentaba en algunas de las universidades a las que históricamente acudían los negros (*historically black universities*).

Subotzky también destaca la importancia de que los centros de investigación sobre educación superior puedan afrontar exitosamente los retos de mantener la calidad, la relevancia y hasta su propia sustentabilidad. Este asunto no es exclusivo de Sur África, es un reto que afrontamos todos los que de una u otra forma nos relacionamos con la investigación sobre educación superior desde una perspectiva más o menos institucional.

El autor termina su ensayo lanzando la pregunta: ¿qué podemos aprender del caso de Sur África? En primer lugar, según Subotzky, es imperativo que partamos del contexto particular que tiene cada país a la hora de establecer políticas y que la investigación sea parte fundamental en el análisis y diagnóstico de esas situaciones, de manera lo más informativa posible. En segundo lugar, debemos tener claro que los procesos de elaborar e implantar políticas son fenómenos de largo plazo y no deben responder a fines instrumentales de estrecha perspectiva. Un tercer elemento es el que tiene que ver con el reconocimiento de la complejidad del proceso de implantación, aunque exista voluntad política para llevarlo a cabo. La cuarta lección mencionada por Subotzky es el papel preponderante que deben jugar los investigadores produciendo tanto críticas como apoyo teórico a las políticas. En ese contexto es fundamental que se retenga la autonomía y la integridad de los procesos de investigación, aunque se encuentren en el terreno movedizo de las políticas. Finalmente, menciona los retos de la institucionalización de las capacidades de investigación para políticas en centros de investigación.

Esto, como podemos imaginar, tiene sus ventajas y desventajas para el mantenimiento y promoción de la calidad y la relevancia que se desea.

En Puerto Rico, como en otros países, debemos prestar atención y aprender de la situación de Sur África, la que experimentó cambios profundos en su sistema político y de educación superior. En ese país dichos cambios han sido y siguen siendo objeto de análisis ponderado por parte de la comunidad de educación superior. En nuestro caso, los cambios rápidos experimentados por nuestra educación superior apenas comienzan a aquilatarse detenidamente. Ese es uno de nuestros principales retos.

En el cuarto ensayo Janice Newson presenta las tendencias más recientes de la investigación universitaria canadiense. En su trabajo titulado *The University on the Ground: Reflections on Canadian Experience*, Newson plantea que en Canadá la investigación académica y crítica ha tendido a tener poca incidencia en las políticas públicas que se formulan para la educación superior. Sin embargo, entiende que la investigación que se realiza en los centros y unidades de investigación, que han sido creados en las universidades con el propósito específico de desarrollar trabajos que sirvan de base a las políticas y hasta proponer las propias políticas, son reconocidos como de gran valía por lo encargados de hacer políticas públicas (policy makers). Entre estos centros la autora destaca al Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), el que ahora es parte de la Universidad de Toronto; al John Deusch Institute, ubicado en Queen's University; y a las unidades de análisis de políticas (policy analysis) que se encuentran en las

Universidades de British Columbia y Alberta (p.1-2).

El artículo de Newson presta particular atención a los vínculos universidad-empresas que vienen proliferándose en Canadá a partir de la década del 80. Esto, en parte, como respuesta a la situación fiscal por la que atravesaron las universidades, sobre todo las públicas, producto de una significativa reducción en los fondos provenientes del Estado (fiscal retrenchment). Esta situación, según Newson, lejos de convertirse en un problema coyuntural, ha dado paso a nuevas políticas públicas que reposicionan a las universidades públicas canadienses como “empresas de conocimiento”, al interior de la industria global del conocimiento (p.12).

La mayor parte de su escrito Newson se dedica a documentar este proceso, el que ella denomina “comercialización del conocimiento”, y a plantear lo que a su juicio son las principales consecuencias de él, tanto para la actividad intelectual en el país como para el propio trabajo docente en las universidades. De entre estas consecuencias la autora destaca: 1) la pérdida de confianza del público en las universidades, 2) la sobrerregulación y hasta vigilancia del trabajo académico, 3) la desvalorización de la enseñanza y el surgimiento del estudiante-consumidor y, 4) los problemas con el tiempo creativo y las crecientes presiones para la producción.

Finalmente, Newson, al igual que Marginson, llama la atención sobre la importancia de que podamos detectar la manera en que las ideas neoliberales han venido incorporándose en los cambios de políticas (policy) alrededor del mundo. Éstas han venido

transformando radicalmente la “idea” de lo que es una universidad, así como afectando los propósitos de la producción de conocimiento en esta importante institución social.

Me parece que las tendencias descritas por Newson, para el caso de Canadá, vienen develándose lentamente en Puerto Rico y en muchos otros países. Parece evidente que se necesita una evaluación crítica y muy documentada, como la provista por Newson en su ensayo, para aquilatar los efectos de este proceso y determinar si es apropiado continuar desarrollando políticas públicas que lo estimulen.

En el quinto ensayo nos adentramos en la realidad de los Estados Unidos, con el trabajo de Brian Pusser *From Ideology to Policy: The Evolution of Choice in Higher Education*. En este ensayo Pusser pretende arrojar luz sobre la complejidad del proceso de formulación y aplicación de las políticas públicas en la educación superior. Para lograr ese propósito utiliza el caso de una nueva forma de “voucher” para la educación superior en el Estado de Colorado. Esta decisión de política pública ha estado rodeada de debates y tensión en torno a los diferentes intereses envueltos en el proceso.

Para Pusser las instituciones de educación superior son unos excepcionales lugares para estudiar las luchas que se generan en torno al establecimiento de las políticas públicas, en la medida en que éstas son “highly symbolic public political institutions”, con una enorme influencia en la economía política en general (p. 2). Por esas razones los discursos y las ideologías que se generan en torno a las

políticas públicas para la educación superior son elementos discursivos de trascendental importancia para comprender todo el proceso de establecimiento de políticas para el país.

En su escrito Pusser presenta las maneras en que se van desarrollando las políticas. En primer lugar se propone un discurso ideológico en torno a la obsolescencia y falta de efectividad de las políticas actuales, y la necesidad de establecer nuevas maneras de alcanzar los objetivos que ya se han aceptado. Luego se pasa al proceso de adopción e implantación de las políticas, proceso sumamente complejo e importante.

En la implantación de la política de “choice” o selección se lleva a cabo un proceso como el descrito anteriormente. Se construye el discurso, luego se disemina y finalmente comienza a implantarse. En el proceso se va destacando la importancia del mercado como elemento esencial para promover eficiencia y hasta equidad en la distribución de los recursos, sobre todo en el caso de los subsidios públicos para la educación.

Cada vez más, según Pusser, se va posicionando al estudiante individual como consumidor del servicio educativo y como beneficiario de las ayudas estatales. De esa manera logra justificarse la nueva política pública de brindar la ayuda directamente al estudiante, lo que se dice le brindará mayor libertad de selección. De esa manera las ayudas gubernamentales se alejan de las instituciones y se dirigen al estudiante individual. Para recibir más fondos públicos, entonces, las instituciones se ven precisadas a cobrar precios más altos por los servicios

educativos que le proveen (¿venden?) a los estudiantes.

Pusser piensa que es probable que el proyecto de “choice” más plenamente realizado en el sector postsecundario en los Estados Unidos haya sido el “Colorado Opportunity Fund” aprobado por la legislatura de Colorado en el 2004. Esta pieza de política pública proviene del “College Opportunity Fund Act” del 2003, el que prometía llevar a cabo dos cambios profundos en la organización y financiamiento del sistema postsecundario de Colorado. En primer lugar, iba a redirigir una proporción de los fondos que antes iban directamente a las instituciones de educación superior a una cuenta, el “opportunity fund” del que los estudiantes podían obtener fondos para ser utilizados en las instituciones de elección (choice). En segundo lugar, le permitía a los colegios y universidades convertirse en “enterprise institutions”, otorgándole el poder de aumentar sus costos de matrícula, así como de tener mayor autonomía en organización y operación. (p.22)

Finalmente, Pusser afirma que la aprobación de las políticas públicas que fomentan la libre selección o “choice” en Colorado representa un significativo evento en el continuado fortalecimiento de la ideología de competencia y selección en las políticas públicas para la educación superior en los Estados Unidos. Este hecho hace imperativo el que se desarrolle análisis exhaustivo sobre el impacto de ese giro en las políticas en el acceso, la calidad, la asequibilidad (affordability) y los beneficios públicos que se han derivado de ellas.

El trabajo de Pusser nos llama la atención sobre la manera en que fue aprobada, implantada y luego derogada la “Ley de Oportunidades Educativas” en Puerto Rico.³ Esta legislación ciertamente representaba un cambio en la política pública sobre el financiamiento de la educación postsecundaria en Puerto Rico, muy a tono con las políticas de “choice”, analizadas por Pusser en su escrito. Lamentablemente, su derogación en el 2002⁴ no sienta las bases ni de una nueva política pública y de la restitución de las políticas anteriores. Todavía está por verse en qué dirección se moverán las políticas que, finalmente guíen el desarrollo ulterior de la educación superior en Puerto Rico. Ese hecho hace aún más importante y más urgente continuar profundizando en las discusiones que se presentan en esta Revista, con el fin de acercar las investigaciones sobre educación superior a las políticas públicas relacionadas con ese importante sector.

En el último artículo de este número, Imanol Ordorika en Investigación Académica y Políticas Públicas en la Educación Superior: el Caso Mexicano de Pago por Méritos, nos presenta algunas de las tendencias más importantes en las políticas públicas para la educación superior en México. Enfatiza particularmente en la implantación reciente de modelos de remuneración del trabajo académico fuertemente influenciados por ideologías de mercado. Éstos, según él, conducen a una particular manera de “mercantilización” del trabajo

académico y hasta de la propia universidad.

Ordorika entiende que en el proceso de implantar lo anterior se desarrollan sistemas de evaluación de la educación superior que imponen límites al trabajo académico e institucional al pretender orientarlos casi exclusivamente hacia el logro de metas y objetivos basados en la productividad y el desempeño. El mayor problema que él destaca es que esas metas y objetivos son determinados en círculos oficiales o gubernamentales fuera del ámbito de discreción de la academia. Esto, sin lugar a dudas, representa una seria amenaza para la autonomía universitaria.

El análisis presentado aquí se basa en el caso de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), considerada por el autor una de las principales precursoras del pago por méritos en el país. En su ensayo Ordorika considera tres argumentos principales al evaluar el impacto que ha tenido el sistema de pagos por mérito en la educación superior mexicana. En primer lugar afirma que *la notable magnitud, expansión e impacto de los sistemas de pagos por mérito en México sólo puede entenderse como el producto de la implantación de formas de mercantilización en los sistemas de remuneración de las universidades.* (p. 2). El segundo argumento propone que el impacto de esos sistemas de remuneración en el trabajo universitario tiene que analizarse partiendo de la propia naturaleza de esa forma de organización y remuneración del trabajo. Es decir, los efectos nocivos del sistema provienen de los propios objetivos perseguidos por esa forma de remuneración y no por fallas o

³ Ley Número 138 de 1 de julio de 1999.

⁴ Por medio de la Ley Número 170 del 11 de agosto de 2002.

problemas en su implantación. El último argumento tiene que ver con las implicaciones analíticas de las características o particularidades de los mercados en los países periféricos como México, en su relación con las diversas perspectivas teóricas que se deben abordar en el análisis de la universidad contemporánea. Es decir, lo apropiado o inapropiado del uso de perspectivas teóricas que se basan en el estudio de sistemas universitarios y países con características muy diferentes, sobre todo con relación al mercado y los sistemas educativos.

Después de presentar evidencia contundente sobre la implantación del sistema de remuneración por mérito en las universidades mexicanas y el impacto de éstos en los ingresos de los docentes, Ordorika pasa a analizar la manera en que este sistema de remuneración altera y hasta define de forma significativa la propia organización del trabajo académico. De esa manera se define lo que se debe y se puede hacer, si es que el docente quiere obtener una compensación por su trabajo que le permita una mayor subsistencia económica.

Al finalizar su ensayo Ordorika se plantea lo problemático que es el aplicar mecanismos de mercado, como el pago por méritos, en un lugar como México en el que los mercados para conocimientos y productos académicos son todavía muy débiles. Es decir, el autor enfatiza en los efectos negativos que ha venido teniendo la aplicación de un modelo basado en mercados desarrollados a un país periférico en el que éstos distan mucho de estarlos.

Ese problema, el de tratar de aplicar modelos provenientes de otras experiencias y, sobre todo, situaciones socio-económicas diferentes, ha sido frecuente en países como Puerto Rico. Continuamente se nos menciona la situación de los Estados Unidos como el referente a emular. No cabe duda de que es un referente muy importante, probablemente el más importante. Pero tenemos que ser muy cuidadosos al intentar aplicar en Puerto Rico modelos que incluso han creado graves problemas en los propios Estados Unidos. El caso de la mencionada Ley de Oportunidades Educativas es un ejemplo muy elocuente, de entre algunos otros.

Para cerrar el seminario, a especie de informe de relatoría, Pedro Subirats Camaraza presenta *The New Ten Commandments in Higher Educational Research*. Aquí, el profesor Subirats presenta, de forma sumamente creativa y amena, los principales hallazgos y consensos que se generaron tanto en las presentaciones como en las discusiones posteriores. Por su excelente capacidad de síntesis, así como por su jocosa profundidad, hemos decidido incluir esta reflexión del profesor Subirats en el primer número de nuestra Revista.

Finalmente, se incluyen unas Referencias sobre Investigación y Políticas Públicas en Educación Superior. Éstas, además de servir para complementar el artículo de Vélez y Aponte, son de utilidad para los interesados en continuar estudiando la importancia de la investigación sobre educación superior para la elaboración de políticas para dicho sector.

Me parece que los trabajos presentados en este primer número de la Revista del

CEDESP representan una significativa aportación al estudio de la educación superior. Además, su innovador y profundo abordaje de la relación entre investigación sobre educación superior y el desarrollo e implantación de las políticas públicas nos ofrece un panorama amplio de la situación que nos puede ser de extraordinaria utilidad en Puerto Rico. No para copiar modelos, sino más bien para entender las similitudes y diferencias que tienen otros países y la manera en que se han abordado históricamente las problemáticas que aquí se discuten.

Teniendo un mejor panorama de los retos, problemáticas y oportunidades que se le presentan a la educación superior en otras latitudes, estaremos en mejor posición para enfrentarlos en Puerto Rico. Además, podremos capacitarnos mejor para proponer políticas que sean acogidas con gran entusiasmo, no sólo por todos los sectores que componen la comunidad de educación superior, sino también por los responsables de establecer (los legisladores) e implantar (el propio Consejo de Educación Superior de Puerto Rico y las instituciones de educación superior) las políticas públicas para el sector de la educación superior.



FROM IDEOLOGY TO POLICY:
THE EVOLUTION OF CHOICE IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This research examines the rise of the discourse of choice and the implementation of market based financial aid systems in higher education. Through an analysis of state policy and planning documents over the period 1970-2000, the authors conclude that the rise of choice mechanisms in postsecondary finance have been more closely linked to political projects than to empirical research on effective subsidy programs.

The authors present a three -stage model of policy transformation in this case. First, for a new policy to be adopted there must be a shift in the legitimate discourse shaping policy in a given arena. Second, for a proposed policy to succeed it must significantly shift the balance of interests in the arena. New discourse and new policy are linked to new social and political formations. Third, a new policy must offer significant incentives or disincentives to legitimate interest groups in order to ensure implementation.

Finally, the authors apply the three-stage model to an analysis of the creation of the Colorado Opportunity Fund, a market-driven restructuring of a portion of the postsecondary financial aid system in Colorado. They conclude that postsecondary institutions will continue to face pressure to increase choice and adopt market models for the organization and finance of higher education.

Keywords

Public policy, higher education, choice, ideology, finance, market, politics

De ideología a política: La evolución de la libre selección en educación superior

Resumen

Este artículo examina el fortalecimiento del discurso sobre la libre selección y la implantación de un mercado basado en el sistema de ayudas financieras en la educación superior. Por medio de un análisis de las políticas estatales y los documentos de planificación en el periodo 1970-2000, los autores concluyen que el fortalecimiento de los mecanismos de libre selección en las finanzas postsecundarias han estado más estrechamente vinculados a los proyectos políticos que a la investigación empírica sobre la efectividad de los programas de subsidio.

Los autores presentan un modelo de tres etapas para evaluar la transformación de las políticas en el caso que estudian. Primero, para que una nueva política sea adoptada tiene que darse un giro en los discursos legítimos que le dan forma a las políticas en un terreno en particular. Segundo, para que una propuesta de política pueda tener éxito esta debe alterar significativamente el balance de intereses en su terreno de acción. Los nuevos discursos y las nuevas políticas están vinculados a unas nuevas formaciones sociales y políticas. Tercero, una nueva política debe ofrecer incentivos o des-incentivos significativos para legitimar a los grupos de interés, a fin de asegurar que dicha política pueda ser implantada.

Finalmente, los autores aplican el modelo de tres etapas en el análisis de la creación del Fondo de Oportunidades de Colorado, una reestructuración guiada por el mercado de una porción del sistema de ayuda financiera en Colorado. Ellos concluyen que las instituciones postsecundarias van a continuar enfrentando presiones para incrementar la libre selección y adoptar modelos de mercado para la organización y financiamiento de la educación superior.

Palabras claves

Política pública, educación superior, libre selección, ideología, finanzas, mercado, políticas

Introduction

One of the enduring challenges in research on higher education is the effort to understand policy formulation. While a good deal of public policy literature does an admirable job of describing the

various proposals put before governing boards, state legislatures and the national congress, relatively little attention is placed on the genesis, nurturing, contest and implementation of public policies shaping the postsecondary sector. This paper uses a case study of one policy in one state, the enactment of a new form of higher education voucher in Colorado, to shed light on the contemporary policy process.

While there is a natural tendency to assume that contemporary policy initiatives grow out of institutional adaptations to contextual demands (Peterson and Dill, 1997; van Vught, 1997), more recent research has argued that postsecondary policies are the expression of longstanding interest group contests largely exogenous to higher education (Pusser and Ordorika, 2001; Pusser, 2004). Higher education institutions are exceptional sites for the study of policy contests, as they constitute highly symbolic public political institutions, with great salience in the wider political economy (Pusser, 2003; Pusser and Ordorika, 2001). Accordingly, the implementation of policies in prominent postsecondary institutions has enormous political value for individuals and interest groups. As one example, while Ronald Reagan is widely understood to be one of the primary architects of the neo-liberal restructuring of State institutions while serving as President of the United States, he first rose to political prominence as a candidate for Governor of California who was ardently and publicly opposed to many of the policies of the University of California. Upon his election to Governor in 1966, he furthered his reputation as a resolute conservative by orchestrating the firing of then President of the UC system Clark Kerr and by sending National Guard troops onto the campus at UC Berkely in an effort to quell student protests (Gitlin, 1987; Kerr, 2003).

While governors, legislators and governing boards often enact seemingly rapid changes to postsecondary policy, the reality is that it requires diligent effort, resources and contest over a significant period of time to effect change in state and national policies that carry profound impact. In Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises* the character Mike Campbell is asked how he went bankrupt. He responds that there are two ways one goes bankrupt: slowly, and all of a sudden. The same can be said for the making of higher education policy. Longstanding ideological, administrative and political contests slowly give way to sudden change driven by dominant

interests. This paper traces the evolution of one of those contests. We begin with some thoughts on three key aspects of policy adoption. We then move to a history of the rise of choice programs in the postsecondary arena, and we conclude with the specific case of Colorado's higher education voucher program and some implications for researchers and policy makers going forward.

From Ideology to Adoption

For the purposes of this study we offer three key propositions for understanding the contemporary postsecondary policy adoption process. First, to shift a longstanding policy, or one with great salience to particular interest groups, a shift in discourse needs to take place. That is, in order to change a public policy, the public discourse on the issue at hand needs to shift, because a new dominant discourse needs to emerge before a new policy can emerge (Slaughter, 1990). Second, for a proposed postsecondary policy change to occur, its implementation must promise to shift the balance of interests that have shaped the policy that will be changed. The new policy needs to privilege a particular set of interests, and we will assume that a contested policy with great salience (one that imposes significant costs on some and offers significant benefits to others) will privilege a new set of interests. Those interests may be endogenous to postsecondary institutions, or exogenous forces may promote particular interests. In rare cases, both may be joined in coalition (Pusser, 2004). The contention here is also that this is largely a zero sum competition. While the concept of a "win-win" solution is popular in arguments for policy shifts, it is the exception in political competition, not the rule. Finally, for a policy to be implemented it needs to provide some considerable incentive, or as is increasingly the contemporary case in higher education, some *disincentive* or penalty for those who fail to implement the policy. The clearest example of this latter point in the contemporary United States education policy arena is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB offers a host of sanctions that accompany a failure to implement the Act, and another set of punitive measures for those school districts and schools that implement NCLB but fail to meet the Act's standards over time. Put simply, for a contemporary postsecondary policy proposal to succeed, its supporters must shift public discourse in their favor, privilege a new set of interests and devise effective rewards or sanctions to insure implementation.

The Evolution of a New Postsecondary Policy: Choice, Markets and Consumer Demand

A prominent development in public policy proposals for postsecondary education over the past decade has been the increased demand for approaches to university organization and finance based on market models and free-market entrepreneurial behavior (Marchese, 1998; Winston, 1999; Newman; 2001, Pusser and Doane, 2001; Kirp, 2003; Pusser et al, 2005). Governors, legislators, policy analysts, and national associations have increasingly proposed increased consumer power, competition, privatization, decentralization, and deregulation as keys to strategic planning and adaptation in the twenty-first century (Collis, 1999; Duderstadt, 1999; Schmidt, 2001; Kirp, 2003; Pusser and Turner, 2004; Pusser and Wolcott, in press).

The belief that an increasingly competitive environment for the provision of postsecondary education necessitates the use of market principles and behaviors is now a key factor in legislative contests over the most basic level of resource allocation for public institutions, state block grants to higher education in the United States (Schmidt, 2001; Breneman, 2003). These contests have been shaped by two persistent strands of political pressure, each of which serves as part of a broader neo-liberal restructuring of public institutions (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Marginson, 2004). The first strand is the continued retreat by individual states from collective public funding for many public institutions, including higher education, as part of a long-term trend away from a reliance on tax revenue as the primary support of public institutions (Geiger, 2004; Kirp, 2004). Individual states have struggled to maintain direct appropriations to public higher education institutions in light of continued political pressure to reduce income taxes (Breneman, 2003; Kirp, 2003; Geiger, 2004). The anti-tax movement was translated into specific policy initiatives beginning in the mid-1970s with such initiatives as Proposition 13 in California (Schrag, 1998). One result has been a significant decline in the per capita allocations for higher education in many states. The second political project driving neo-liberal restructuring has been the effort by state and federal political leaders, policy researchers and interest groups to promote a discourse that suggesting that there is rampant inefficiency, lack of accountability and a dearth of competition in nearly all public sector institutions, including

public colleges and universities. This inefficiency is said to harm the interests of individual students (referred to in the public discourse on this issue as "consumers") and other key constituents, primarily taxpayers and business interests.

Political efforts to restructure higher education over the past decade have promoted the ideological premise that consumer choice and institutional competition will lead to greater efficiency and accountability (Tooley, 2001; Ruch, 2001), despite little empirical evidence that this is the case for higher education or other complex public service projects (Birnbaum, 2000; Doane and Pusser, in press; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). The contemporary narrative that is offered as a panacea for the ills of the public sector -- that markets and competition will lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness -- grows out of a sustained project to create and shape a new discourse and a new set of policies (Pusser and Doane, 2001). The prevalent discourse on markets and higher education in the United States also draws heavily on a much longer and protracted contest, the efforts to bring vouchers to the elementary-secondary sector. Central to the argument for the market model in elementary-secondary education is the idea that competition and choice will lead to lower costs, improved performance and the empowerment of individuals and communities (Weiler, 2001; Levin and Belfield, 2004).

The market discourse in policy debates over higher education has been accompanied by an equally important shift in the discourse shaping perceptions of the public and private goods generated by higher education. That debate, essentially a continuation of one dating back to the advancement of arguments about human capital and education in the early 1960s (Becker, 1964) suggests that higher education is a private good and that as such, much of the cost should be borne by individuals, not the public (Marginson, 2004; Pusser, 2002).

This shift in tension between competing discourses, whether higher education should be collectively produced through State provision or through market provision, and whether higher education is a public good or a private good, has taken several decades to manifest in the public policy arena. Given that over 80% of degrees granted in postsecondary programs in the United States are from public, nonprofit institutions, proposals to shift the method of allocating public

resources to such institutions have enormous implications for organization, finance, and the production of public and private benefits from postsecondary education.

Nevertheless, over the past decade fundamental attributes of market approaches have been moving to the center of policy recommendations by such influential organizations as the National Governor's Association (NGA), and individual state legislative bodies and coordinating boards (Kelly, 2001; Pusser and Wolcott, forthcoming). Most prominent among these market attributes is the notion that increased consumer choice will improve the provision of public higher education. A report commissioned as part of The NGA's initiative, *Influencing the Future of Higher Education*, notes that:

Savvy states in the twenty-first century will focus on postsecondary customers: the learner, the employer, and the public who supports educational opportunities. In competitive states, resources will increasingly flow to the learner, and state regulatory policies will ease to encourage institutional flexibility. (NGA, 2001, pg. 3)

In a similar fashion, a special commission on higher education in Texas concluded earlier in this decade that the state should develop a funding system for public higher education driven by consumer choice. The commission suggested a move towards a funding model that "emphasizes grants to students over direct appropriations to institutions" (Special Commission on 21st Century Colleges and Universities, 2001, pg.12).

The implications of these proposals for restructuring the organization and finance of public higher education are enormous. The shift from state block funding of institutions to direct funding of postsecondary learners would be one of the most significant shifts in the public financing of higher education since the adoption of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1972 (Breneman, 1992; Pusser & Doane, 2001).

Choice has arrived suddenly as a key driver in postsecondary policy, but it has been approaching slowly for quite some time. Where has the political energy behind choice been germinating? Why this policy, and why now? Why would the United States postsecondary system, one which

for much of its history has been defined by easy access and the diversity of its institutional forms, and the system that has long had the world's largest portable financial aid system, suddenly find itself besieged by demands in the policy arena for greater choice?

This paper presents findings from an analysis of contemporary state higher education planning documents, and analyzes the theoretical underpinnings of the contemporary choice movement for the finance of public higher education. Historical planning documents are also analyzed to reveal changes over time in how states view the mission and purpose of public higher education. We suggest that although consumer choice and market approaches to the organization and finance of public higher education have significant appeal for planners and political leaders, it is unclear that they will generate the transformations those planners intend. It is more evident that these transformations portend powerful and disruptive shifts in the historical relationship between public universities and the broader political economy, with subsequent shifts in the dominant interests shaping postsecondary policy.

The State and Higher Education Finance Policy

Public funding for higher education has a long history in the United States, one that precedes funding for elementary and secondary education (Friedman, 1962; Rudolph, 1965). Public subsidies in the Colonial period varied in type and source. Virginia employed several different forms of taxation to fund William and Mary (Rudolph, 1965). Connecticut induced young men to enroll in the Collegiate School (Yale) by exempting them from taxes and military service (Rudolph, 1965). Although the Colonial colleges were not uniformly funded by government, they were largely financed by some kind of public corporation or community effort, either a Colonial government or a religious denomination. Each was charged with serving the public interest. In the earliest days of the Colonial period, this meant training clergy. The public bodies that supported the first colleges in the United States identified social advantages with higher education in order to warrant the use of scarce community resources.

Over the centuries, the shifting goals and roles of higher education institutions have been accompanied by changes in both direct and

indirect funding mechanisms. State block grants to institutions and federal financial aid programs represent two of the largest forms of direct public support for higher education. The benefits of 501(c)(3) status bestowed on non-profit institutions and the education tax credits provided by the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 constitute two forms of indirect public support for higher education.

Recently, postsecondary institutions have faced both growing demands from their stakeholders and challenges associated with turbulent operating environments (Newman et al, 2004). Policy makers expect institutions of higher education to “do more with less,” as calls for greater accountability, efficiency, and quality increase (Peterson & Dill, 1997; Breneman, 2003). In certain sectors for-profit degree-granting providers of postsecondary education are increasingly competitive with traditional, non-profit providers (Pusser et al, 2005; Breneman, 2005), and new technologies allow institutions to transcend traditional geographic boundaries (Marginson, 2004; Altbach, 2001). Over the next decade, nonprofit public higher education’s traditional revenue streams will be further stressed by demands on public resources from such compelling areas of need as elementary-secondary education, corrections, healthcare, and transportation (Hovey, 1999). Many states are now facing structural deficits, which will only deepen the competition for increasingly scarce financial resources (Breneman, 2003).

Along with rising interest in market approaches for university adaptation, a related shift is taking place in public policy and planning, from a public supply model to a public subsidy model for the provision of higher education. This shift is accompanied by a move from collective finance to individual finance, and has significant implications for higher education as a public good (Pusser, 2002). Both shifts are consistent with market approaches to the provision of higher education. An intriguing aspect of the policy debate is that the primary rationale for these changes is not the one advanced by neo-classical economists such as Gary Becker (1976), that education is an investment in individual human capital, and as such an appropriate investment for the individual to finance. Nor does the argument follow Howard Bowen's (1977) contention that since public subsidies have gone disproportionately to those who could matriculate without them, policymakers might appropriately

shift the subsidies to more needy beneficiaries. Contemporary financing trends are moving in the opposite direction, with tax credits and institutional aid increasingly directed to students in the middle- and upper-income brackets (Bowen et al, 2005; Ehrenberg, 2000).

A History of Markets and Choice in Higher Education Finance

The rationale for the treatment of higher education as a “market” rests on the argument that higher education primarily yields private benefits and is thus fundamentally a private good. As such - so the argument goes - exchanges involving private goods are best negotiated by rational, self-interested parties operating in a free market. Milton Friedman developed this view of higher education in *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962). Friedman and his followers (economists of the Chicago School and their supporters in government and business) successfully challenged Keynesian economics from the 1960s onward.

Marginson argues that advocates of social conservative (new right) political agendas and supporters of neo-liberal economics believed that mass government education systems, in which education was both an opportunity and a right, weakened “competitive subjectivities” (1997, p. 88). He also suggests that the Chicago school imposed rational choice models onto public sector institutions and the production of public goods:

The Chicago school economists [sic] wanted ‘a global redescription of the social as a form of the economic’ progressively expanding the reach of economic theory and economic behavior across more of the ‘non-economic’. The Chicago school set out to create the economically rational individuals imagined by neo-classical theory – *homo economicus* as a ‘manipulable man’ responding to the economic environment and regulating ‘his’ own entrepreneurial and competitive behavior... Economic government set out to shape students along the lines of *homo economicus*, to create a self-regulating investor-in-the-self whose moves would be dictated by economic utility (Marginson 1997, pp. 75 - 76).

While Marginson’s work focused on Australia, parallels are apparent in the United States, and there are contradictory pressures at the center of

each case. In the contemporary policy arena, calls for free-market solutions abound, yet calls for State intervention to increase standards and performance measures are equally prevalent.

The theoretical framework for the neo-liberal re-organization of the public, postsecondary education system can also be traced to Friedman. In *Capitalism and Freedom* he advanced the notion that the public provision of higher education should be substantially reduced. He also suggested that independent providers of post-secondary education had been unable to compete with highly subsidized public colleges and universities and should have access to greater State support. Private funding was to be favored over public provision (supply), and market competition was to be encouraged. Consumers would face full-cost fees. Public funding - and there would be a need to continue some public funding to overcome traditional sources of market failure, i.e., under-investment in education by some individuals, and lack of access to capital - would be disbursed in the form of voucher-scholarships (Friedman pp. 92 – 105; Friedman and Friedman 1980, pp. 163 – 185). Any public funding would, thus, function as a demand-side subsidy leading to market competition.

Under Friedman's model, the State would primarily function as a regulator, issuing charters and administering voucher programs. Creation of the Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (BEOGs) program in 1972, a program that provided portable student aid on a mass scale, signaled a shift in federal higher education policy in the spirit of Friedman's model. The State distributed aid in the form of vouchers for student consumers. Federal student aid has continued to favor portability since 1972; yet nearly 30 years later, calls for increased accountability, efficiency, and quality are common, and greater market competition continues to be promoted as a solution to the "ills" of the postsecondary system.

In sum, Friedman's fundamental argument was that the benefits of the education that institutions provided were largely private in nature. Friedman proposed that government intervention be limited, that public institutions should compete with private institutions, and that equity could be pursued by making capital more widely available to low-income students. In State theoretical terms, Friedman was arguing for public subsidy over public supply, and for public subsidy over public provision.

Public Supply and Public Subsidy

Public supply refers here to the production of higher education in public non-profit institutions. In the United States those institutions have been traditionally state chartered and state controlled. At present, some 75% of students enrolled in postsecondary degree programs are in public non-profit institutions (Pusser & Doane, 2001). Public subsidy refers to the allocation of public funds to public or private, for-profit or nonprofit institutions and to students. Public subsidies are generally provided by state or federal entities directly to public institutions in the form of block grants (supply-side subsidies), or they are provided to students in the form of grants, loans, tax credits and the like (demand-side subsidies) that the student may use at any accredited institution.

Over the past 150 years, publicly incorporated institutions that have been publicly funded and regulated have become the dominant sites of postsecondary enrollment and the provision of postsecondary degrees. The State, through the establishment of nonprofit public universities, the provision of public funds to nonprofit public and independent institutions, and the establishment of accreditation and oversight functions, has long served as provider, subsidizer, and regulator of American higher education.

Public Higher Education Institutions as Political Institutions

A key aspect of understanding contemporary higher education policy initiatives requires conceptualizing public higher education institutions as political institutions (Pusser, 2003). From this perspective political institutions are seen as entities that control significant public resources, that have the authority to allocate public costs and benefits, that implement policies with significant political salience, such as conditions of labor or standards of credentialing, and that stand as particularly visible sites of public contest. We suggest that these conditions describe public higher education institutions in the United States, and that public higher education institutions are political institutions. Furthermore, higher education can be seen as a key commodity in its own right, and the postsecondary policy formation process may be characterized as an interest group struggle for that commodity value.

Contemporary theoretical perspectives on the organization and governance of public political institutions effectively challenge the prevailing interest articulation model for higher education institutions. These models suggest that powerful external forces, operating within a context of historical developments and conditions, shape political action and decision making at the state and institutional level. From that perspective, legislators, interest groups and state policy makers will endeavor to restructure the organization and finance of higher education in ways that reflect their own interests and their own beliefs about the proper role of the institution.

Choice in Contemporary Higher Education Planning

In that light, we turn to the role of choice in contemporary state master plans and strategic planning documents. Two points need to be made at the outset. First, while these documents are produced by a variety of state commissions, governing boards or executive branch agencies, they also reflect significant state legislative and gubernatorial influence. Portions of a number of the plans are written in response to state legislation, and some plans are developed under state mandate. Several of the plans incorporate introductions from governors, and are commissioned by boards that include a significant number of gubernatorial appointees. These documents are, to a significant degree, political documents. Our contention is that they reflect political demands and interests, and serve as a guide to the emerging politics of university restructuring. Second, these documents reflect a continuum of state politics and policies over three decades. The documents are separated into two categories: (1) contemporary documents produced between 1996 and 2004, and (2) historical documents produced between 1971 and 1993. Given the time span over which the documents were produced, they reflect quite different economic conditions, and political alignments. However, the primary issues we address here, choice plans and market models, are most prominent in contemporary planning documents.

Data Collection

The data collected for this research are part of an ongoing study of state policy responses to changing contexts for higher education. Thirty-nine contemporary planning documents from thirty-four states and 9 historical documents from

6 states were evaluated for evidence of commitment to: (1) drawing upon restructuring proposals - including choice plans - in the K-12 sector, (2) the conceptualization of students as consumers, (3) the perception of a need to overcome institutional inefficiency, and (4) the promotion of market-based, decentralized, or entrepreneurial approaches to postsecondary organization, finance and governance. The documents analyzed entail master plans, special reports, and other policy materials that shed light on the nature of the policy debate occurring in state capitals across the nation.

As shown in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, there has been a rather dramatic increase in the prevalence of these four discourses in state planning documents from across the United States. From virtually no mention of these concepts in any state in the years prior to 1989 (Appendix 1) we see nearly every category mentioned in each of the seven largest states between 1996 and 2002. Closer analysis of the policy documents gives further insight into the intensity of the shift.

K-12 Choice and Postsecondary Education

Initial findings from the document analysis suggest that a number of states have begun to adopt the language of "school choice" that has previously been applied to K-12 educational discussions into master plans for postsecondary education. For example, the phrase "resources will increasingly flow to the learner," is used in the National Governor's Association report *Influencing the Future of Higher Education* (2001), and the invocation of "a redesign of the funding of higher education," to "empower parents and their children to improve access to higher education by offering grants to students," appears in the postsecondary report *Higher Education: Moving Every Texan Forward* (Special Commission on 21st Century Colleges and Universities, 2001). These echo the wording of a national commission on restructuring K-12 governance describing a fundamental goal in that arena of, "allowing money to follow the child to the school he or she attends," (Education Commission of the States, 2001).

Students as Consumers

The analysis of state master plans points to two key aspects of the construction of the transition to the financing model of "dollars following

learners.” The first is part of a broader movement, growing out of the national accountability movements and performance based funding projects of the nineties that conceptualizes students as consumers (Trombley, 2001). The second aspect emerging from the discourse is a concerted challenge to the authority and efficacy of postsecondary institutions and their leadership.

The “student as consumer” discourse is embodied in the National Governor’s Association’s third principle for developing student human capital: “Promote a customer orientation.” The NGA goes on to note that, “Savvy states in the 21st century will focus on postsecondary customers; the learner, the employer, and the public who supports educational opportunities. In competitive states, resources will increasingly flow to the learner, and state regulatory policies will ease to encourage institutional flexibility. Education and training programs will increasingly be tailored to the abilities and learning styles of the customer,” (National Governors Association, 2001). Similar language can be found in the Florida master plan for postsecondary education. It states; “The theme “Students First” should embrace all future efforts to address the issue of postsecondary access,” (Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, 1999). The Oregon master plan suggests that, “Creativeness, responsiveness, efficiency, and a customer orientation must pervade all that the State System does,” (Higher Education 2010 Advisory Panel, 1994). The Colorado Commission on Higher Education, in its Master Plan of 2000, presents the following Mission Statement: “CCHE’s mission is to provide access to high-quality, affordable education for all Colorado residents that is student-centered, quality driven and performance-based. CCHE’s primary customers are Colorado students and citizens. CCHE is committed to providing the best quality education at the best price with the best possible service for its customers,” (Colorado Commission on Higher Education, 2000). This language appears in similar form in the planning documents of several states.

The Assumption of Institutional Inefficiency

The second, and perhaps more significant rationale for the efforts to increase student choice is driven by a taken-for-granted assumption that institutional organization and culture, and state regulation, are reducing the efficiency and effectiveness of the provision of postsecondary

education. This “systemic inefficiency” argument is presented most clearly in the Texas master plan for higher education. It states, “The responsiveness and adaptability of the current system are hindered by the policymaking and organizational structures in public higher education systems of the 20th century. The Commission recommends a redesign of higher education that places the primary stakeholders of education – students and parents, instead of institutional structures – at the center of the decision-making process,” (Special Commission on 21st Century Colleges and Universities, 2001, pg. 9). The National Governors Association also advocates greater institutional accountability in its fourth principle, which states, “Hold high expectations for postsecondary education providers, and expect results,” (National Governor’s Association, 2001).

Another aspect of the assumption of inefficiency is underscored in the Ohio Board of Regents’ 1996 master plan, entitled, *The Challenge is Change*. With regard to student-centered learning, the plan states, “Higher education is shifting away from teacher-centered classroom experiences and toward student-centered learning experiences. In the new learning models, students must understand and accept responsibility to be active participants in the learning process rather than the passive recipients of information and knowledge. They are expected to collaborate but also to be more autonomous and to realize the quality and outcomes of their education are directly linked to their efforts to learn. With these new models, the emphasis is shifting from the productivity of faculty to the productivity of students, from styles of teaching to styles of learning, from the disciplinary interests of faculty to the learning needs of students,” (Ohio, 1996). As with much of the rhetoric on institutional efficiency found in the master plans, the Ohio document posits a series of dichotomies, with new better than old, active better than passive, student-centered preferable to teacher-centered. There is little empirical evidence presented here, or in the other literature, that the current postsecondary pedagogical system is ineffective or in need of transformation. There is even less evidence that should this transformation take place, students will be better for it.

The Market in the Master Plans

A report by the Education Commission of the States, *Governing America’s Schools* presents a

transformation in K-12 policy that is echoed in emerging postsecondary planning documents. It states, "It is unsurprising then that a dominant theme in education policy today is that of privatization and the creation of market mechanisms to regulate education practice in lieu of state control and regulation," (ECS, 1999). The report from Texas put the transformation this way, "Obviously, to create a more responsive market for higher education, institutions of higher education must be substantially freed from the state regulation that currently binds them," (Special Commission on 21st Century Colleges and Universities, 2001, page 9). Oregon's Higher Education 2010 Advisory Panel notes that, "To enable a responsive and effective entrepreneurial environment, the State of Oregon will provide the State System with the flexibility needed to function more efficiently," (1994, pg. 2). A report prepared by a Governor's task force in Arizona, *Arizona at Risk*, suggests that, "The Legislature, in consultation with the Board of Regents, should adopt a funding approach for universities – beyond enrollment growth – that is tied to a market-based analysis utilizing benchmark data from peer institutions, (Arizona Governor's Task Force, 2000, pg. 36).

Higher Education Vouchers: The Case of Colorado

Perhaps the most fully realized postsecondary choice project in the United States is the "Colorado Opportunity Fund" passed by the Colorado legislature in 2004 (Hebel, 2004). Colorado is a complex case, but as a fast growing and economically prosperous state it serves as a useful harbinger of things to come. Colorado's higher education system is driven by several key factors. Colorado is a relatively wealthy state, yet is below the median in terms of its own citizens who attend college. Colorado also operates under TABOR (the Colorado Taxpayer's Bill of Rights), a constitutional amendment added in 1992 that limits state tax revenue, while at the same time, Colorado's Amendment 23 mandates increases each year in state funding for public elementary and secondary schools (Burdman, 2003; Hebel, 2004).

Continued challenges to the effectiveness of Colorado's higher education system, coupled with declining state funding for higher education in Colorado, led to the formation of a Blue Ribbon Panel on Higher Education for the 21st Century in 2001 by Republican Governor Bill Owens.

The panel initially recommended consideration of a new funding option that reflected elements of a higher education voucher system, although over the course of the contest to pass the legislation the discourse changed from "voucher" to the current "opportunity fund."

A bill was introduced as *The College Opportunity Fund Act* (Bill 189) in 2003. It promised to enact two major shifts in the organization and finance of Colorado's postsecondary system. First, it would shift a portion of the traditional direct funding allocation for higher education institutions into an account, the "opportunity fund" that students may draw from to use at the institution of their choice. The money redirected from the institutions would be referred to as "student stipends" and amounted to approximately \$2400 per qualifying student (Burdman, 2003). Second, the bill would allow state colleges and universities to become "enterprise institutions," which would give them the power to raise tuition, as well as greater autonomy in their organization and operation (Hebel, 2003).

The bill was championed early by conservative delegates in the Colorado legislature and by the Director of the State Higher Education Commission. The argument put forward in support of the bill was that it would encourage more students to attend Colorado's higher education institutions, with the rationale that the opportunity fund would encourage greater consumer choice and engagement with higher education.

The bill was supported by the University of Colorado and Colorado State University, the state's largest and most prestigious universities. This was due in part to a complex set of agreements within the legislation that enabled those institutions to liberate themselves from many of the restrictions caused by the TABOR regulations. Representatives from smaller, regional schools were resistant, as they believed the bill would divert state funds away from their institutions and force them to raise tuition.

The discourse used to lobby for the bill, and the language in the bill itself capitalized on the political popularity of markets, choice, and competition. The text of the bill includes a number of such statements including one that summed up the purpose of the legislation in this way: "it is the intent of the general assembly to fundamentally change the process by which the

state finances postsecondary education from funding institutions to funding individuals.” The text of the bill also noted that, “funding for postsecondary education is not an entitlement,” and apparently to further justify the consumer choice/market approach, “The provision of higher education services is a business,”

(<https://cof.college-access.net/cofapp/Law.jsp>).

The legislation stalled in the state legislature in 2003, but was passed (as State Bill 04-189) and signed into law by Governor Owens on May 10, 2004. Since that time a number of other states have begun considering similar legislation, and a number of flagship universities have endeavored to work with legislatures to garner greater autonomy and authority over tuition in exchange for concessions over state funding.

Conclusion

The passage of the Colorado opportunity fund legislation is a remarkable event in the continued rise of the ideology of competition and choice in postsecondary policy making in the United States. From virtually no attention to choice and markets in higher education policy documents of the 1970s and 1980s to the enactment of a significant postsecondary choice plan in 2004 represents a dramatic shift. The path to the implementation of the Colorado legislation incorporated the three key elements noted at the outset of this paper. The passage of the legislation benefited from a long-term and dramatic shift in the discourse of finance policy for higher education. That shift transformed a saga reflecting the power of collective public provision and subsidy projects that could be traced from the land grant movement of the late 19th century through the New Deal and the GI Bill to one with echoes of Adam Smith, Hayek, Friedman, Thatcher and Reagan. That shift was part of the gradual transformation of the discourse of higher education policy reflected in the document analysis from the various states analyzed for this research.

The bill also entailed a significant change in the balance of interests in the postsecondary arena in Colorado. Within the traditional U.S. postsecondary policy triangle of state, institutional and citizen interests, the balance now needs to be re-conceptualized. The power and legitimacy of higher education institutions and between higher education institutions has shifted to some degree, as has the relationship between the institutions and the legislature. The relationship of the citizenry of Colorado - those who participate directly in higher

education and others - to the higher education institutions has also shifted, in complex ways that cannot be easily modeled and have yet to fully manifest. Much will depend on whether institutions actually gain greater autonomy in the aftermath of the new legislation, and if so, on how they use that increased autonomy.

The case also points to the importance of institutional interpretation of the legislation, although it is too early to draw conclusions on precisely how the legislation will be implemented. Institutional participation in programs that encourage students to take advantage of the college opportunity fund, institutional strategies for tuition and student aid, and the interaction between more and less prestigious institutions will greatly influence the success or failure of the new legislation.

Perhaps most important, it is not clear that the passage of the Colorado act, or the increasing demands for greater choice and competition in higher education policy circles will enhance the higher education system. Contemporary policy research in higher education has documented a number of significant challenges to the future health and stability of postsecondary institutions. Costs have risen dramatically (Heller, 2001; Geiger, 2004) and affordability has declined (Callan, 2001). A number of researchers have suggested that colleges and universities are insufficiently accountable to the public and state legislatures (Burke, 2005), and there is serious concern over the future financial viability of state funding (Breneman, 2003). Yet, despite its many challenges, there is little empirical evidence that the postsecondary system in the United States is ineffective or inefficient. Most of the concerns in the research literature and in the state policy documents evaluated for this study could more appropriately be described as interest group demands upon the postsecondary system than as evidence of shortcomings in institutional performance.

Based on our preliminary analysis, we suggest that postsecondary institutions will continue to face pressure to increase choice and adopt market models for the organization and finance of higher education. This despite an historical record that indicates that thirty years of unprecedented choice and access, supported by a vast system of portable financial aid, has done little to contain costs or increase affordability. Nor is it clear that the intention of post-war public policy has been to

contain prices; rather, the effort seems to have been to increase capacity and choice, and to preserve quality. In the absence of empirical documentation of the efficacy of choice models, the essential question that emerges from contemporary planning documents is quite basic: whose interests are served in the proposed transformations?

A political theoretical approach to postsecondary institutions turns attention to the traditional interest group contests over state postsecondary education. The central actors in those contests have been the governors, the legislatures, the electorate, and the institutions themselves (Pusser, 2003). Proposals to shift the finance of postsecondary education from the traditional system of direct state finance of public institutions, to "choice" plans that redirect funds to students, can be understood as political projects. To call them political projects does not infer that they are good or bad for higher education. The expansion of the community college system in the post-war era was a political project, as was the California Master Plan for higher education in the early sixties (Douglass, 2000). Both of those are generally regarded as projects that generated considerable public benefit. A shift in financing from direct support for institutions in favor of increased portable student aid will also shift the relative influence of institutions in state political arenas. How that shift will impact access, quality, affordability, or the production of public benefits is not readily apparent. The message from emerging state master plans and policy documents is becoming increasingly clear: consumer choice will move to the fore of postsecondary planning, institutional support to the rear. What is much less clear is the evidence for the efficacy of these shifts, and the consequences that may result from a move away from public provision to greater individual subsidies.

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HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH
AS THE BASIS FOR PUBLIC
POLICIES
THE CASE OF AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

Drawing on the last 30 years of experience in Australia, the paper begins by discussing factors that shape research on higher education. These include the relevant fields of study, and the changing role of the different social science disciplines (particularly the growing importance of economics in policy and policy research); the impact of neo-liberal policy in research practices; the role of autonomy in research and of critical research; and the relationship between research on higher education on one hand, and public debate about higher education policy on the other. It then describes research on higher education in Australia, focusing on the main institutional sites; the main strands/ topic areas of research, with their strengths and weaknesses; the ever-present issue of the relationship between the research and national government which is much the most important sponsor of research; and the main data series that are maintained by research agencies located in government. The final section makes suggestions on how research on higher education might be improved and developed. It is suggested that a stronger basis of researcher autonomy would strengthen the work, as would the more creative use of mixed disciplinary approaches (e.g. to the important problem of defining, measuring and judging educational outputs), the foregrounding of research-informed synthetic judgement as a policy tool, new data collections in several areas, and more international collaboration in the research.

Keywords

Higher education, public policy, policy research, neo-liberalism, Australia

La investigación sobre educación superior como base de las políticas públicas: El caso de Australia

Resumen

Basado en la experiencia de Australia en los pasados 30 años, el artículo comienza discutiendo los factores que le dan forma a la investigación sobre educación superior. Estos incluyen los campos de estudio relevantes y el cambiante papel de las diferentes disciplinas de las ciencias sociales (particularmente la creciente importancia de la economía en las políticas y en la investigación para políticas); el impacto de las políticas neoliberales en las prácticas de investigación; el papel de la autonomía en la investigación crítica; y la relación entre la investigación sobre educación superior, por un lado, y el debate público acerca de las políticas de educación superior, por el otro. El artículo entonces pasa a describir la investigación sobre educación superior en Australia, enfocándose en las principales entidades institucionales, los principales temas y ramas de investigación, con sus fortalezas y debilidades; los asuntos siempre presentes de la relación entre la investigación y el gobierno nacional - el que es el principal auspiciador de la investigación-; y las principales series históricas de datos que son mantenidas por las agencias de investigación localizadas en el gobierno. La sección final del artículo hace sugerencias sobre como la investigación sobre educación superior puede ser mejorada y desarrollada. Se sugiere que solo una fuerte base de autonomía en la investigación puede fortalecer el trabajo investigativo, y lograr un uso más creativo de los acercamientos disciplinarios mixtos (por ejemplo con relación al importante problema de definir, medir y juzgar los resultados educativos); el poner en primer plano los juicios sintéticos informados por la investigación como herramienta para el establecimiento de políticas, la recopilación de datos en diversas áreas y una mayor colaboración internacional en la investigación.

Palabras claves

Educación superior, política pública, investigación para políticas, neoliberalismo, Australia

1. Introduction: the paper

The paper begins with issues common to research on higher education in many nations, though the Australian experience has shaped the theorisations and reflections, and the paper draws selectively on Australian examples to illustrate some points. It identifies the factors that shape research on higher education and discusses four of them in some detail: the field of study construction of research in higher education, and historical changes in the roles of the disciplines; the impact of neo-liberal policy including the relationship between education policy and economic policy; the questions of autonomy of research and of critical research; and the relationship between research on higher education and public debate.

The next two sections focus explicitly on Australia, outlining the forms of research conducted and their institutional bases, especially the relationship between research and government; the main contents of the work; the federal government web site, where much of the research is located; the relationship between research on higher education and public debate in Australia; and the principal data series maintained by the federal government.

The final section outlines brief perspectives on how research in higher education might be developed. Detail on Australia, higher education in Australia, and the framework of public policy, is provided separately in the Appendix. This might illuminate the sometimes obscure reverences to Australian specifics in the main text.

2. Theorisations and reflections

The role of research in higher education is continually changing. While policy research is often mundane and continually revisits established patterns, including patterns of its own devising that have been instituted by itself, it is never yet is not finally, absolutely defined or fixed in nature. This openness is intrinsic not just to the generation of knowledge but to the processes of government and education themselves. Education policy and education research are both engaged in a larger process of continuous working on education, an ongoing transformation of it. There is always more to the potential of research on higher education than can be glimpsed through surface observation or a count of recent outputs.

In *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975/1987) Cornelius Castoriadis puts it as follows:

There will always be a distance between society as instituting and what is, at every moment, instituted – and this distance is not something negative or deficient; it is one of the expressions of the creative nature of history, what prevents it from fixing itself once and for all into the “finally found form” of social relations and of human activities, what makes a society always contain *more* than what it presents (Castoriadis 1987, 114).

This suggests that a part of the optimum conditions for education research is to keep open the broader possibilities that it illuminates and that in certain respects it helps to create.

The shaping of research on higher education

Research in higher education is shaped by ongoing transformations in education and government, changes in the fields of knowledge relevant to policy, and in the ever tense and productive relationships between government and research. At a given time, the character of policy-related research in higher education is shaped by:

- the boundaries of government responsibility in higher education;
- the relationship between education policy and other zones of policy, particularly economic policy and other central strategic arms of the state;
- where the research is conducted, whether in government itself, universities, research agencies, or by contracted individuals; how robust are the institutional sites and how dependant on the policy research as income, etc.;
- the degree to which the research is developed by researchers working on the terrain of the nation-state, vis a vis the influence of foreign research constructions and models (including the influence of global agencies);
- the forms of epistemological autonomy of the research, including on one hand the policy ‘nesting’ of the researchers, and the various influences that shape their outlook and methods; on the other the capacity for measured judgment and dispassionate work;
- the scope for critical research that enables evaluations of and reflections on policy and policy outcomes as well as

research instrumental to pre-given policy objectives;

- the disciplinary base of the research, particularly the respective roles of psychology, sociology, economics, demography, and policy studies/political science;
- the preferred methods used, the orle of statistical data, etc.;
- the degree to which the conduct of, assumptions guiding, and results of, the research are transparent and subject to ongoing public policy discussion and debate.

All of these factors are subject to complex social and historical variations, and could be explored at length. The paper will remark on just four, drawing on Australian examples: the field of study construction of research in higher education, and historical changes in the roles of the disciplines; the impact of neo-liberal policy including the relationship between education policy and economic policy; the questions of autonomy of research and of critical research; and the relationship between research on higher education and public debate. (For more detail about Australia and Australian higher education, see Appendix 1).

Fields of study in higher education research

At bottom, educational economics, psychology and sociology – which aside from social statistics are the main policy sciences that are drawn on in the policy analysis of, and program implementation in, higher education - have not been constituted so much as independent intellectual fields, so much as sub-disciplines that have evolved as specific policy sciences to serve the needs of government. Demography has played a lesser role of the same kind. Of these applications to education only learning theory in psychology has constituted major innovations in the parent discipline. As noted, the role of the different social sciences is not fixed and has varied significantly over time. Generally, the positivity of the social sciences has tended to flourish when their role is, in the words of Castoriadis, an ‘instituting’ role in which they are joined to the nation-building projects of government.

To take the example of the Australian case, the highpoint of Australian educational development in the early 1970s was also the highpoint of the

role of government in education; and of the highpoint in the evolution of educational economics, psychology and sociology and of their policy effects. For a brief time, within the policy framework of government-financed strategies of nation-building, the strictures of educational economics about investment in human capital harmonised with the strictures of education sociology about equality of opportunity, without generating immediate and obvious tensions with the selective functions of educational psychology. The conditions for this temporary harmonisation were specific.

In 1957 the success of the Soviet Union in launching the first satellite, the Sputnik, prompted an intensified focus in Western nations on science and education policy. From 1959, the newly emerging school of human capital economists provided a credible and powerful justification for the rising levels of public and private investment in education demanded both by governmental norms of global competitiveness and popular desires for individual advancement. Denison (1962) calculated that education and research between them explained more than 40 per cent of American economic growth. Becker (1964) developed and systematised Marshall’s private calculus of the private benefits of educational investment. The social science moved with remarkable speed from the journals, to governmental and United Nations conferences, to the pivots of economic strategy and into the heartland of economic public culture. Human capital became not just a principal driver of economic enrichment but a primary social metaphor; personal investment in education, with its deep resources for self-invention and for navigation through institutions and economies, became one of the keys to modern individuality. The rise of human capital theory as a global ideology of educational expansion coincided in Australia with the quickening of enrolments in post-compulsory schooling and the first federally funded higher education system which was established following the Murray committee of inquiry into the universities in 1957.

Educational psychology, with its capacity to individualise and order whole populations at the same time, devised systems for advancing successive cohorts that could be tweaked so as to meet an expanding national need for skills. Psychologists wanted to draw all social groups into education on the basis of individual merit so as to maximise the pool of talent from which

social leaders would be selected, so despite the fact that they naturalised individual differentiation, they were intuitively sympathetic to system-level notions of educational equity as inclusiveness and as access to equal economic resources.

Educational sociology shaped education systems against a more consistently collective logic. It 'solved' the sensitive question of who gets what opportunity by suspending recognition of the scarcity of positional opportunities amid a continuous expansion of tertiary places. From time to time additional educational opportunity was mobilised by political leaders, especially from the Labor Party, with an eye to the electoral advantages (Marginson 1997a). As a policy idea, equality of educational opportunity gained exceptional momentum, so much so that it remains broadly supported even after more than two decades of neo-liberal hegemony.

The political conditions were also specific. At this time there was a broad social and policy consensus on the need to expand education. Political parties seen to neglect education could lose office. None lost office for increasing education spending. It was assumed that the interests of both families and the nation were most effectively and fairly served by common educational provision on the basis of taxpayer financing. It was felt that to rely on the private capacity to pay would be to under-invest in education, retarding modernisation, and maintaining post-compulsory education as the preserve of the privileged few so suppressing much of the available talent. For a time, as long as education budgets kept growing at the expense of willing taxpayers and there were enough employment opportunities for graduates, the aggregated individual ambitions could be contained within strategies for equality of educational opportunity. In other words Keynesian economic times and cold war foreign policy enabled a temporary juncture between economic and egalitarian objectives in which trends to democratisation could be expressed.

After the mid 1970s and the turn to monetarism and fiscal restraint, the policy basis for continuous publicly-financed educational expansion collapsed. Suddenly, economic policy in education became driven not by nation building but by fiscal prudence: the strategic objective was to cut the dynamic of continuous expansion and bear downwards on costs at every turn, except in the financing of private schools. In economic circles education was redefined from investment to cost,

a characterisation that held until disrupted by endogenous growth theory in the 1990s. First in theory and then in policy, educational economics did a 180 degree turn to focus on private investment rather than collective publicly-financed investment. Again with Becker's work at the forefront – his policy contribution was to be canonised in the award of the Nobel Prize for Economic Science in 1992 – the human capital equations were mobilised to support the neo-liberal policy turn to education as a private investment in individual economic and social advantage. 1960s human capital theory had combined Keynesian notions of social investment with a classical individualist calculus. It had been taken for granted by most economists that the private benefits of education summed to the social benefits, and aside from Milton Friedman (1962) most believed these would be financed more readily by governments than individuals. The nexus between private and social benefits was now discarded; the notion that all taxpayers should pay for private benefits of some became unattractive; the notion that 'private' and 'public' goods were zero sum (Samuelson 1954) took root; and the social benefits of education were shifted from policy mechanism to policy rhetoric. Policy now focused exclusively on the private benefits, generating a continuing prima facie argument for increasing the share of costs paid by individuals up to 100 per cent.

The price of this manoeuvre was non-recognition of all outcomes of education other than the measurable economic or psychic returns to individuals: individualised externalities (for example the contribution of the education of one individual to the productivity and earnings of others); the long-run collective benefits of education for whole communities and societies, such as the potentials created by universal literacy, and comprehensive basic research, and the benefits of an egalitarian structure of social opportunities and cultural formation in education. But egalitarian educational sociology had been discarded by policy makers as utopian, and the selective functions of educational psychology were being reasserted. Neo-liberal policy tended to empty out the prior complexity of education as a policy site.

In the Australian context, the rise of neo-liberalism has been associated with a decline in the efficacy and quality of policy research in relation to higher education, especially policy research that accumulates specific expertise in

relation to higher education, on an ongoing basis. One result of neo-liberal ascendancy in policy is that in the last two decades federal economic policy has often been more powerful than education policy in shaping educational practices. Correspondingly, the federal governmental departments of Treasury (especially), Finance and Prime Minister now have more policy clout than the spending departments such as Education - the Nelson market reforms in higher education were carried through by the federal Treasury - and this potent intersection between economic policy and education policy has positioned economics as king of the social sciences in education.

Neo-liberal policy and education research

In the neo-liberal era the boundaries between the policy terrain of government, and the zone of private and civil society, have become complicated by the rise of self-regulation and semi-autonomous institutional forms as tools of public policy (Rose 1999); and the growing use by nation-state and regional government of managed markets and quasi-markets, and private institutions and families, as agents of policy. Neo-liberal government has withdrawn from some of the prior direct commitments and responsibilities of government, for example the provision of universal public services in education, financed by taxation; and there is no longer the same emphasis on public planning underpinned by medium term fiscal stability. Certain matters once subject to active debate have been transferred into automatic funding mechanisms and competitive market allocations, more difficult to contest democratically than were the old public plans. It the same time, however, neo-liberal government has developed processes of government and regulation that reach across the boundaries between governmental agencies and the objects of their attention, and colonise inner subjectivity with redoubled effectiveness. These techniques include the use of competition and quasi-markets to manage financial allocations on the basis of 'steering from a distance', the reconfiguring of the users of higher education from citizens with the right to exercise collective political decision-making in education as 'consumers' choosing on an individual basis between pre-given alternatives determined by government and 'producers', the imposition of detailed regimes for measuring performance and securing output-based accountability, devolution of some political functions of government to corporate management at the level of the institution, etc. In short, the

population is just as 'governed' in globalised neo-liberal states, as in the welfare states and the nation-bound nation-building regimes of the earlier period; though the extent to which it is also a self-governing collective subject - a democratic subject that is 'instituting' as well as 'instituted' - is more problematic.

These developments cut across the old public/private distinction, without abolishing it (Marginson, 2004), while rendering the role of government in education more complex than before. Correspondingly, the role of policy research has become less straightforward than it was in the high Keynesian era of nation-building government, public planning and universal public provision and funding in Australia fell between 1960 and 1975. Not only is education-related research no longer necessarily the dominant intellectual influence in education policy; the horizons of government are shorter, research is more often required in relation to single problems, rather than on an ongoing basis that enables the accumulation of expertise; and the autonomy of researchers is less consistent and on the whole more fraught.

The result of the dominance of economic policy in education policy, and the narrowing of policy research agendas, is that the education policy work of the 2000s is impoverished compared with the 1960s/1970s. (The exception is statistical data, including student achievement measures, which are much improved on the earlier period). The Martin report (1964) and the Universities Commission were followed by a first national report on TAFE (Kangan 1974) and the creation of statutory national commissions to manage federal policy and programs. The Tertiary Education Commission and Schools Commission began with room to move, and each developed a distinctive body of policy knowledge, drawing from different social sciences and from quantitative and qualitative methods at need, that profoundly affected educational institutions, systems and people. The work is superior to today's policy making in its dispassionate intelligence and its accumulation of wisdom. Successive reports build on each other in response to a long term horizon of objectives, rather than constituting a disconnected series of problems. Policy inquiry drove deeper, foregrounding obstacles and creating new lines of inquiry and programs to address them. Policy benefited from the freedoms of triennial planning and government willingness to invest in selective

policy interventions. Nevertheless, in the 1980s the federal education commissions became more politicised, on one hand by public debate and the education interest groups within their structures; on the other hand by pressures to rein in spending, and the expectations placed on government, which the commissions found impossible to do. Reforming Labor Minister John Dawkins (1987) saw the commissions as potential sites of resistance and abolished them. Ostensibly their functions were transferred to the federal department, but the main lines of semi-autonomous policy work, and the core public servants steeped in the policy discourses, were deconstructed. This opened education policy to the play of neo-liberal models.

Policy papers now eschew genuine inquiry: the only questions they pose are those with pre-given answers. Policy objectives are either piecemeal, or expressed in vacuous generalities. From time to time, strategic initiatives are taken up but not sustained, being always vulnerable to fiscal pressures. Commonly, policy statements are polemical in tone. The only funding initiatives that gain ready political support are those that strengthen private schooling or kick-start tertiary markets. The fiscal imperative leaves little scope for a social science designed to improve educational outcomes, which would require nuanced public investments designed to generate specific cause/effect relationships. Instead government simply assumes that once buyer/seller relations are in place, mediated by competition and prices, institutions will improve more or less continuously. In an ideological setting in which system=market, uncomfortable sociological insights about quality variation and limits to upward mobility within a hierarchy of producers can be set aside. The fuller pedagogical potentials of innovations in psychology are also eclipsed, in a policy environment in which the political economy of education (reforms in management and governance; and economic resources, mechanisms and incentives), rather than pedagogies and curriculum, is seen as the medium of modernisation. Instead educational psychology is configured to serve policy-generated markets in more subordinate fashion. Learning achievement can be differentiated by institution and school type, and when freed of social context, league tables can be constructed.

Yet the same tools of inquiry are never used to interrogate market reform itself. Have the dezoning of government schools, nurturing of

private schools, tertiary competition and student fees led to higher student achievement overall? The question is yet to be asked.

Autonomy in research, and the potential of critical research

Autonomy in research is always a key issue but it tends to elude definition, taking many forms, being as varied as subjectivity itself. In a certain sense research is unimaginable without the autonomy, the self-managed identity, of the research. A measure of autonomy is essential to any research on higher education including all research that is conducted within government agencies themselves. At the same time, to be meaningful, all policy-related research – even the most independent and also the most critical research - must relate to government. It must be engaged with the institutions and agencies of government (in some but not all cases this will include a democratic public or ‘public opinion’) and in more or less continuous communication with them. The effectiveness of research is maximised when it can sustain and develop (self-institute) its own intellectual and policy identity, while at the same time maximising its engagement on what are necessarily mutual terms.

A number of considerations determine the potential and limits of autonomy. A threshold issue is the institutional form taken by the research - whether the research is conducted as a branch of government, by independently contracted individuals working to a branch of government, in a university with access to the worldwide sources of academic identity, by an on-going research agency dependant on project revenues, or by an independent agency which has its own sources of funding independent of the projects. Another and associated issue is the method by which the research is financed, and whether the financing covers infrastructure, or is limited to the labour and materials absorbed in specific projects. In turn these material, organisational issues affect other factors that determine autonomy, such as:

- the extent to which the self-managed autonomy of the researcher is also an independent self-determining autonomy: the degree to which the researchers or research agency determine their own program of work and their values, their methods and their time-scales and work rhythms;

- the extent to which researchers are free to exchange with or collaborate with other researchers inside and outside the nation concerned;
- the extent to which the researchers constitute a longer-term program of work; or the research is essentially a series of one-off projects with no necessary relation to each other or necessarily contributing to the longer-term accumulation of expertise;
- the extent to which the goals of the research are solely determined by government, or partly determined (perhaps on a collaborative basis) by the researchers; and if determined by government how close or how distant is this process of determination to the research process itself;
- the extent to which the research results are subject to intellectual property rights that restrict publication and other forms of dissemination, or is projected freely into the public domain;
- the extent to which the research is open-ended, or the outcomes are anticipated if not fixed in advance; including the extent to which payments are determined by whether the client finds the research acceptable (for example, the extent to which the research must be tailored to pleasing the client or is free to draw controversial conclusions).

The processes of government benefits from sustaining at least some research programs in relation to higher education that are independent of continuous direction, and where the results are not type-cast in advance, so that new ideas, data-based findings and theorisations can emerge. Such research programs will need to connect effectively to the parent social science disciplines where research-oriented theories and methods are derived; but will also maximise their effectiveness if they are not bound by pre-given assumptions about cause-effect in higher education, that they provide space for both new realities in higher education, and new theorisations of higher education, to emerge. Castoriadis again:

The non-causal ... appears as behaviours that are not merely "unpredictable" but *creative* (on the level of individuals, groups, classes or entire societies). It appears not as a simple deviation in relation to an existing type but as the

positing of a new type of behaviour, as the *institution* of a new social rule, as the *invention* of a new object or a new art form – in short, as an emergence of a production which cannot be deduced on the basis of a previous situation, as a conclusion that goes beyond the premises or as the positing of new premises. It has already been observed that the living being goes beyond a simple mechanism because it can provide new responses to new situations. But the historical being goes beyond the simply living being because it can provide new responses to the "same" situations or create new situations (Castoriadis 1987, 44).

Theorisations of higher education, where much of what is 'new' in the sector can emerge, are not opposed to or undermining of the practicalities of government. 'Theory in itself is a doing, the always uncertain attempt to realize the project of clarifying the world' (Castoriadis 1987, 74). At the same time, from the point of view of government, and democratic accountability, to be worth supporting such programs of research must be relevant to ongoing needs for the improvement of higher education, and be competent to match the rhythms of policy.

Here we should be wary of the expectation that there is one, fixed optimal relationship between research and government; still less that the relationship should be imagined as a balanced partnership. Needs for research can be partly tailored to longer term planning horizons, but this by no means exhausts the potential of research. Policy issues – and new ideas relevant to policy – can arise from time to time at short notice; and the evolution of government itself determines that at some times the relationship between government and research will be closer than at other times. For example, while there is always potential for cross-fertilisation between areas of social science knowledge and government; the high points of government/researcher collaboration do not translate into a permanent ongoing chemistry. The rhythms and breaks of education policy (like all policy) are other than those of social science. The relations of power/knowledge are not symmetrical: within educational programs, social science only rarely drives policy; and the reverse relationship is more likely to prevail.

As noted, educational economics, psychology and sociology evolved as specific policy sciences to

serve the needs of government, rather than vice versa. The Australian experience suggests that the autonomies of all three are problematic; and they are often undermined by short-term incentives and imperatives in decision-making, and crowded out by fiscal imperatives. Policy is politicised and rarely stays fixed, even in the case of brilliant policy solutions to complex problems. Thus in government, the needs of the social sciences for long term horizons and critical spaces are not always understood. In-depth research inevitably finds itself pulling against this constraint, with varying results - for in the sense of day-to-day institutional practicalities, policy research needs government more than government needs policy research. Where social science fails to provide ready answers to real (or illusory) policy problems, or to speak back in the values of those with power, it can be shut out, like much of education sociology. Yet when the social science tracks its trajectory to the twists and turns of policy it places its own long term autonomy and coherence at risk.

For example educational economics has proved itself readily adaptable to the shifts in official ideologies, themselves often economic in content. As a result educational economics now trails behind it a litter of broken universals, theorisations that were insightful and useful for policy at certain times but were inevitably found wanting as total explanations - policy research constructions that were 'caught out' when the policy environment shifted. Denison's 1962 claim about investment in education has lost its fiscal purchase, though not its appeal to educationists. In *Human Capital* (1964) Becker systematised Alfred Marshall's calculations of the rates of return to individual investment; work still mobilised selectively by governments in arguing for the transfer of costs to the direct beneficiaries, despite its limited grasp of educational outputs. Screening theory recognises education's role in social selection and the exchange value of credentials, the motor of education markets, deepening our understanding of the peculiarities of educational competition (Hirsch 1976; Marginson 2005); but is cynical about the potential of education to enhance productivity or other human capacities. Economists have also built education production functions, in which outputs defined by psychological measures of student achievement are mapped against the costs of inputs. This appeals to policy makers because it is output focused; it measures both system-level and institutional efficiencies; and evidence of weak relations between inputs and these selected

and narrowly defined outputs (e.g. Hanushek 1986) can be mobilised to constrain demands for spending. But the method has little credibility with educationists precisely because most outcomes of education are left outside the equation. Policy continues to make extensive use of these different economic constructions but none of them fulfil the desire of some policy makers (and economists) for a total economic theory of higher education. This points not only to the needs for inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary approaches to research in relation to higher education, but to recognition of the partial reach of any theories.

The question of critical research is an important aspect of the autonomy problem. There are both instrumental/reflexive and democratic benefits for government when it can tolerate and support research on higher education that provides open-ended critiques of government programs despite the short-term political costs. There are also benefits in supporting research that is free to develop its own investigations and analyses in a critical manner, though it can be difficult to determine which projects or research programs of this type to support. Not all governments support this kind of research or freely publish the results, but some do, and more governments are prepared to tolerate some kind of (often fraught and unstable) element of independent criticism in research. It is not practical to expect researchers working within government itself to freely criticise the programs of other government agencies. If government wants to foster the element of criticism in research it needs to do so by supporting university-based research or independent researchers. Providing university faculty are independent in policy matters, universities and independently-financed research institutes provide the best environment to support critical strands in research. By contrast, independent individuals are more vulnerable to the ties of dependency.

In Australia in the last three decades, including the neo-liberal period, the national government has sponsored a broad range of research on policy-related issues, as referred to below. Most of this research is instrumental in character with results that can be broadly forecast in advance, but some of it critical in nature and directed to open-ended inquiry and/or controversial issues. The work is generally (although not universally) made publicly available by being posted on the federal government website. It must be said that the

critical research has done little in itself to shake the hegemony of neo-liberal economic policy in higher education even in cases where the critical faculty has been targeted at neo-liberalism.

Research and public policy debate

Finally, as the foregoing suggests, to maximise the effectiveness of research on higher education in building national identity, democracy and a broad-based movement for improvement, it is essential that the outcomes and (where relevant) the processes of such research be disseminated freely on a public basis. In nations where the infrastructures supporting the Internet are broadly available the Internet provides an effective medium for making the full set of policy-related research available on an ongoing basis, free of charge, evading the costs of printed publication and distribution. In nations where Internet access is more limited other media will be needed, alongside dissemination on the Internet.

In particular, government can play an important function in informing both good planning and better public debate by maintaining an updated set of statistical data concerning higher education such as student enrolments, staff and other people resources, buildings and equipment, expenditures on education; employment outcomes of graduates, and so on. It is particularly important that such statistical collections be extended to the private and commercial sector rather than being confined to more directly administered public institutions; given that private and commercial institutions have implications both for the public good objectives of higher education policy and for the private benefits accessed by citizens; and given also that such institutions often receive government regulatory or financial aid.

3. Research on higher education in Australia

There is no profession of higher education research in Australia, or professional organisation that is focused primarily on research in higher education, though occasional national meetings of scholars take place. The field of research lacks a strong or clear tradition of autonomy and a sense of self-determined field boundaries and intellectual practices. The reproduction of the field, if field there is, rests partly on the PhD supervisions carried out by the small number of university-based researchers whose work is

largely or entirely devoted to research on higher education, and often have strong links to international scholars working on higher education; and partly on the continuous movement of academics and researchers from other fields – mostly in the social sciences – into individual projects on higher education. In the last three decades in Australia the vast majority of research on higher education has been commissioned by federal (national or Australian) government, in support of its broad or specific policy objectives. A small amount of research is supported by State government, which retain a minor role policy and a more substantial legal authority within the sector (see Appendix), but the federal government is overwhelmingly the principal policy influence in the sector.

Thus the epistemological character of the field is determined on one hand by international research on higher education, on the other by the practical and episodic preoccupations of the Australian government. There are two journals that publish mostly Australian work – *The Australian Universities Review*, and the *Journal of Tertiary Education Policy and Management* - but neither are definitive and international journals such as *Higher Education* carry greater weight among Australian-based researchers. The relative weakness of local journals and professional associations tends to enhance the knowledge-building role played by the comprehensive government website on higher education (see below).

Sites of research

Some of federal government-initiated research has taken place within government, by its employee professionals, while other government-initiated research is tendered or commissioned on a one-off basis and carried out by researchers based in universities, or management consultancies or market research companies.

There has been a lesser strand of independently-driven research – what might be designated as ‘basic’ or ‘pure’ research and conceptual/ analytical inquiry in relation to higher education - mostly of it located in the universities, and most of it conducted by personnel who are active also in the much larger field of commissioned policy research. Outside the policy arms of government, there are only a small number of research bases and individuals specifically oriented to research on higher education on an on-going basis.

However, from time to time, professional research companies or social scientists not normally committed to research on higher education will work on individual projects. Some of these organisations and individuals go on to develop a continued role.

The main arm of federal government that draw regularly on research in relation to higher education is the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), including its offshoots and related agencies such as Australian Education International, which researchers aspects of the export market in education, and the Australian Research Council.

In sum, research on higher education is located in four different kinds of institutional site: governments themselves, universities, commercial research companies, and national education organisations.

The main site of research conducted within government is the branches of federal government specifically focused on higher education (the state governments maintain a small number of personnel dedicated to higher education, but there is negligible specialised research capacity). The role of government is particularly significant in relation to statistical collections, but many other reports and papers are prepared. In Australia the number of government personnel dedicated specifically to research in relation to higher education peaked during the operations of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) in the 1970s/1980s, which included in its mandate both the administration of specific programs and the production of policy discussion and advice to government. Since the time that the CTEC was abolished in 1987 there has been a reduced interest in formal policy advice on higher education, the emergence of a general tendency for public service personnel to be rotated rapidly through different portfolio specialisations so that they accumulate a lesser depth of knowledge of higher education than did their predecessors, and greater reliance on the out-sourcing of research, apart from statistical series which have remained located in federal government.

The role of university researchers is probably equally important to that of governmental personnel; though a relatively small number of university researchers specialise full-time or part-time in relation to higher education. The government does not fund any one research centre

or institute in the universities on an ongoing basis to conduct research in relation to higher education. (Interestingly, the National Council for Vocational Education Research does provide contract-based funding that supports research infrastructure in three universities for the conduct of research on vocational education). One university-based centre, the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, with a floating population of 6-10 academic staff, specialises in policy-related research on higher education, while also focusing on academic development functions within that university. In recent years the Melbourne group has performed a significant number of contracted projects for the federal government: it tends to focus on the pedagogical and administrative/ institutional aspects of the student experience and teaching/ learning. A smaller group of researchers at the University of New England has focused on comparative and international policy studies and on aspects of national system organisation and institutional leadership and management; it too has derived significant support from federal government contracts, as well as carrying out basic research. The Monash Centre for Research in International Education at Monash University, somewhat smaller again, has pursued a number of projects on the cross-over between higher and international education, mostly of a basic research kind: though it has carried out a little commissioned research it has taken no funding from federal government sources. There are also a number of individuals in various university locations that from time to time conduct research in relation to higher education policy; and a much larger group that has taken on single projects.

In addition, all universities carry something of a research capacity attached to their executive arms, focused mainly on statistical collection in order to fulfill government and institutional planning and accountability requirements, and on matters specific to the requirements of institutional policy. Work of the latter kind often takes in research on matters of government policy but such research is focused through the lens of the specific institutional interest and much of it does not enter the public domain. Occasionally some of these predominantly institution-focused researchers enter into public discussion of policy issues.

Management consultancy and market research companies are the fastest growing segment of the market in higher education-related research conducted for government and also for institutions.

The commercial research companies are generally more effective than university researchers in tailoring the work to the timelines and specific briefs of commissioning agents in government, and their work often carries greater credibility in the economic arms of government and in the public arena. On the other hand, the commercial research and consulting companies are generally less effective when more fundamental or critical work is required, on the whole they are less effective in gathering data from international sources, where university researchers have deeper and more diverse networks, especially outside the UK/USA; and they tend to be more expensive than universities.

The fourth site of research on higher education is the policy-related work done in education interest groups and organisations, particularly the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) which represents the universities, IDP Australia which is a commercial corporation that organises aspects of international education, and the National Tertiary Education organisation. In the case of the NTEU and AVCC the research agenda tends to be set by the policy agendas and initiatives of government. Both organisations, particularly the NTEU, interpolate a critical approach which enables them to add new perspectives and sometimes significant new data to the perspectives and data circulating through government channels.

Fields of study and research topics

As previously indicated, the principal fields of study that contribute to policy research on higher education are economics, sociology and psychology as well as statistical methods. Though some policy-related research lies within the methods of economics or psychology, much of it is more eclectic and draws from the methods and perspectives of one or more of these disciplines, and sometimes also political science/ policy studies. The majority of policy papers and reports are closer to psychology and/or sociology than to any other disciplines.

Aside from statistical data collection (see below), the principal sub-fields of research include the following:

- Teaching and learning
- The student experience, including transition from school, retention at university, etc.

- Student satisfaction, student responses to and evaluation of teaching
- Student choice of institution and program of study
- Issues specific to the higher education of indigenous students including recruitment and retention
- Access of students, including students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds, the integration of disabled students, regional variations in participation rates
- Financial factors and the student experience
- Internationalisation, including foreign students in Australia (choice-making, satisfaction) and inter-cultural issues
- The off-shore operations of Australian universities
- Applications of information and communications technology to higher education
- The relationship between educational outcomes, and material inputs, and modes of organisation in higher education
- The academic profession, including global mobility, and supply issues
- Governance of institutions, including their commercial operations
- Leadership, organisation and management
- Research management and research performance
- Quality assurance
- The specific needs of regions in higher education
- Cross-sectoral issues, particularly the intersections between higher education and vocational education and training.

The federal government and research

Over the last 30 years government has varied significantly in the extent to which it draws on research and the manner in which it fosters an ongoing research capacity inside and outside government. In the recent period, there has been less use of research than formerly, and little attempt to build a substantial research capacity inside higher education, except in relation to data collection. Projects have mostly been funded on a one-off basis, subject to tender, though the government does tend to call on a small group of researchers and research companies repeatedly. National inquiries normally commission a small

number of large-scale research tasks. There has been an increase in the role of research and consulting companies, relative to universities centres and individual academic researchers. The major research project contracts associated with national inquiries and report writing are often given to research companies.

Very little research commissioned by government is 'pure' or 'basic' in character. There is an overwhelming focus on real or perceived policy issues and problems. Government commissioned research is applied research designed to fulfil identifiable policy purposes. The exception is the small number of projects on higher education funded each year as 2-5 year Discovery Grant projects by the Australian Research Council, where knowledge-building with or without policy application is the primary determinant of funding, rather than practical utility per se. The Australian Research Council also provides funding for 2-5 year Linkage Grant projects funded jointly by the government and partner organisations: these projects often have an applied purpose that sustains the involvement of the partner (which might be a government department), while being longer duration than most commissioned projects.

The extent of reliance on critical research also varies. This kind of research is supported when government officials see the issues as somewhat open, and are curious as to the results of the research, as distinct from research where the answers, or the parameters of the answers, are fixed in advance, formally or informally. In the 1980s and early 1990s there was a surprising amount of commissioned research of the critical type; much of it indistinguishable in method from the research published in academic journals (and often more relevant to policy problems). Although there are no firm data on the topic, in recent years there appears to have been an increase in the proportion of commissioned research that is designed to provide a pre-given policy position with useful political ammunition or a post-hoc validation.

The majority of government-commissioned research is published soon after completion but this is by no means always the case. Commissioned research is owned by government rather than the individual researchers. Publication is a policy decision, and the reasons for decisions not to publish are not always released. There are cases of apparently innocuous data, without any

obvious capacity to embarrass the government of the day, that have never been released.

The Department of Education, Science and Training website

One of the two principal strengths of the Australian approach to research in higher education is that the federal government maintains an active website containing a broad range of past and current policy papers, reports, statistical data and information about the sector.

<http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/default.htm>

Although the site is relatively dense in terms of information the site is easy to use and constantly updated. The vast majority of the materials provided through the site are free of charge. For the scholar it is an invaluable library of materials concerning Australian higher education. All publications produced from 2002, and a significant proportion of those published since the mid 1990s, can be downloaded in pdf and html forms. The statistical series are accessible back to the mid 1990s, and there is an historical series for student enrolment data that goes back for 50 years. The only documents that cannot be readily accessed through the website are those papers and reports that have not been cleared for publication (see above), and the speeches and media releases produced by ministers for education prior to the incumbent Minister. A distinction is made between those papers and documents associated with the ongoing work of government – where some continuity of information is maintained even between governments of different political persuasion – and the episodic statements of particular ministers. This relatively bi-partisan approach to the maintenance of and provision of access to research-based data is somewhat surprising, in a period where the operations of the portfolio and of the government as a whole have tend to be not just partisan but strongly coloured by ideological preconceptions, and it cannot be taken for granted that the site will be maintained this way in perpetuity, but it is most welcome.

The provision of what is an open access library of research-based materials on the higher education sector tends to facilitate government policy, in that disseminates common and standardised approaches. From the point of view of democratic debate, it opens the sector to scrutiny, making visible many of the main policy and political preoccupations of the day, and ensuring that the

common discussion occurs on the basis of a platform of agreement about many of the basic facts. Inevitably, not all issues or critical perspectives are acknowledged in the site, however. There is no open access space for public discussion or commentary. The site remains firmly in government control. It does not function as a common democratic space.

The relationship between research and public debate

Currently public debate about higher education in Australia is sustained largely by the mass media; especially the 'serious' newspapers produced by the Fairfax group (*The Sydney Morning Herald* in Sydney, *The Age* in Melbourne, the *Australian Financial Review* which is the chief source of business-related data) and *The Australian* which is published by Rupert Murdoch's News Limited and publishes a weekly supplement on higher education. A weekly newsmagazine *Campus Review* circulates within the sector and provides the most accessible space for debate but has thin journalistic resources and does not carry the same agenda setting function as the daily newspapers. There is still policy and political exchange of the traditional kind, through activism, meetings, petitions, etc. – particularly instigated by and among students and to a lesser extent the NTEU - while Internet-based discussion is growing in importance and is likely to become much more significant in future. At present, however, the mass media is dominant. Thus public debate tends to be shaped and constrained by the preconceptions of the media, with its definition of legitimate issues, framing of debates and tendency to simplify often complex questions. On the whole the media – particularly *The Australian* - tends to be both more conservative and more neo-liberal than is the sector itself. The media also tends to be preoccupied with the business aspects of higher education, such as the international student market, the prospects for commercial online education, and the economic position of individual non-profit public universities, which are discussed in the terms of business journalism almost as if they were corporations subject to equity value.

In this context there is some reporting of the outcomes of research projects concerning higher education provided that these can be fed into the established policy debates and issues. In the last decade or so there has been something of a shift from foregrounding university personnel as experts or as public intellectuals, to covering the

statements of politicians, vice-chancellors ('CEOs') and spokesperson for the major interest groups such as the AVCC and NTEU. (Student union spokespeople are invited to comment on issues that affect students, such as increases in fees, but in general receive less legitimacy than other organisations). The exception here is the reporting of the outcomes of some medical and scientific research considered to be of public interest – medical findings, matters affecting lifestyle, perennial favourites such as the environment, space research, palaeontology, etc. - where expertise continues to be foregrounded. There is less reporting of social science research, including research on higher education, and it is difficult for researchers on higher education to use the mass media to place new issues on the agenda. It is *much* easier for a researcher who has discovered a new dinosaur to get publicity, than one who has unlocked the secrets of better university teaching or access to people from non-English speaking backgrounds. However controversial findings about pre-given issues in higher education are usually reported.

A very small group of researchers with expertise on higher education, from different political persuasions, are called on regularly as public commentators on the sector itself. Even here, however, the agenda of discussion is pre-given and largely inaccessible to reframing by the experts. Complex data sets are not reported even in summary form and there is little in-depth analysis, or attempt to acknowledge the dimension of depth of issues, in the media. Journalists rarely read government reports in full, let alone policy papers produced by independent researchers, and even those who regularly report on higher education do little research of their own, remaining largely oblivious to most of the resources on the government website. This limitation is in part a function of the time imperatives of daily journalism. The framing of debate by the mass media - which publishes under conditions of formal freedom from state interference but can scarcely be described as democratic in a larger sense – is retarded by the media's need to entertain which feeds into its political stereotyping of issues and personnel. Research as such tends to be rinsed out though from time the media will signal websites or other sources where a deeper engagement in discussion and issues becomes possible.

The second main strength of the Australian approach to research in higher education is the federal government's maintenance of a comprehensive set of statistical series on higher education. The collection of data, which involves significant resources at both university and governmental levels, is supported by a sub-section of the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). It has developed primarily to facilitate government programs, particularly aggregate funding allocations for the support of teaching: the targeting of funds for specific purposes, such as the support of equity groups and rewards for research performance; and financial accountability. For example government policy requires that institutions meet the enrolment targets for which they are funded, and differentiates funding allocations according to fields of study. Such policies can only be implemented on the basis of comprehensive and accurate information about student enrolments and withdrawals.

The statistical collections have the not incidental effect of encouraging the individual institutions to standardise their internal data collection, funding allocations, performance measures and financial accounting, thus serving to continually modernise and homogenise the sector. For government, self-managed statistical data requirements have proven to be an economic method of securing standardisation of higher education. Arguably, it is a method that carries less political costs than would direct instruction and surveillance.

However, it is totally dependant on the provision of adequate resources and expertise at institutional level, including staff trained in statistical methods.

DEST statistical data series

The DEST statistical collections can be accessed at
<http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/statistics/default.htm>

The broad series headings are

- Finance (each year the government publishes each university's revenues and expenditures under major category headings, enabling also annual calculation of system-wide trends);
- Research expenditure (again annual, detailing research

allocations by field of study, purpose of research and source of income for research);

- Students (annual enrolment figures for each institution and the different categories of enrolment and of student, including gender of students, age, level and field of study, mode of enrolment such as distance education and offshore, foreign/local students including both country of permanent residence, language spoken at home, other special categories such as indigenous students, lower s.e.s. students and disabled students, fee-paying arrangements, basis of enrolment and origin of commencing students, degrees gained in the previous year by level and field of study, foreign and local students, etc.);
- Time series data on students, going back to 1949;
- Staff (annual numbers by category, mode of employment such as full-time or part-time, age and gender, academic or non-academic classification, main duties, field of study allocations, etc.).

All of these data series are provided free of charge and can be downloaded as soon as they are published, in the form of separate tables and often as complete annual publications.

The base data are collected from institutions at two main census dates during each year: with increasingly flexible patterns of enrolment, it became necessary to supplement the principal collection of 31 March, adding to the workloads of universities and government.

Successive collections have led to refinement of definitions, categories and collection methods, and frequently past collections are revised. The data sets enable a useful set of historical comparisons in relation to key policy indicators such as student-staff ratios, public funding per student, and patterns of income sources and research expenditure. For example the growth of the commercial industry in the education of foreign students, a spectacular feature of Australian higher

education, can be clearly traced from these data series.

The DEST statistical site also provides one-off statistically based studies, for example in relation to aspects of institutional performance in relation to government equity and efficiency objectives; and provides a payment-based statistical service whereby more detailed data interrogations are made available.

Graduate Careers Council collections

There is a further set of statistical collections, conducted independently of the federal government but partly financed by it and partly by the universities themselves. That is the annual survey of new university graduates by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA). This is a comprehensive survey of all new graduates, conducted 3-5 months after the completion of programs. Response rates vary by institution and can fall below 50 per cent.

The GCCA collection falls into two main sections. The first section collects data on graduate employment (employed or unemployed, full-time or part-time work, salary level) and enables the identification of patterns of employment by category of student – gender, level of study, field of study, institution attended, etc. The second section covers graduates' own evaluations of the quality of teaching and the learning of generic skills such as communications during their academic programs. These are the only substantial data collected in Australia on the 'quality' of teaching; and so despite their subjective and historically/ locally variable character, they tend to be widely used when comparing the performance of institutions. The GCCA data are heavily publicised on release. In a nation in which – in public discussion at least - university is primarily understood in terms of the relationship between study and work, as a process of self-investment in future career and income, these data carry a good deal of weight. Arguably, however, the statistical collection occurs too early to provide a useful comparative picture of career outcomes. Many graduates obtain their first substantial employment after the collection date; while three to five months after graduation is too early to assess the formative impact of university education on work and life skills.

5. Suggestions for improving the research field in Australia

The Australian experience suggests a number of achievements and strengths: the openness of research papers and data series to broad discussion and interrogation; the transparency of federal government funding of research and of individual contracts; the openness to international literatures and comparative examples (though this is evident more among academic researchers than those working in government); the episodic willingness of government to entertain critical approaches and from time to time (though not consistently, and rarely in areas of high priority or sharp controversy) to publish materials critical of policy; and the quality of the statistical data collections, particularly those that enable commercial activities and questions of student access to higher education to be more closely investigated.

The Australian experience also suggests ways in which research in higher education might be usefully developed, at least in Australia and perhaps elsewhere.

1. Constitution of an autonomous body of researchers

The absence of a clearly identifiable and self-reproducing body of researchers specialising in work on higher education handicaps the accumulation and reproduction of knowledge in the field and opens it unduly to colonisation by episodic policy trends and political perspectives. A more balanced relationship between academic researchers specialising in research on higher education, and the federal government as the primary funding agent, would lead to more intellectually robust outcomes; including a stronger protection for basic research activities and for critical work with its capacity to move 'outside the box' defined by pre-given policy, and to connect to ongoing debates and controversies. The question is how to do this. Federal government funding- along with support by one or more universities - is one necessary element of the constitution of an autonomous body of researchers. This ensures the continuing relevance of what is always largely applied research field, while it also interpolates complex problems of negotiation in an environment in which instrumentalism has become the norm.

2. Mixed modes and methods

Higher education research is purpose driven, drawing on any and every disciplines and methods that provide answers to its questions. Experience demonstrates that a range of social science disciplines can and should contribute to our understandings of higher education. Nevertheless there has been little systematic attempt to develop more grounded approaches to multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary studies. Much of the research unreflectively combines different social sciences in a loose manner, or ignores work relevant to the inquiry that was completed in disciplines other than the researchers' own. Here the absence of strong training in philosophy – which is largely absent from the preparation of social scientists in Australia – is a key difficulty and leaves the field open to competing claims between the partial universals of economists and psychologists who can only ever provide some of the answers. Government officials that commission research tend to veer erratically between different approaches, depending on their own intellectual training, with economics and economists, located both in research and in government, gaining ground over time.

A serious effort to get to grips with disciplinarity and cross-disciplinary synergy is one of the preconditions of a forward move in the field. In particular, it is essential to reconcile the selective use of linear reasoning with synthetic and qualitative approaches that recognise the non-linear character of many phenomena under discussion. This is particularly important in work involving international and inter-institutional comparison – the 'league table' type comparisons that carry an increasing weight in policy circles – where quantitative data generated by each individual unit are highly context sensitive and can take different meanings depending on the values and perspectives adopted, and the purposes of the inquiry.

3. Research and expert judgment

The process of research, let alone the findings of research findings, cannot substitute for policy making. They are an adjunct to expert judgment rather than a substitute for it. One of the problems associated with neo-liberal policy is the undue reliance on mathematical data and data generated in competitive outcomes to determine the allocation of finances and status, reducing the political pressure on government. The philosophical grounding of these approaches is F.A. Hayek's chimera of the self-evolving

spontaneous market order, free of state direction, 'the results of human action not of human design' (Marginson 1997b). It is a chimera because when government designs systems of 'automatic' allocation based on data gathering, it is nevertheless engaged in a process of human design, and is far from being free of state determination. The only difference here between the neo-liberal approach and Keynesian planning is that under neo-liberalism the assumptions guiding the system of allocation are hidden in the design rather than open for scrutiny, for testing by research and for democratic debate.

4. Possible areas for further research and data collection

There are a number of areas where new or more detailed research and data collection might be developed:

- Integrated data on the *capacity* of higher education institutions, and trends in and comparisons of capacity, and factors determining capacity, in particular academic capacity (staff-student ratios, patterns of academic and administrative work, the spread of research activity) Strengthen data concerning outcomes e.g. in workplace;
- The effects of corporate and commercial development in absorbing the revenues and resources of institutions (how much of the monies collected through market-based student places are ploughed back into the business, how much generates surplus that can be used for academic purposes?);
- The role of higher education in servicing particular cities and regions, including the global networking functions of universities;
- The patterns of offshore collaboration with foreign universities and the public goods (and 'public bads') created by cross-border relations in higher education (Marginson 2004);
- Longer term graduate outcomes, say five years, ten years and/or twenty years after graduation, supplementing the existing Australian studies that collect data 3-5 months after graduation;

- More detailed, considered and synthetic studies of educational outcomes. (This is expanded on in more detail below).

5. An example: stronger data on educational outcomes

The collection of stronger data on the outcomes of higher education would provide a significant new resource for policy making and would facilitate public debate. Arguably, the better identification and monitoring of educational outcomes and output is the most important single problem confronting policy and research in relation to higher education. Over the years, the deficiencies in the existing tools of analysing outcomes have become more obvious.

Consider again the case of Australia. Between 1960 and 1978 the number of higher education students rose from 53,000 to 313,000 and the number of institutions quadrupled. Public spending on education tripled in ten years (Marginson 1997a). At that time, following first wave human capital theorists such as Denison (1962) it was taken for granted that simply expanding taxpayer-financed education would deliver economic and social payoffs, and education would pay for itself in the longer term by generating growth. Little thought was given to the composition of investment; the mix of benefits; the location and mode of delivery; or efficiency, incentives and behaviours. Keynesian economics supported education psychology in its drive to extend the boundaries of participation across the whole school age population and maximise the potential talent. For sociologists, whose objective was equal educational outcomes by social group, as in the Karmel (1973) report on schools, the universal expansion of education was the path of least political resistance through the problem of distribution. But when fiscal pressures demanded a less generous and more nuanced approach, government looked to identify educational outputs, so as to maximise the benefits of investment and to target particular outcomes – and neither economics nor psychology nor sociology had devised a plausible function relating investment in education to the comprehensive outcomes associated with it.

Mainstream psychology is strong on individual cognitive outcomes but weak on social determinations: the only sociology it recognises uses linear analytical methods to model non linear and contingent social relations. Educational

sociology is divided between atomistic quantification, critical policy analysis and cultural theory: none of which can imagine comprehensive outcomes. Economists draw on partial measures of output such as private rates of return. But rates of return analyses assume perfect competition in the markets for education and labour; enhanced earnings are attributed to education alone not social selection; calculations of externalities and collective benefits are arbitrary. Economics leaves the larger questions unanswered. What are the social and economic conditions and determinants of student achievement? How much does education make a difference? Is education consumption or investment? Are these zero sum or positive sum? Is advanced education necessary to economic competitiveness, or do strong economies spend more on education because they can (Wolf 2002)? What are the relations between private benefits and public or social benefits? Are they zero sum, so that the greater the private benefit (and private cost) the lesser the social benefit (and public cost)? Or are they positive sum? Do they require distinctive policies? To what extent should education be assessed in terms of direct benefits at all, given its larger contribution to social, economic, cultural and political capacities?

The unresolved ambiguity of outcomes runs through every debate. When mass tertiary education becomes the norm and the engine of complex social practices there is nostalgia for simplification and certainty. In Australia this takes the form of demands for vocational utility (or sometimes for traditional literatures), whereby outcomes are measured in terms of employment rates, wage rates, the lifetime earning of graduates; and the work-related attributes they have acquired. The measure of education is how 'practical' it is; how well it prepares, screens and selects students into jobs. The formation of cognitive and cultural attributes, let alone social values, is not significant. Neither human capital theory nor policies of equal opportunity challenge the utilitarian vision. Yet the holes in it are obvious. Education is never the sole factor that determines economic and social destinations. It does more than prepare people for work, and also does less: learning on the job is more effective than simulated vocational learning in education. Again, the lacuna is a holistic theory linking investment in educational capacity, including direct and indirect effects, to the full range of human potentials.

Such a theorisation of higher education would need to draw on the different disciplines, to configure relations between them in an intellectually rigorous and transparent manner, and to provide space for expert synthetic judgment. It would need to be grounded in philosophy not quantification: mathematisation would be not the master of such a theorisation, but its servant. Such a theorisation is removed from contemporary practices, but it is not beyond the whit of intellectuals working on problems of higher education. It is unlikely to be achieved *sui generis* in a nation the size of Australia. Here is a challenge for international collaboration.

Appendix: Australia and Australian higher education

Australia is an island continent in the southern hemisphere of 7.7 million square kilometers and a population of 20 million (2004) clustered in coastal centers with high urban concentration. In 2003 Australia's GDP of \$518.4 billion USD (1.4 per cent of global GDP) ranked as 13th in the world. Gross National Income per capita was \$28,290 in purchasing power parity; twentieth in the world, though Australia ranks second behind Norway on the UN Development Index that measures broader living standards (World Bank, 2004. All financial data are expressed in US dollars on the basis of 1.00 AUD = 0.75 USD.). In common with the other English-speaking nations, income inequality as measured by Gini coefficients is less egalitarian than in Scandinavia and much of Western and central Europe, but more egalitarian than in most of the developing world and it is less egalitarian than the USA. In economic terms Australia exhibits a distinctive profile reflecting its recent colonial history. The main strength is in primary industries that now employ only a small fraction of the total population. Australia is a major minerals exporter, and has a technology-intensive agribusiness sector, though there are serious problems of land and water degradation in this driest and most ecologically fragile continent. Elaborately transformed manufacturing is weaker than in most OECD economies, and the East and Southeast Asian nations that absorb most Australian trade. However, Australia has a robust finance sector; is a strong exporter of transport, tourism, education and business services; and has certain strengths in research.

In government, Australia is a federation of six states and two territories, plus islands to the north

and in the Pacific, Indian and Southern oceans. The Commonwealth (Australian or national) government dominates military and international matters, tax and economic policy, and welfare payments. Publicly-supported education and health services are largely provided by state and territory governments, but the national government leads higher education policy. Australia originated in six separated British colonies established after 1788, on the basis of the dispossession, cultural destruction and partial genocide of the indigenous inhabitants. The federated colonies were granted 'dominion' status by Great Britain in 1901. Though the British monarch is still head of state and Australia inherited British common law, most constitutional ties with the UK have been abolished. In terms of economics, military-strategic matters—and to some extent culture—Australia is now closer to the United States than the UK. Nevertheless, Australia is a Westminster-style democracy, and its institutions—including higher education—are still marked by their British origins. Even in recent years, policy changes in Australian higher education have paralleled British developments more closely than those of any other nation. Neo-liberal practices in government shaped by the Thatcher years in the UK are highly influential in economic and educational policy and administration. At the same time, like New Zealand but unlike other English-speaking nations, Australia is located near East and Southeast Asia, has a closer relationship with China than the US, and has extensive economic and educational ties throughout the Asia-Pacific region. This region provides 85 per cent of the foreign students in Australia's institutions of higher education.

As a British settler state, Australia was formed by migration and it continues to sustain a higher rate of migration and population increase than most OECD nations, despite internal tensions about immigration and refugee policy. The majority of Australians originated from Britain and Ireland, some via New Zealand or South Africa. But Australia also has continuing indigenous traditions, and since World War II has received waves of people from Northern, Central and Southern Europe; the Middle East; most nations of Asia; the Pacific islands; and the Horn of Africa. Large segments of the populations are descended from Greek, Italian, Vietnamese and Chinese settlers: in the two largest cities of Sydney and Melbourne, almost one in ten are Asian born, and Melbourne contains the second largest city population of Greeks in the world after Athens. The number of

migrants from Spanish speaking nations is relatively small. Recent policy has favored skilled, professional and business migrants, many first entering Australia as foreign students. Australia combines these diverse starting points within homogenizing economic, educational, legal and political institutions, so that a stable Anglo-American monoculture triumphs over complexity. Anglo-Irish descendants still lead business and dominate politics and the professions. The sole public language is English. At the same time, Australia practices a policy of 'multiculturalism' which, though contested, encourages tolerance and some expression of cultural diversity, while normalizing economic, social and educational opportunities for non Anglo-Celtic settlers. While there are some inter-cultural tensions, especially in relation to indigenous people and in rural areas, open racism is no longer acceptable in the principal urban centres, and inter-cultural marriage is common. Educational institutions have been important in cultural mixing.

In education Australians of non Anglo-Celtic origin generally outperform the majority in the first or second generation after arrival, with exceptions among some Middle Eastern families. On the other hand, there is less support for historically-derived legal, political and cultural rights of indigenous people than in the other British settler states of New Zealand and Canada. Indigenous people are severely disadvantaged in incomes, employment rates and health indicators, and have relatively low participation and success rates in tertiary education. The education system has been unsuccessful in connecting positively to indigenous traditions or providing an untroubled space for self-determining indigenous programs and institutions.

Education sectors and education policy

There are five sub-sectors of education in Australia: pre-school to age five years; primary (elementary) and secondary schooling; vocational education and training (VET) including public technical and further education (TAFE) and private training; higher education conducted mostly in public universities; and on the job training which is largely unfunded and uncodified. In 2003 almost 6 million people were enrolled in formal institutions, including 3.3 million at school, 1.7 million in VET, and 0.9 million in higher education. Of every 100 citizens 30 were involved in formal education and perhaps another 15 or so were involved in informal on-the-job training.

There were also 350,000 foreign students, half of them enrolled in higher education (ABS 4221.0; DEST 2005; NCVET 2005; AEI 2005).

In Australia the vocational education and training sector, offering one and two year diploma and certificate programs, is not included in the formal definition of 'higher education' which is confined to institutions granting degrees. The vast majority of higher education students are enrolled in doctoral universities. To be designated a 'university' an institution must provide a comprehensive range of fields of study, conduct research and operate under conditions of independence in governance and academic freedom in teaching and research. There are 39 higher education institutions on the main federal government funding schedule; 36 are public doctoral universities and three are small private institutions. The 39 institutions enrolled 844,480 students in the first half of 2004, 54 per cent women (DEST 2005). The largest is Monash University, with 55,726 students in 2005, 29 per cent foreign students (Monash 2005). There are about 100 small private sector institutions outside this group, enrolling about 45,000 students, mostly offering specialist programs in areas such as theology. From 2005 onwards students attending private sector institutions are eligible for government-subsidised loans covering tuition costs and the private sector is expected to grow rapidly in future.

Because education in Australia has become central to individual and family aspirations, to work, to economic capacity, to global competitiveness and national identity; it is an important site of federal and state policy. It is a highly politicised sector, in which government is pervasive even in subsidised private institutions and family decision making; and much policy attention is focused on efficiencies and cost containment. In all sub-sectors of education funding and provision are shared by a mix of public and private agents and both federal and state governments are involved. Under the constitution the states carry responsibility for education, except that in 1946 the Chifley Labor government secured a referendum concerning federal provision of social services which included a clause on 'benefits to students'. The federal government uses its superior taxing powers to intervene selectively. Canberra has never taken complete responsibility for maintaining institutions or securing policy outcomes, even at the peak of nation building

policies in education under the Whitlam Labor government (1972-1975), and its role varies by sub-sector of education. The federal/state fault-line has become associated with a divergent administrative evolution. On one hand there are federally fostered independent private schools, higher education and private training institutions, now modelled as self-regulating markets. On the other are school and TAFE systems subject to more traditional public administration by the states. (Systemic Catholic schools, educating almost one student in five, federally funded but administered as state/territory systems, are an intermediate form). The result is a fragmented policy environment: institutional educational cultures at variance with each other; government blame shifting and buck-passing across the constitutional fault-line; and coordinating arrangements that are incomplete, complex and poorly understood even in policy circles. Although all ministers meet in the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), there is no agreement on administering and financing education. Only when federal funding and/or ideological leadership carries all before it, pushing the states towards a residual role (the early 1970s, the late 1980s) is there temporary national coherence.

It is often difficult to identify what drives policy; because of federal/state factors; because institutions and government agencies are engaged globally (UK policies and practices are particularly influential); because government draws eclectically on social science inside and outside the public service (economics, psychology, sociology and demography all contribute, and statistical methods are indispensable); and because education policy is not autonomous. Federal economic policy has often been more powerful than education policy in shaping educational practices, especially in the last two decades of neo-liberal ascendancy. The federal departments of Treasury (especially), Finance and Prime Minister have more policy clout than the spending departments. The potent intersection between economic policy and education policy positions economics as king of the social sciences in education. The Nelson reforms in higher education in 2005 were carried through by Treasury. Likewise state treasuries have the last word on government schools and TAFE. Other portfolios intersect more sporadically with higher education. Agriculture, Health and Science are interested in research and universities; and when

they exist departments of industry are concerned about training. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Foreign Affairs helped to launch the international student market; and Immigration now shapes the entry of international students by nation, facilitating and retarding the market by turns, and using conditions. From time to time, all of these different government agencies are capable of sponsoring research in higher education.

Participation and funding

Total national spending on education in 2002-03 was \$35.1 billion, \$25.8 billion from governments and \$9.3 billion from private sources (ABS 5518.0.55.001), constituting 6 per cent of GDP. The 2001 census found that that education employed 595,398 Australians, 10.2 per cent more than in 1996 (ABS 2017.0: 67). Education not just absorbs national production but in part creates it: in 2003-2004 international education earned \$4.2 billion in export revenues, including tuition fees and other spending by students. Education is Australia's third largest services export after tourism and transport (IDP 2005). In education export Australia provides 10 per cent of the world's places for cross-border students, and is the fourth largest exporter behind the USA (30 per cent), and the UK and Germany (each 12 per cent). The largest components of foreign students are from China, Hong Kong China, Singapore, Malaysia, India and Indonesia. In higher education two foreign students in three enrol in Business Studies and IT programs. The Australian approach to international education is highly commercial, and foreign student revenues now provide 15 per cent of the total income of higher education institutions. There is relatively little movement of Australian students to study abroad, with a ratio of incoming to outgoing students of 23.1 (2001), which is the highest in the OECD (OECD 2004, 155).

Participation in post-school (tertiary), including both higher and vocational education, is relatively strong in international terms, especially among older age groups. In 2002, 25 per cent of Australian 25-34 year olds had entered degree-granting institutions in higher education, compared to an OECD country average of 19 per cent. Among 20-29 year olds, 32.9 per cent were in some kind of education program compared to an OECD average of 22.7 per cent; while among 30-39 year olds Australia's participation rate was 15.2 per cent, which was behind only the UK (16.2 per cent) and well above the OECD average

of 5.4 per cent. Expenditure on tertiary education in education was once relatively strong in international terms but is now slipping back to the OECD average level. In 2002 Australia spent \$12 688 per tertiary student compared to an OECD average of \$10 052. (The US level was \$22 234). But between 1995 and 2001, despite a 15 per cent increase in Australian per capita GDP, total spending per tertiary student fell by 9 per cent. Further, and significantly, average degree level study was 2.6 years compared to the OECD figure of 4.7 years. Thus the average tertiary student received \$32 101 of education over the course of study compared to \$42 906 in the OECD (OECD 2004: 215, 217 & 221).

Australian education funding is relatively private sector dependant, especially at tertiary stage. In 2001 total education spending at 6.0 per cent of GDP exceeded the OECD average of 5.6 per cent. However total public spending at 4.5 per cent of GDP was below the OECD average (5.0 per cent) and also below other English speaking nations; while Australia's private spending at 1.4 per cent of GDP was third highest in the OECD after Korea and the USA. Australia's private spending on tertiary education was 0.7 per cent of GDP while the OECD average was 0.3 per cent. Australian public spending on tertiary education at 0.8 per cent of GDP was ahead of only Japan, Korea and Mexico. (Canada spent 1.5 per cent, the USA 0.9 per cent). From 1995 to 2001 Australia's public spending on tertiary education institutions fell by a massive 11 per cent. Private spending on fees and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) rose by 56 per cent. Only two other OECD nations experienced declining public spending on tertiary institutions in this period: the UK at 4 per cent and Norway at 2 per cent (OECD 2004: 229-232). In sum, tertiary participation is increasing faster than spending, and resources are being spread more thinly across a relatively short period of study. Since the transition from Keynesianism to monetarism in economic policy in the 1970s the strongest single policy imperative in higher education has been the downward pressure on public outlays for public institutions. This fiscal imperative is the core of neo-liberal policy.

Neo-liberal policy and the universities

In higher education the spectacular reduction in public funding is the condition as well as the result of neo-liberal reform and marketisation. In the mid 1980s Australian higher education was

free of tuition charges and more than 90 per cent government funded. Official policy and programs was managed by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission which operated at 'arms length' from the economic policy arms of government, and included on its governing councils representatives of the education institutions. The last 20 years have seen the abolition of the CTEC and its replacement by more direct administration, a shift to models of government-institution relationship influenced by public choice theory, such as purchaser-provider contracting and detailed performance measurement and accountability, simultaneous with the partial withdrawal of government funding and a spectacular growth in student charges and commercial activities. By leading the OECD in its reduction of public outlays per student the federal government has driven the market incentive deep into the minds of university executives. While the quality of the infrastructure supporting education and research has declined, the imposition of market competition as the modus operandi in relations between institutions, and in relations between institutions and students/ public, ensures that universities have a vested interest in concealing the downsides.

The reform of the higher education system by the then Labor Party government in 1987-1990 saw the introduction of selective neo-liberal reforms alongside policies designed to increase participation and safeguard access to students from poorer families. There was a 50 per cent growth in student numbers in six years, financed partly by the introduction of a system of uniform student charges, the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). The HECS was subject to income contingent repayment arrangements through the tax system, so that current students were not obliged to repay their HECS tuition debt until their incomes reached the threshold level for repayments, which was originally fixed at average weekly earnings. This kind of loan has relatively 'soft' deterrent effects and hits poorer students little harder than others. However the non-market HECS was balanced by more explicitly business-like approaches to higher education drawn from the template for neo-liberal reform, including the promotion of inter-institutional competition, executive-style leadership, efficiency drives and performance regimes within institutions, and commercial markets in vocational postgraduate degrees and international education that were outside the HECS framework. Institutions became positioned

by government as self-serving corporations competing for fee-based private revenues and performance-based public research funding. Full indexation of public funding was dropped in 1995, creating increased institutional dependence on market revenues.

Under the Liberal-National Party conservative government which first took office in 1996, growth in HECS places became restricted, the advance of domestic student participation slipped, the HECS itself was increased sharply and allowed to vary in level on the basis of variation by the universities (thus moving closer to the forms of a tuition market), and the main priority of institutional managers became more unequivocally the building of commercial revenues. Institutions became shaped less by national policy goals and academic criteria; and more by market mechanisms, funding formulae and business acumen; especially the less prestigious universities. Between 1996 and 2003 public source funding fell from 58 to 44 per cent; with only 25 per cent from federal money for teaching. Funds from students rose from 19 to 34 per cent, with 17 per cent from fees other than the HECS (Table 1).

The market reforms in 2005 led by Education Minister Brendan Nelson (2003) include HECS increases of up to 25 per cent, and the introduction of a full-fee undergraduate market supported by income contingent loans, FEE-HELP, for up to 35 per cent of domestic students in each program. This implies a further shift of costs to the private side (Marginson 2005a); and by extending the FEE-HELP system to accredited private institutions the government established the basis for the rapid growth of a subsidised private sector which in the future can be expected to absorb an increasing proportion of government monies.

In terms of 'sticker' price Australian universities are now among the least affordable in the world, and there is little scholarship support from either universities or government. Student aid for living costs – which in the mid 1970s was extended to two thirds of all university students – has fallen sharply in both level and availability. Over two thirds of full-time students work during semester, which is double the proportion of two decades ago. Nevertheless, Australian universities are more socially accessible than the rising private costs would suggest, primarily because the income contingent repayment system first developed for the HECS has been retained for both HECS places

and for government-sponsored loans to cover full-fee places for domestic students (EPI 2005). But for students the question is not so much access to degrees as access to high value degrees. The deeper changes have not been in social access to higher education, but in the production and culture of the education that is accessed. The market reinforces vocational and instrumental perspectives; blurs policy focus on the longer-term and collective benefits; and unleashes a steeper stratification between 'high value' and 'low value' institutions that is no longer mediated by government policies designed to standardise degree parity and research functions across the national system.

Australian higher education is a test case for neo-liberal reform because this has gone further than in most nations. The successive weaves of neo-liberal reform have produced some peculiar patterns of development. Prior to the 2005 reforms, domestic student numbers grew slowly except for business and IT students. From 1996 and 2001 domestic students increased by only 5.7 per cent, though domestic fee-paying postgraduate load grew by 84.8 per cent and international students by 112.2 per cent. Aside from the Australian National University - which has special public subsidies focused on its mission as an internationally networked university in research and doctoral education - economic incentives have forced Australian universities to focus unduly on high volume high revenue-generating teaching programs. Thus Australia provides 10 per cent of the world's international student places but only two of the top 100 research universities (Marginson 2005). Universities have been slow to recruit international research students who need scholarships not fee-based places. Only 4.5 per cent of Australia's international students are research students, much lower than the USA (16.6 per cent), the UK (10.0 per cent) and parts of Western Europe (OECD 2004).

Meanwhile universities siphon a growing part of resources into sustaining competitive position and revenue flows (marketing, promotion, fundraising, offshore branches, financial management, quality assurance, status-oriented buildings and facilities) at the expense of academic infrastructures and their larger public role. Between 1993 and 2002 average students per staff rose from 14.2 to 20.4 (DEST 2005). In 2001 only 37.5 per cent of university staff were engaged in teaching. Research publication and citation counts indicate that the number of publications is increasing but

citation rates are falling; and there is a downward trend in the average academic status of the journals that include articles from Australian scholar/ researchers. Problems of academic capacity will worsen, given that university teachers are older than the workforce as a whole. In 2001 44.5 per cent of university faculty were aged 45 years and over. 'Australian universities over the next decade will be faced by their largest recruitment tasks for three decades', in 'the most competitive international labour market for skilled academics, scientists, technologists and researchers that has ever existed' (Hugo 2004). Universities use marketing and quality assurance to conceal variations in educational quality, while policy turns a blind eye to the link between national investment and long term educational capacity; but over time such gestures tend to have diminishing returns, especially in the global context where students from other nations have choices about where they choose to go for study, and the international standing of Australian research is transparent.

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**INVESTIGACIÓN ACADÉMICA Y
POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS EN LA
EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR: EL
CASO MEXICANO DE PAGO POR**

MÉRITOS

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Resumen

La relación entre la investigación académica y el diseño, implementación y desarrollo de las políticas públicas ha sido un tema de preocupación y reflexión en diversos ámbitos del mundo académico y, en menor medida, en los espacios de la acción pública. La vinculación entre la reflexión académica sobre la educación superior de cada país y las políticas que se desarrollan para este sector no son excepción. En este artículo se analiza un caso de políticas para la educación superior: las políticas de pago por méritos en México. El caso analizado muestra el contraste entre la imagen un proceso que se nos ha presentado hipotéticamente como racional y científico, distanciado de la política, y de naturaleza esencialmente técnica y una experiencia concreto de diseño e implementación de políticas. El estudio de caso pone en entredicho al mito de la racionalidad y a la ideología del apoliticismo que dominan el estudio de políticas públicas y el campo de estudios de la educación superior. De esta forma nos permite entender mejor la relación entre producción de conocimientos y toma de decisiones y el papel que debe jugar la academia en la comprensión de nuestro campo de conocimiento y en la transformación de la educación superior.

Palabras claves

Educación superior, estratificación, flexibilidad laboral, personal académico, poder, política, políticas públicas, remuneración, universidad

Academic research and public policy in higher education: The Mexican case of merit paid

Abstract

The relationship between academic research and the design, implementation and development of public policies has been a topic of concern in diverse areas of the academic world, and to a lesser extent, in the public sphere. The link between academic reflection on higher education in each country and public policies developed for that sector are no exception. In this article a case of policies for higher education is analyzed: merit pay policies in Mexico. Said case shows the contrast between the image, a process that has been presented hypothetically as rational and scientific, distant from politics and of essentially technical nature, and a concrete experience of design and implementation of policies. The case study calls into question the myth of the rationality and the ideology of apoliticism that dominates the study of public policies and the field study of higher education. In this way it allows us to better understand the relationship between knowledge production and decision making and the role that the academy should play in the comprehension of our knowledge field and the transformation of higher education.

Keywords

Higher education, stratification, flexible work, academic personnel, power, politics, public policies, remuneration, university

Introducción

La relación entre la investigación académica y el diseño, implementación y desarrollo de las políticas públicas ha sido un tema de preocupación y reflexión en diversos ámbitos del mundo académico y, en menor medida, en los espacios de la acción pública. La vinculación entre la reflexión académica sobre la educación superior de cada país y las políticas que se desarrollan para este sector no son excepción. En todo caso, ante la relevancia que en el mundo actual ha alcanzado la producción de conocimientos y la formación disciplinaria y profesional de alto nivel, esta relación entre políticas públicas y el estudio de la educación superior ha adquirido mayor importancia.

Políticas públicas y educación superior

La educación, y más particularmente la educación superior, constituyen objetos de estudio a los que se aproximan los investigadores desde la óptica de diversas disciplinas de las ciencias sociales, con

diferentes perspectivas teóricas, distintas estrategias y múltiples metodologías. El estudio de la educación superior, por lo tanto, no es una disciplina en sí misma. Constituye un campo de conocimiento y de acción bien delimitado, con actores, procesos, estructuras, organizaciones, institución y prácticas relativamente bien identificadas.

Se afirma aquí que la educación superior constituye un campo en dos sentidos distinguibles analíticamente pero íntimamente relacionados. En primer lugar, es un campo en tanto objeto de conocimiento identificable, delimitado y distintivo. En esta lógica, la educación superior es un campo de conocimiento. En otro sentido, la educación superior es un campo en tanto constituye un espacio bien definido para la práctica profesional. Un campo profesional relativamente estandarizado, con reglas establecidas, prácticas bien definidas y ámbitos de acción identificables.

Esta doble condición de campo de conocimiento y campo profesional establece una de las características fundamentales para analizar la relación entre el estudio y la práctica de la educación superior. La coexistencia de campos (de conocimiento y profesional) aparecen a primera vista como un espacio favorable para interacción entre conocimiento disciplinario y práctica profesional; entre investigación académica y políticas públicas. Sin embargo la experiencia de académicos y administradores en casi cualquier país del mundo puede ser testimonio de la desconexión entre reflexión y práctica y de la desatención de la producción de conocimientos sobre el campo entre quienes diseñan, promueven y ponen en práctica las políticas sobre la educación terciaria.

El mito de racionalidad de las políticas públicas

El diseño y la implementación de las políticas públicas han sido presentados, en los sistemas políticos y las administraciones públicas modernas como sistemas racionales. Las corrientes dominantes en los estudios de ciencia política, de derecho y de administración pública han contribuido a la generación de un mito de racionalidad en el ámbito de las políticas públicas. De acuerdo con esta mitificación, el diseño e implementación de políticas obedece a principios racionales, a procesos analíticos basados en reflexiones teóricas y métodos científicos.

El mito de la racionalidad ha dado lugar a una pretendida “ciencia de la administración.” Tanto las organizaciones académicas postsecundarias como las propias instituciones gubernamentales han contribuido a generar y enraizar el mito de la racionalidad así como a desarrollar una profesión estandarizada de especialistas en políticas públicas y profesionales de la administración.

Stone (1997) señala que la pretendida racionalidad del diseño de políticas públicas se sustenta en tres elementos fundamentales: un modelo de razonamiento, un modelo de sociedad y modelo de diseño de políticas. El modelo de razonamiento es un proceso racional de toma de decisiones, a partir de pasos bien definidos (Stone, 1997):

1. Identificación de objetivos.
2. Identificación de cursos alternativos de acción para lograr los objetivos.
3. Predicción de las consecuencias posibles de cada una de las alternativas.
4. Evaluación de las consecuencias posibles de cada alternativa.
5. Selección de la alternativa que maximiza el logro de los objetivos.

El modelo de sociedad que encuadra el mito de la racionalidad en el mundo contemporáneo es, por supuesto, el mercado. Esta visión se presenta como “natural,” la única posible, homogénea y aceptada por todos (Marginson, 1997). En esta lógica, la sociedad es un conjunto de individuos independientes que toman decisiones racionales de manera autónoma, al margen de su entorno y de su comunidad. En la toma de decisiones los individuos maximizan su bienestar individual a partir de cálculos racionales.

De acuerdo con Wolin (1981) esta racionalización a partir del mercado se sustenta en una nueva filosofía de lo público. En este marco, todos los procesos sociales (no sólo los económicos o los relacionados con los mercados) se analizan a partir de esquemas de costo beneficio en lo que constituye una construcción economicista de la vida social.

El modelo de diseño de políticas públicas, de acuerdo a este mito de racionalidad, “es un modelo de producción, en donde las políticas se

crean en una secuencia ordenada de etapas, casi como en una línea de montaje” (Stone, 1997 p. 10). Los temas son incluidos en la agenda, implicando que un problema ha sido definido. Las alternativas para su solución son analizadas “racionalmente” en diversas instancias del sistema político (poder legislativo y ejecutivo) y la administración pública. Las decisiones son puestas en práctica por el ejecutivo y la administración. El gobierno aparece así como un actor racional en la toma de decisiones. El modelo de diseño reproduce a gran escala los pasos cognitivos del modelo de razonamiento (p. 10).

Racionalidad y despolitización

El mito de la racionalidad de las políticas públicas está sustentado en un extendido esfuerzo de despolitización. Por un lado, la racionalización de la toma de decisiones reivindica explícitamente la diferenciación entre la esfera de lo técnico-racional y la esfera de lo político. Lo político se presenta como un conjunto de procesos y prácticas desordenadas y arbitrarias, carentes de lógica y racionalidad, que empantana y oscurece el proceso de toma de decisiones y el diseño de políticas públicas. Con base en esta caracterización, la despolitización aparece como un proceso deseable y una reivindicación a favor de la racionalidad.

Por otro lado, en la sustentación del mito de la racionalidad de hace evidente una construcción ideológica que oscurece la naturaleza política de las instituciones, los autores y los procesos involucrados en la toma de decisiones. Se oculta que los actores involucrados (o no) en las decisiones tienen más o menos poder e influencia en cada momento (Weber, 1978). Se hace caso omiso de que la selección de temas y las perspectivas desde las que estos se analizan están profundamente marcadas por las relaciones de poder (Bachrach y Baratz, 1970) y por la diversidad de posiciones políticas, intereses y proyectos (Kuhn, 1962; Berger y Luckmann, 1966). Finalmente, se parte de una visión única y hegemónica de modelo de sociedad que da forma y determina en gran medida la aceptabilidad de las alternativas, los procesos analíticos mismos, así como la evaluación de oportunidades, costos y consecuencias de dichas alternativas (Gramsci, 1971; Lukes, 1974).

Despolitización de la educación superior.

Aunque existe amplia evidencia histórica sobre la naturaleza política de las instituciones de educación superior (Perkin, 1984; Luna Diaz, 1985; Brunner, 1990; Perkin, 1997; Ordorika, 1999) tanto el discurso oficial de políticos y administradores como la mayoría de los estudios sobre el campo reivindican una ideología de apoliticismo y neutralidad de las organizaciones postsecundarias (Ordorika, 2002a, , 2003).

Sin embargo, el conflicto y la política en las instituciones de educación superior se presentan de forma constante y reiterada. Esta evidencia histórica desafía las interpretaciones dominantes sobre las tradiciones universitarias y sobre la naturaleza de la educación superior así como a las aproximaciones analíticas convencionales. En contraste con las expresiones dominantes que integran la ideología oficial, la ideología de la universidad y el mito de la racionalidad (en el diseño de las políticas públicas) no resulta una sorpresa que en las universidades entren en conflicto proyectos diferentes, visiones alternativas e intereses contrapuestos (Ordorika, 2006 en prensa; Ordorika y López, 2006 en prensa).

La ideología de la neutralidad política y el carácter técnico de las universidades tiene un paralelismo muy significativo con el mito de la racionalidad y el apoliticismo de las políticas públicas. Por esta razón, el análisis de las políticas públicas en la educación tiene un doble componente de apoliticismo y un mito extremadamente enraizado de “racionalidad.”

La constitución de dos campos diferentes asociados a la educación superior – el de la investigación y los académicos, por un lado, y el de la práctica y los profesionales, por el otro – explica en alguna medida la desconexión entre producción de conocimientos científicos y diseño de políticas públicas. La desconexión resulta paradójica dado el argumento de cientificidad en que se funda el modelo de razonamiento del mito racional. Sin embargo, esta desconexión ha provocado la emergencia de dos sistemas de producción de conocimientos diferenciados sobre la educación postsecundaria. Por un lado tenemos el sistema de investigación y producción de conocimiento académicos, ubicado fundamentalmente en las universidades y centros de investigación. Por otro lado existen espacios y formas de investigación, asociadas a la práctica administrativa y la toma de decisiones, a la que se ha dado en llamar investigación institucional. Esta reside fundamentalmente en instituciones del gobierno y centros de reflexión sobre políticas públicas. Los

dos sistemas cuentan con organizaciones disciplinarias o profesionales y con publicaciones paralelas. Los sistemas se interesectan y comunican en ciertos ámbitos pero el espacio del diseño de políticas está esencialmente reservado y se funda en conocimientos con orientaciones muy prácticas producidos en los espacios institucionales.

El campo académico es habitualmente más crítico que el de la investigación institucional – incluso en el caso de la producción de conocimientos desde las perspectivas teóricas racionalistas y despolitizadas más dominantes. Pero la despolitización de la universidad y de las perspectivas analíticas y teóricas de la academia contribuyen enormemente a la subordinación y marginación del conocimiento académico frente al diseño de las políticas para el sector. En lo casos en que existe más compatibilidad en las perspectivas analíticas de académicos y tomadores de decisiones, lo que ocurre con frecuencia es que los rimeros asumen el papel de racionalizadores ex post facto de políticas ya aprobadas y puestas en práctica.

Los análisis críticos parecen alejar aun más el mundo de la academia de aquel en que se diseñan y ponen en práctica las políticas para la educación superior. La distancia y marginación del conocimiento académico no hace evidente en todos los casos el hecho de que el conocimiento crítico revela en los hechos la naturaleza política del diseño e implementación de las políticas. De hecho, el conocimiento académico pone implícitamente en cuestión el mito de la racionalidad apolítica en que se sustenta la legitimidad de las políticas y los administradores que las diseñan y sustentan.

Por estas razones resulta a nuestro juicio conveniente explicitar el carácter ideológico del mito de la racionalidad y reivindicar el papel crítico del conocimiento académico. Resulta al mismo tiempo fundamental la adopción de perspectivas analíticas que contribuyan a develar la naturaleza política de los procesos de toma de decisiones así como de diseño y puesta en práctica de las políticas públicas. Se trata de descubrir las motivaciones para la selección de temas en las agendas para la toma de decisiones, explicitar los objetivos que se persiguen y analizar las diversas posiciones políticas que están juego en cada confrontación a partir de la cual se produce un hecho al que denominamos política pública.

El pago por méritos en México: un caso para el análisis

La experiencia mexicana de pago por méritos en la educación superior constituye un caso paradigmático para el estudio de la selección de temas, los modelos de sociedad y las formas de producción de políticas públicas. El estudio de caso es revelador del proceso de decisiones mismo, de los intereses que involucra, de las concepciones en que se funda y de las formas de ejercicio del poder que entraña.

Es revelador de los esquemas dominantes para el desarrollo de la educación superior desde el ámbito internacional hasta el local. Es una muestra del impacto de los discursos y modelos hegemónicos y su adopción en contextos particulares. Pone en evidencia la interacción entre fuerzas y actores políticos de diversos signos. En suma, revela de manera descarnada la naturaleza política de las políticas públicas y de los procesos que les dan lugar. Este es el objetivo primario de presentar este estudio de caso.

En un segundo orden, el estudio tiene como objetivo mostrar la correspondencia entre un modelo de sociedad y un conjunto de políticas públicas que han sido centrales en el desarrollo de la educación superior mexicana en el último cuarto de siglo. En este sentido se trata también de un caso paradigmático del diseño y la puesta en práctica de un tipo de modelos de remuneración y de una forma de “mercantilización” del trabajo académico y de la universidad. La magnitud e impacto que han alcanzado los sistemas de pago por méritos en México tienen una importancia significativa que es posible observar durante estas dos últimas décadas, en las que se han establecido y se han consolidado estos sistemas. Por tales razones, en este trabajo se analizarán los sistemas de pago por méritos, por rendimiento o por productividad, como una de las formas en las que se ha pretendido trasladar conceptos y políticas “de mercado” a los espacios académicos en México.

El sistema de evaluación, integrado por el conjunto de políticas, programas e instrumentos de evaluación de la educación superior, impone límites al trabajo institucional e individual al pretender orientarlos con el fin de lograr objetivos y metas con base en la productividad y el desempeño. Estos objetivos y metas se determinan en los círculos oficiales y fuera de la academia. Tal sistema impone una lógica a los

tiempos, ritmos y dirección del quehacer académico, en diferentes instancias de la realidad institucional. Por consiguiente, la división del trabajo académico ha dejado de estar sujeta al principio de la proliferación para ser regulada por el cumplimiento de múltiples funciones que distraen a los académicos y a sus instituciones de las tareas sustantivas. La evaluación, si bien abre posibilidades de acción, lo son dentro de márgenes prefijados en los programas de evaluación, de los cuales no es posible salir a riesgo de perder el juego.

Para este análisis, se requiere de una perspectiva política que resalta el hecho de que las políticas, sistemas y criterios de evaluación de la educación superior han sido impuestos a las instituciones y comunidades académicas desde los círculos del poder. En su manejo desde el gobierno, estas políticas han provocado efectos perversos, toda vez que su fin último no ha sido el desarrollo de la academia y el conocimiento, sino el establecimiento de límites a las condiciones necesarias para el ejercicio de la libertad y la autonomía académicas con base en un sistema de desconfianza de la cantidad y calidad de los resultados. Hablamos de fuerzas más allá de la academia, que la han subordinado y se han impuesto sobre ella modificando sus valores y el sentido de colaboración que le es inherente. La perspectiva es política porque la evaluación ha trastocado las normas prevalecientes de la academia y porque ha sido utilizada como instrumento de control de las universidades, que son un espacio innegable de la vida política nacional.

El análisis en este estudio se funda en el caso de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, como una de las precursoras de los sistemas de pago por méritos; que involucra la magnitud más elevada de recursos económicos al pago por rendimiento y establece algunos de los patrones de evaluación y remuneración más extendidos en México.

El contenido de este trabajo se desarrolla a partir de tres argumentos con base en el impacto que han tenido los sistemas de pagos por méritos en México. El primero de ellos sostiene que la notable magnitud, expansión e impacto de los sistemas de pago por méritos en México sólo puede entenderse como el producto de la implantación de formas de mercantilización en los mecanismos de remuneración de las universidades. El segundo, propone que el

impacto de los mismos en el trabajo universitario tiene que ser analizado desde la naturaleza misma de esta forma de organización y remuneración del trabajo. Desde esta perspectiva se mantiene que muchos de los llamados efectos nocivos del pago por méritos corresponden precisamente a los objetivos perseguidos por estas formas de remuneración. En el último, se discuten las implicaciones analíticas de las características de los mercados en los países periféricos de cara a las de diversas perspectivas teóricas para el análisis de la universidad contemporánea.

Los mecanismos de remuneración de las universidades, una forma de mercantilización

La globalización ha modificado sustancialmente la naturaleza del Estado contemporáneo como organizador principal de la acumulación de capital y como articulador de la identidad nacional (Evans, Rueschemeyer y Skocpol, 1985; Castells, 1996). El alejamiento del Estado frente a la educación superior, expresado notablemente en la reducción de recursos públicos (Altbach y Johnstone, 1993; Johnstone, 1998b), ha implicado una mayor competencia por recursos individuales e institucionales frente al Estado mismo y de cara al mercado (Marginson, 1997; Marginson y Considine, 2000). En consecuencia, la autonomía tradicional de las instituciones académicas (universidades y demás organizaciones educativas postsecundarias) y de sus profesionales frente al Estado y el mercado, se ha reducido notablemente (Slaughter y Leslie, 1997; Rhoades, 1998).

La provisión de recursos públicos, como punto de interacción entre la universidad moderna y la sociedad, durante muchas décadas, y la autonomía concedida a la primera, a través del Estado, significaron para la sociedad, las condiciones materiales para la supervivencia de las instituciones de educación con una independencia necesaria frente al Estado y un relativo aislamiento frente al mercado. Tanto el otorgamiento de recursos, sin requisitos establecidos para la provisión de bienes o servicios y sin exigencia de rendición de cuentas, como la autonomía jurídica, organizativa y administrativa de las universidades estaban basados en una relación implícita de confianza de la sociedad frente a las instituciones de educación superior (Trow, 1996).

Sin embargo, las iniciativas para la rendición de cuentas se han enfatizado en todos los ámbitos de la sociedad. La esfera de lo público se ha puesto

en cuestión y el peso de las relaciones de mercado se han incrementado. La globalización ha traído aparejados procesos de economización creciente de la sociedad y el deterioro de “lo público” (Wolin, 1981); el cambio en la naturaleza y capacidad de acción de los Estados nacionales (Evans, Rueschemeyer y Skocpol, 1985); y la expansión continua de los mercados, en particular hacia el ámbito de la producción de conocimientos y la educación (Marginson, 1997; Slaughter y Leslie, 1997; Marginson y Considine, 2000), que explican en gran medida la “reducción de la confianza” de la sociedad frente a la universidad.

La crisis de “lo público” en el ámbito educativo se ha expresado en los cuestionamientos permanentes acerca de la eficiencia, falta de equidad y baja calidad de los grandes sistemas escolares (Díaz Barriga, 1998). La crítica a la situación de la educación y el reclamo de rendición de cuentas han hecho de la evaluación y la certificación elementos centrales de las políticas públicas en educación en todo el orbe. La diversificación y diseminación de los planteamientos de evaluación académica e institucional responde tanto a una dinámica impulsada desde organismos internacionales -la UNESCO y el Banco Mundial entre otros- como a la adopción del discurso y la práctica de la evaluación y la rendición de cuentas por parte de los estados nacionales y los administradores educativos a nivel local (Coraggio y Torres, 1997; Díaz Barriga, 1998).

Las universidades de todo el orbe han sido objeto de transformaciones profundas, a partir de las dos últimas décadas del siglo XX. Tanto las instituciones de educación superior como la naturaleza del trabajo que en ellas se realiza han sufrido cambios que no tienen precedente en la historia de las universidades (Slaughter y Leslie, 1997). Hasta la década de los años setenta, la educación superior se expandió de forma sostenida en el número de instituciones, en la cantidad de estudiantes y profesores y en la disponibilidad de recursos financieros. A partir de los años ochenta, sin embargo, el financiamiento público para la educación superior se ha reducido significativamente en casi todos los países (Altbach y Johnstone, 1993; World Bank, 1994; Johnstone, 1998a; World Bank, 2000).

La crisis fiscal de las instituciones universitarias ha ido aparejada -a un mismo tiempo como causa y como consecuencia- a una redefinición del

sentido, los fines y las prácticas de la educación superior. Las nociones de la universidad como proyecto cultural e institución productora de bienes públicos han pasado a un plano marginal o sólo discursivo (Readings, 1996; Marginson, 1997). Estas nociones han sido sustituidas por un énfasis renovado en la vinculación entre educación superior y mercados (Marginson, 1997; Slaughter y Leslie, 1997; Marginson y Considine, 2000), por un esquema de universidad “empresarial” (Clark, 1998), por la noción de excelencia (Readings, 1996) y por un proceso creciente de privatización de la oferta educativa y del financiamiento (Slaughter y Leslie, 1997).

En el caso de México, nuestro gobierno adoptó la evaluación como el eje fundamental de sus políticas educativas desde hace tres lustros. La publicación del Programa para la Modernización Educativa 1989-1994, significó posicionar la evaluación como elemento central de las políticas educativas en México.¹

Existen una gran cantidad de programas, sistemas y modalidades de evaluación, que se ubican en diferentes niveles y actividades de la educación superior mexicana. Son puestos en práctica por instituciones diversas que van del ámbito gubernamental, a la esfera privada y al terreno institucional. Las metodologías, criterios y requisitos de cada uno de ellos varían significativamente. Las diferentes prácticas evaluativas generan y a la vez se basan en diversas fuentes de información que resultan redundantes y son poco consistentes entre sí.

De tal modo que la evaluación de la educación en México ha sido estructurado a partir de iniciativas poco coordinadas que han perseguido fines distintos y generan mensajes diversos, en muchas ocasiones contradictorios, hacia las instituciones programas y actores de la educación superior. Muchos de los actores sociales de la universidad -académicos, estudiantes, especialistas y administradores- perciben que este conjunto desarticulado de procesos y mecanismos de evaluación ha transformado profundamente la naturaleza del trabajo universitario (Ver por ejemplo Díaz Barriga y Pacheco, 1997), fundada, en parte, en la reflexión sobre las características del trabajo académico antes y después de la

¹ La discusión sobre los sistemas de evaluación antecedió incluso a la publicación de este Programa. El primer sistema de evaluación del trabajo académico se estableció con el Sistema Nacional de Investigadores (SNI) en 1984.

emergencia y consolidación de las prácticas de evaluación.

Esta apreciación también emerge del contraste existente entre la cauda de valores y las concepciones implícitas en el discurso y la acción evaluativas –eficiencia, eficacia, pertinencia y rentabilidad, entre otras- de cara a los valores y concepciones arraigados en la idealización de “lo académico”. En distintos análisis se hace referencia al trastocamiento del ethos académico como un conjunto de valores y prácticas intrínsecos a la concepción tradicional de trabajo académico (Ibarra Colado, 1993; Licha, 1996; Muñoz García, 2002).

En México se han escrito un buen número de trabajos sobre los programas de estímulos e incentivos (Ibarra Colado, 1993; Kent Serna, 1995; Díaz Barriga, 1997; Díaz Barriga y Pacheco, 1997; Canales Sánchez, 2001). El caso mexicano es paradigmático por su extensión dentro del sistema y por su impacto económico. En los sistemas mexicanos de pago por méritos a la educación superior se combina la existencia de un programa nacional -el Sistema Nacional de Investigadores, SNI- y de diversos programas institucionales. El programa nacional se estructura a partir de asignaciones monetarias fijas, correspondientes a cuatro niveles.² En la diversidad de programas de cada institución se utilizan tanto asignaciones económicas fijas como asignaciones porcentuales.³

El elemento más significativo del caso mexicano, sin embargo, es el impacto que tienen estos programas de incentivos en los ingresos del personal académico. Analicemos los casos de la

² El Sistema Nacional de Investigadores esta estructurado en cuatro niveles: candidato, nivel I, nivel II y nivel III. Cada uno de estos tiene asignada una cantidad mensual fija en salarios mínimos mensuales. Para revisar las características de cada uno de los niveles y sus asignaciones puede verse el reglamento del SNI en http://www.conacyt.mx/dac/sni/reglamento_sni2003.html.

³ El programa de estímulos de la UNAM establecido en 1990, denominado Programa de Estímulos a la Productividad y al Rendimiento Académico (PEPRAC) se organizó a través de asignaciones monetarias fijas. El PEPRAC fue ajustado y modificado en varias ocasiones. En 1994 se estableció un nuevo programa denominado Primas al Desempeño Académico del Personal de Tiempo Completo (PRIDE) que ha funcionado, en sus distintas versiones, a través de asignaciones porcentuales sobre el salario base y la antigüedad del personal académico de tiempo completo. Para un análisis detallado de estos programa ver el trabajo de Canales Sánchez (2001). La Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) combina estímulos con asignaciones fijas con primas porcentuales. Ver Ibarra Colado (2001).

Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana y de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

De acuerdo con los datos que proporciona Eduardo Ibarra Colado (2001 pp. 402-403) es posible ver que para el año 2000, el impacto de los cinco tipos de estímulos en los ingresos del personal académico de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), en sus distintos niveles, variaba entre 14.3 y 68.2 por ciento (tomando como base los ingresos máximos por primas). La proporción varía al incluir los ingresos por estímulos del SNI. En este caso, el conjunto de primas institucionales y el SNI representan entre un 14.3 y un 77.3 por ciento de los ingresos máximos por categoría académica.

En el caso de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), la situación es muy similar a pesar de las diferencias en los sistemas de primas institucionales entre esta Universidad y la Metropolitana. A partir de un análisis análogo al de Ibarra (ver Cuadro 1) puede verse que la proporción del salario base en los ingresos máximos (correspondiente al nivel D de los estímulos) es de 48.8 por ciento.⁴ Si incluimos los ingresos correspondientes a la máxima categoría del SNI, los salarios base sólo representan entre 18.1 y 46.8 por ciento del ingreso máximo posible.⁵

Analicemos un caso particular a partir de cálculos propios con datos correspondientes al año 2003. Un profesor titular “C”, con antigüedad de treinta años, con la prima más alta del PRIDE (nivel D) y nivel III del SNI cuenta con un ingreso mensual bruto de 72,663.91 pesos.⁶ La prima de estímulos de la UNAM representa, para este nivel, el 51 por ciento del ingreso universitario. El conjunto de primas, incluyendo la del SNI, constituye una

⁴ En el documento *Lineamientos y requisitos generales para la evaluación de profesores e investigadores*, y en el correspondiente para técnicos académicos (publicados en Gaceta UNAM en 1996 y actualmente vigentes) se establecen requisitos para la obtención de los diferentes niveles de estímulos. Formalmente no existe ninguna limitante para acceder a estos niveles en función de las categorías establecidas para el personal académico. Sin embargo, es evidente que los niveles máximos de estímulos están altamente correlacionados con las categorías más altas.

⁵ El Sistema Nacional de Investigadores tampoco establece restricciones de acceso en función de las categorías o nombramientos del personal académico en cada institución. También en este caso es evidente que existe una alta correlación entre niveles más altos del SNI y las categorías más altas de la UNAM.

⁶ El equivalente en dólares al tipo de cambio vigente en noviembre de 2003 es de aproximadamente 6,600.00 dólares mensuales.

proporción de aproximadamente el 63 por ciento del ingreso bruto.⁷

Con los datos del Cuadro 1 es posible mostrar la multiplicidad de niveles de ingreso existentes en la UNAM, aun sin tomar en cuenta la diferenciación que se produce con la antigüedad. Los datos son contundentes. Se hace evidente que los programas de estímulos producen una enorme estratificación del personal académico según sus ingresos. Se muestra además que el componente de los ingresos asociado a rendimiento y pago por méritos alcanza proporciones muy significativas, superiores al 60 por ciento del ingreso, respecto al salario base de los académicos.

Es posible afirmar con bastante certeza que los sistemas mexicanos de merit pay son una de las experiencias más extendidas y consolidadas en la educación superior de todo el mundo. Ciertamente la complejidad de estos sistemas y el impacto en los ingresos de los académicos en México no tienen comparación con los que existen en los sistemas europeos y en los Estados Unidos. ¿Cuáles son las razones que explican la rápida expansión de los sistemas de pago por méritos en México? ¿Porqué han llegado estos complementos a representar una proporción tan alta de los ingresos del personal académico?

Una forma de organización y remuneración del trabajo

En el diseño de los programas de merit pay hubo muy poca reflexión sobre los efectos que los sistemas pudieran tener en las prácticas académicas, en las comunidades de profesores e investigadores y en los procesos de producción de conocimientos. El impacto de estos programas ha sido muy significativo y sus secuelas, no deseadas, muy diversas.

Como en otros países del mundo, en México, el establecimiento de políticas de evaluación en la educación superior se argumentó con base en la intención de realizar diagnósticos y adecuaciones con el fin de mejorar la eficiencia y desempeño de instituciones y de los académicos.⁸ A partir de una

⁷ Este porcentaje es aun mayor si se toma en cuenta que las remuneraciones correspondientes al SNI y a los estímulos están libres de impuestos. Este no es el caso de los salarios nominales.

⁸ A partir de 1974, la Coordinación de Educación Superior de la Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) impulsó procesos de auto-evaluación en las universidades del país. En este esquema se establecieron posteriormente la Comisión Nacional

laxa idea inicial de evaluación formativa se empezó a enfatizar una visión y una práctica de evaluación sumativa. Las políticas públicas hicieron prioritaria la necesidad calificar y jerarquizar los productos de la universidad,⁹ de garantizar estándares de calidad frente a los consumidores de conocimientos o egresados y de regular el ingreso de estudiantes a las universidades.¹⁰

A partir de los años ochenta las políticas de evaluación institucional y del personal académico adquirieron un rasgo adicional. Se empezaron a manejar propuestas para la asignación de subsidios y otros recursos financieros con base en evaluaciones institucionales y en el establecimiento de indicadores de calidad y productividad. En este contexto, desde las instancias educativas del gobierno federal se desarrollaron políticas de asignación de recursos extraordinarios, o etiquetados para actividades académicas específicas, también asociados a indicadores.¹¹

de la Educación Media Superior (CONAEMS) y, en 1989, la Comisión Nacional de Evaluación de la Educación Superior (CONAEVA).

⁹ A finales de los años setenta empieza a darse crédito a las críticas –frecuentemente infundadas– de baja calidad de la educación superior pública. En 1979 el entonces rector de la UNAM, Dr. Guillermo Soberón Acevedo, propuso el establecimiento de índices de escolaridad y velocidad de carrera en la UNAM. La propuesta fue rechazada por los estudiantes y finalmente abandonada por las autoridades.

¹⁰ A partir de una recomendación de la Asamblea General de la Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Institutos de Educación Superior (ANUIES) se creó el Centro Nacional de Evaluación para la Educación Superior (Ceneval), el 28 de abril de 1994. Este es un organismo privado con status de asociación civil. Su creación fue apoyada por el gobierno mexicano. Integran la asamblea de asociados el titular de la SEP y dos subsecretarios, el secretario general de la ANUIES, el presidente de la Federación de Instituciones Mexicanas Particulares de Educación Superior, el rector de la UNAM y los de cuatro instituciones de educación superior, dos públicas y dos privadas, así como los directivos de tres colegios de profesionales.

El Ceneval ofrece servicios de evaluación a las instituciones educativas, públicas y privadas. Realiza exámenes de ingreso a bachillerato, licenciatura y postgrado así como de egreso para diversas carreras, que se llamaron inicialmente de Calidad Profesional y ahora de Egreso de la Licenciatura. En 1996 se estableció el examen único de ingreso a instituciones de educación superior metropolitanas a cargo del Ceneval.

¹¹ Entre estos destacan la creación del Fondo para la Modernización de la Educación Superior (FOMES), el Programa para el Mejoramiento del Profesorado (PROMEP), los Programas Integrales de Fortalecimiento Institucional (PIFI's), el Programa Integral de Fomento al Posgrado (PIFOP) y los fondos sectoriales de Conacyt. Estas políticas, los programas que en este marco se desarrollaron y sus implicaciones para las instituciones de educación superior han sido analizados por varios autores y están fuera del alcance de

Desde 1985, las políticas de evaluación de académicos se asociaron a los sistemas de remuneración. La evaluación del personal académico en las universidades y demás instituciones de educación superior se tradujo en complejos sistemas de pago por méritos. En sus distintas versiones, éstos fueron denominados programas de estímulos o incentivos al rendimiento y la productividad de los investigadores y docentes universitarios.

En 1984 se estableció el Sistema Nacional de Investigadores (SNI) con incentivos asociados al pago por méritos como incentivo de la productividad. Pocos años después, en casi todas las instituciones de educación superior del país se montaron sistemas locales de “estímulos” o “incentivos”.

Buena parte de la producción académica sobre este tema se ha centrado más en los temas de operación o implementación de los programas de estímulos (i.e. Grediaga, 1998, , 2001). La discusión se ha ubicado en la definición de los objetivos, los criterios, mecanismos y procedimientos de la evaluación, así como las formas y niveles de la remuneración de acuerdo al rendimiento. Podríamos caracterizar estas preocupaciones como procedimentales, que parten del reconocimiento de muchas las deficiencias y efectos perversos de los programas de pago por méritos –corrupción, simulación, individualización de la producción académica y arbitrariedad en los procesos de evaluación, entre otros. En la mayoría de los casos, en estas formulaciones se asume que la emergencia y expansión de los sistemas de pago de acuerdo a rendimiento en nuestro país, se establecieron como un mecanismo compensatorio para resarcir la caída en los ingresos de los académicos como producto de la crisis financiera del Estado mexicano.

Desde una perspectiva alternativa –a la que llamamos sustantiva- resulta conveniente analizar los sistemas de merit pay a partir de la naturaleza misma de los sistemas de competencia en la remuneración de los académicos. Los sistemas de pago por méritos están fundados en un concepto básico de la economía clásica que establece que la competencia en el mercado –sin intervención o injerencia externa- basada en el interés individual fomentaba el bien común (Smith, 1776). De

este capítulo. Para este tema conviene consultar los trabajos de Ibarra Colado (2001) y de López Zárate (2001) entre otros.

acuerdo con esta perspectiva se enuncia con sorprendente superficialidad que el *laissez-faire*, *laissez-aller*¹² establece el adecuado equilibrio de precios, determina la supervivencia económica de los sujetos a partir de su productividad y garantiza la calidad de los productos (Marginson, 1997; Ordorika, 2002b). La literatura convencional sobre el pago por méritos en distintos ámbitos laborales destaca un conjunto de beneficios asociados a estos programas. Entre ellos resultan más recurrentes los siguientes:

- el pago por méritos estimula la productividad individual de los integrantes de la organización,
- estimula la competencia entre los integrantes de la organización para la obtención de ingresos más elevados,
- favorece los procesos de cambio y ajuste del desempeño de los empleados en función del cambio en los objetivos organizacionales,
- permite una diferenciación entre el rendimiento individual y el de la compañía,
- permite al empleador diferenciar el pago entre empleados de alto y bajo rendimiento,
- permite al empleador otorgar un remuneración satisfactoria a un empleado por la realización de una tarea que no habrá de repetirse, y
- se utilizan exitosamente en muchas organizaciones y ámbitos profesionales (especialmente en las instituciones bancarias).

En los ambientes académicos, los objetivos de los programas de estímulos se enuncian con mucha más ambigüedad. Por ejemplo, en el caso de Programa de Primas al Desempeño del Personal Académico de Tiempo Completo (PRIDE) de la UNAM se señala que:

El Programa de Primas al Desempeño del Personal Académico de Tiempo Completo (PRIDE) incide en el desarrollo de la carrera académica y en el cumplimiento de la misión universitaria al otorgar una prima al desempeño a los académicos que realizan sus actividades de manera sobresaliente. Estos estímulos propician que se conjugue la formación de recursos humanos, la docencia frente a grupo, la investigación y la extensión académica, fomentan la superación del personal académico y

¹² Dejar hacer, dejar pasar.

promueven la elevación del nivel de productividad y calidad académica.¹³

En la Exposición de Motivos del SNI se establece que:

El Sistema Nacional de Investigadores fue creado el 26 de julio de 1984, para reconocer la labor de las personas dedicadas a producir conocimiento científico y tecnología. El reconocimiento se otorga a través de la evaluación por pares y consiste en otorgar el nombramiento de investigador nacional. Esta distinción simboliza la calidad y prestigio de las contribuciones científicas. En paralelo al nombramiento se otorgan incentivos económicos a través de becas cuyo monto varía con el nivel asignado.

El propósito general del Sistema Nacional de Investigadores es promover el desarrollo de las actividades relacionadas con la investigación para fortalecer su calidad, desempeño y eficiencia.¹⁴

La ambigüedad de estas formulaciones “para académicos” tiene como únicas referencias a las concepciones básicas de los programas de rendimiento los términos de estímulos, productividad y calidad, en el caso del PRIDE, así como de incentivos económicos, desempeño y eficiencia en el caso del SNI. Los supuestos básicos de los sistemas de competencia por ingresos en que se sustentan los programas de pago por méritos se encuentran incrustados en estos términos cargados de significados.

De esta forma, se vuelve oscuro el hecho de que muchos de los llamados “efectos perversos” o “problemas de implementación” de los programas merit pay, constituyen precisamente algunas de las características deseables o de los beneficios reconocidos de los sistemas de competencia. Analicemos estos casos en tres grandes rubros.

Productividad y calidad

La mayoría de los especialistas en el estudio de la educación superior, de uno u otro signo, coinciden en señalar las dificultades existentes para estimar en que consiste la productividad en una organización de educación superior (Massy, 1992,

¹³ Página del Programa de Primas al Desempeño del Personal Académico de Tiempo Completo (PRIDE), <http://dgapa.unam.mx/pride/pride.html>. Énfasis del autor.

¹⁴ Página del Sistema Nacional de Investigadores, <http://www.conacyt.mx/dac/sni/reglamento-sni-2004.html#exposicion>. Énfasis del autor.

, 1996; Slaughter y Leslie, 1997). Frente a esta dificultad, en los sistemas de evaluación contemporáneos se han establecido indicadores indirectos o sucedáneos –número de publicaciones, estudiantes graduados, cursos impartidos, tesis dirigidas- a partir de los cuales se establecen complejas e imperfectas mediciones aproximadas de productividad. La medición cuantitativa fue rápidamente identificada como problemática. Por un lado, porque no garantizaba estándares de calidad, otro concepto ambiguo e imperfecto en el ámbito académico. Por el otro, porque fomenta las prácticas de simulación y corrupción académica.

En los sistemas de evaluación se han tenido aun más dificultades para “medir” la calidad de los productos del trabajo académico. La combinación de criterios cuantitativos y cualitativos que hoy prevalece sigue favoreciendo prácticas de simulación y es constantemente cuestionada por la subjetividad y arbitrariedad de las interpretaciones sobre la calidad. La importación de dos conceptos, productividad y calidad, que emanan de ámbitos productivos relacionados con los mercados tradicionales introducen problemas insuperables en las prácticas académicas.

Competencia y diferenciación

Muchos estudiosos de los sistemas de pago asociado al rendimiento en México han señalado el hecho de que estos mecanismos han dado lugar a la ruptura del tejido social y la destrucción de las comunidades académicas (Díaz Barriga y Pacheco, 1997). Este proceso es evidentemente una consecuencia de cualquier sistema de pago por méritos ya que estos estimulan la competencia entre los integrantes de las organizaciones, favorecen la diferenciación salarial y la estratificación del status académico e incluso incentivan la disparidad entre los intereses individuales y los de la institución. La competencia por recursos escasos enfrenta a los académicos entre sí y erosiona el sentimiento de pertenencia a un proyecto colectivo. La competencia y los procesos de diferenciación son una característica sustantiva del sistema de merit pay y no sólo un problema de implementación.

Orientación de las actividades productivas y de los procesos de cambio

En las percepciones de muchos académicos prevalece la idea de que los sistemas de pago por rendimiento han transformado la naturaleza del

trabajo académico y sus productos. Con frecuencia se señala que los académicos abandonan los proyectos de investigación de largo plazo por otros que puedan rendir resultados en tiempo más cortos; que se enfatiza la elaboración de artículos en lugar de la realización de libros u otras obras de mayor envergadura; que se sesga la elección de temas con el fin de que éstos resulten más redituables. En el ámbito de la docencia, se argumenta que se reducen los estándares de calidad para permitir tasas más altas de graduación de estudiantes de licenciatura y posgrado. En suma, se da prioridad a actividades “rentables”, “temas financiables” y prácticas más “eficientes” para la obtención de puntajes que se transformen en remuneraciones más elevadas en los sistemas de pago por méritos.

Los criterios de evaluación y las políticas de financiamiento a la investigación indudablemente juegan un papel preponderante en la orientación de la “producción académica”. Este es una característica intrínseca y altamente valorada en los sistemas de competencia. Formalmente, los conceptos tradicionales de libertad de cátedra e investigación se mantienen incólumes. La búsqueda de rentabilidad de las actividades académicas, en la competencia por ingresos a través del pago por méritos, traslada al profesor o investigador la decisión sobre los grados de conformidad de su trabajo con las temáticas, criterios y prácticas a las que se da prioridad en los sistemas centralizados. La necesidad económica establece límites concretos a la libertad académica de cada uno de ellos.

Por otro lado, la preponderancia de estos criterios, mecanismos y prácticas correspondientes a objetivos y metas definidos de manera centralizada en cada una de las disciplinas, departamentos o instituciones educativas constituye una poderosa herramienta para inducir procesos de cambio. Los académicos tienen pocas posibilidades de incidir en la orientación del cambio. Su capacidad para adherirse o resistir los cambios está de nuevo limitada por la necesidad de obtener máximos rendimientos en los sistemas de estímulos.

Algunas de las consecuencias de los programas en la vida académica de las universidades mexicanas han sido estudiadas por diversos autores. A partir de estudios sobre las percepciones de los académicos respecto a los programas de estímulos al rendimiento, Díaz Barriga (1997) identifica que los profesores reconocen que ha cambiado la

naturaleza de su trabajo académico. Identifican que estos programas han introducido una “lógica de competencia” que reemplaza el trabajo académico y destruye a las comunidades académicas. Los estímulos son percibidos como un sistema de sanciones que genera un comportamiento eficiente en la búsqueda de altos puntajes de evaluación, promueve la simulación y deteriora la calidad del trabajo académico. Los académicos son conscientes de la estratificación y diferenciación creciente de sus comunidades (Canales Sánchez, 2001). A la vez juzgan que los criterios y procedimientos de evaluación son imperfectos, discrecionales y arbitrarios. Ibarra Colado señala que (2001) que el modelo

es incapaz de reconocer la naturaleza misma del trabajo académico, pues induce la simulación, fomenta la corrupción y el credencialismo, desalienta los trabajos de largo alcance, genera altos niveles de estrés y angustia y desarticula a las comunidades académicas, que hoy ven amenazada su cohesión interna y reducida su capacidad de respuesta (p. 401).

En contraposición a estas percepciones negativas de los académicos, en las posturas oficiales y en el discurso de autoridades universitarias y educativas, se argumenta que los sistemas de incentivos han incrementado la productividad de profesores e investigadores, que han tenido un impacto positivo en la obtención de grados superiores (maestrías y doctorados) y que han elevado la calidad de los productos del trabajo académico. Otros autores señalan que los efectos positivos de estos mecanismos de remuneración están relacionados con una mayor racionalidad del sistema educativo y con la eliminación de prácticas arbitrarias (Kent Serna, 1993; Acosta Silva, 2000; Grediaga, 2001).

No existen estudios que muestren de manera fehaciente que la puesta en práctica de sistemas de evaluación por méritos haya, efectivamente, incrementado el número y la calidad de la investigación en nuestro país. No existe información disponible que permita establecer claramente hasta qué punto el crecimiento en la obtención de posgrados por parte del personal académico es una consecuencia de los sistemas de incentivos o qué tanto se debe a la presión demográfica y a la competencia por un número restringido de plazas académicas. Tampoco ha quedado claro que los sistemas de reconocimiento y remuneración del personal académico se hayan vuelto menos arbitrarios y más racionales.

Más allá de la percepción de los propios académicos y los estudios que en ellas se fundan no existen análisis que muestren que los sistemas de estímulos han sesgado la selección de temas de investigación ni hasta qué punto han producido procesos de simulación, nuevas formas de corrupción académica y destrucción de las comunidades académicas –si es que estas alguna vez existieron en la forma en que las perciben los propios profesores e investigadores.

En este trabajo y en el de Ibarra Colado (2001) se muestran datos que confirman los procesos de diferenciación salarial en las instituciones de educación superior y la consiguiente estratificación del personal académico. A partir de los datos aquí presentados, es posible afirmar que, a pesar de los sistemas de pago por méritos, los ingresos de la mayoría de los académicos se han reducido significativamente durante los últimos treinta años. Solamente los profesores e investigadores con más altas remuneraciones – Titular “C”, PRIDE “D” y SNI III en el caso de la UNAM- percibieron en 2003, ingresos (sin tomar en cuenta antigüedad) equivalentes a los que un académico con el nombramiento correspondiente –Titular “C” en el caso de la UNAM- recibía en 1975.

De acuerdo con la Agenda Estadística de la UNAM, en el 2002 esta universidad tenía 7,195 profesores e investigadores y 3,274 técnicos académicos, todos ellos de tiempo completo. Para el mismo año, la base de datos del SNI reporta que un total de 2,561 miembros del personal de tiempo completo de la UNAM (esta información no distingue entre profesores, investigadores o técnicos académicos) forman parte del SNI en alguno de sus cuatro niveles¹⁵ (ver cuadro 1). Esto quiere decir que menos del 25 por ciento del personal de tiempo completo cuenta con un nombramiento en el SNI. Del total de académicos de la UNAM en el Sistema, sólo 389 alcanzaron el nivel III y 648, el nivel II (3.7 y 6.2 por ciento respectivamente).

No existe información disponible que permita analizar la relación entre la asignación de estímulos locales (PRIDE), nivel del SNI y categoría académica. A partir de los datos de pertenencia al SNI puede señalarse que no más del 3.5 por ciento de los académicos de tiempo

completo de la UNAM mantiene un nivel de ingresos equivalente al de 1975. El resto de los profesores universitarios perciben hasta menos de 60 por ciento en términos reales (en el caso de quienes no tienen estímulos ni SNI) en un nombramiento equivalente comparado con ese mismo año.

En todo caso parece evidente que, a pesar de que existen un buen número de estudios acerca de los sistemas de remuneración asociados al mérito y la productividad y de los sistemas de evaluación en que se sustentan, para una mejor apreciación de los beneficios y efectos perversos de estos sistemas se requiere de más información, investigación y análisis. La evaluación de la experiencia mexicana de pago por méritos plantea muchos interrogantes y requiere de estudios cuidadosos que contribuyan a enriquecer un debate que polariza a las comunidades académicas y a los especialistas.

Los argumentos más recurrentes con los que se ha intentado explicar las características de los sistemas de remuneración del personal académico de la educación superior en México se centran buena parte en el deterioro salarial que se inició en 1976. El caso de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México es una muestra representativa del deterioro salarial del personal académico al nivel nacional.

A partir de los datos sobre salarios reales en esta Universidad podemos ver que de 1976 a 1991 estos cayeron de manera sostenida en todas las categorías del personal académico (ver Gráfica 1 y Cuadro 1). La contracción salarial promedio para todas las categorías fue de aproximadamente 70 por ciento en este mismo período. Las caídas más espectaculares se dieron entre 1975 y 1982 con una reducción de 17 por ciento y, más notablemente, de 1982 a 1984 con una reducción de aproximadamente 42 por ciento en promedio para todas las categorías. De 1991 a 2003, los salarios reales en promedio sufrieron ligeras fluctuaciones con un crecimiento real de 6.2 por ciento, en las categorías de profesores e investigadores, y de 2.05 por ciento, en las de técnicos académicos.

Las contracciones salariales más significativas están claramente asociadas a los momentos de mayor déficit fiscal del gobierno mexicano en las crisis económicas de 1976 y 1982. Este hecho, por sí mismo, parecería confirmar la idea de que la naturaleza, magnitud y extensión de los

¹⁵ La Agenda Estadística de la UNAM 2002 señala que sólo 2,322 del personal de tiempo completo formaba parte del SNI. Para este análisis tomamos la cifra del propio SNI por ser la que está desglosada por nivel.

sistemas de remuneración asociados a indicadores de productividad se explica fundamentalmente como un mecanismo de recuperación salarial del personal académico de las instituciones de educación superior.

Otros datos, sin embargo, nos obligan a analizar a los sistemas de pago por méritos desde una perspectiva más compleja. Con este fin conviene revisar cuidadosamente la evolución de los presupuestos de educación superior, y de la UNAM en particular, así como el comportamiento histórico de los salarios mínimos generales y profesionales durante el mismo período.

Entre 1975 y el 2003 las asignaciones de gasto público para educación superior han cambiado de forma notable. La crisis económica de 1976 provocó una inmediata reducción del gasto público en educación, y en particular en educación superior. El descubrimiento de nuevos yacimientos petroleros condujo a un período nuevo de crecimiento entre 1978 y 1982. La crisis de la deuda externa, a partir de 1982, abre un nuevo período de alarmante reducción en los presupuestos educativos. Entre 1982 y 1988 el gasto total en educación se reduce en 43.6 por ciento. A partir de ese año se inicia un lento proceso de recuperación. El gasto en educación superior se redujo en 50.8 por ciento entre 1982 y 1989. Este rubro comienza su recuperación a partir de este último año.

El presupuesto real en la UNAM siguió un patrón de comportamiento similar al del rubro general de educación y su componente de educación superior. Alcanza un punto máximo en 1982 y decrece notablemente hasta 1986. A pesar de las caídas de 1988, 1995 y 1996 el presupuesto de la UNAM se recupera constantemente desde 1986. Por primera vez, en el año 2003, superó en términos reales al presupuesto obtenido en 1988.

Fuente: Elaboración propia con base en datos de Presupuesto UNAM
Gráfica 3

Los salarios del personal académico, sin embargo, cayeron casi sin freno desde 1975 hasta 1990. La recuperación del gasto educativo y el presupuesto de la UNAM, experimentadas entre 1978 y 1982 y a partir de 1986, no produjeron un comportamiento similar en los salarios base de los académicos.

Implicaciones analíticas de las características de los mercados en los países periféricos para el análisis de la universidad contemporánea

Las concepciones empresariales o emprendedoras de la universidad han tenido un profundo impacto en las universidades de América Latina y de México en particular. En el ámbito analítico y conceptual, así como en el de las políticas públicas, los lineamientos dominantes de los países centrales han sido trasladados a los periféricos. En este contexto, tanto las visiones dominantes como las posturas críticas frente a la universidad contemporánea enfatizan la importancia de analizar los intercambios entre la educación superior y los diversos mercados con los que tiene contacto. Pocos esfuerzos se han realizado sin embargo para analizar estas relaciones en el contexto de países, como México, en los que los mercados para la producción de conocimientos y la formación de egresados son extremadamente débiles y limitados.

Las universidades de América Latina, y en particular la educación superior en México, no han sido ajenas a estos procesos de privatización y mercantilización.¹⁶ Entre los rasgos esenciales de estas transformaciones universitarias destacan (Mollis, 2003):

- diversificación de fuentes de financiamiento y competencia por recursos financieros,
- crecimiento de la inversión privada y emergencia de nuevos proveedores en educación superior,
- venta de servicios y vinculación universidad-empresa,
- procesos de privatización y mercantilización de las instituciones de educación superior tanto públicas como privadas,
- establecimiento de sistemas de evaluación, rendición de cuentas, acreditación y certificación de instituciones programas, y actores,
- expansión de la matrícula de educación superior,

¹⁶ Para un análisis de diversos casos de reformas universitarias en México y América Latina, sus coincidencias y diferencias, ver los estudios de caso de distintos autores en el libro *Las universidades en América Latina: ¿reformadas o alteradas?* (Mollis, 2003).

- establecimiento de marcos normativos regulatorios, y
- diversificación institucional.

Algunos autores ven en estos nuevos rasgos característicos de las políticas educativas en el nivel superior, un elemento de distorsión y transformación profunda de la esencia histórica de la universidad (Readings, 1996; Barnett, 2000; Trindade, 2001). Otros encuentran en ellos las formas más exitosas de adaptación de las instituciones de educación superior a los nuevos requerimientos de la sociedad del conocimiento y la información (Clark, 2000). En esta última perspectiva se identifican las líneas dominantes de las políticas de educación superior en el ámbito global como el proyecto de universidad capaz de interactuar con la sociedad en el ámbito del mercado.

Esta visión se ha sintetizado en la idea de la universidad “empresarial” o “empresarial”.¹⁷ Desde esta óptica, Clark (1993; 1998) analiza las transformaciones que ocurren en universidades europeas y norteamericanas caracterizadas por su actitud “empresarial”, por la diversificación de fuentes de financiamiento y por su capacidad para competir por recursos en el mercado.

Desde una perspectiva distinta, que denomina a estos procesos como capitalismo académico, Slaughter y Leslie (1997) analizan el “comportamiento de la universidad en el mercado” y la adopción de “prácticas similares a las del mercado”.¹⁸ El concepto de comportamiento de mercado se refiere al conjunto de actividades realizadas por las instituciones académicas con el fin de obtener recursos económicos. Estas incluyen actividades institucionales para la obtención de patentes, licencias y regalías, empresas conjuntas entre universidades e industrias, y desarrollo de empresas propias. Incluyen también la venta de servicios, la obtención de ganancias de comedores

¹⁷ Esta visión está sintetizada en el libro *Creating entrepreneurial universities : organizational pathways of transformation* (Clark, 1998). En la versión en español el libro fue traducido como *Creando universidades innovadoras : estrategias organizacionales para la transformación* (Clark, 2000). En esta traducción se pierde el sentido esencial de la propuesta de Clark.

¹⁸ Slaughter y Leslie se refieren a *market behavior*, que llamaremos aquí comportamiento en el mercado y a *market-like behavior* a las que denominaremos adopción de prácticas similares a las del mercado.

y librerías, entre otros (ver Slaughter y Leslie, 1997 p. 11).

Por “adopción de prácticas similares a las del mercado” se entiende,

la competencia de instituciones y profesores por financiamiento, tanto en la forma de grants y contratos externos, fondos para el patrimonio, asociaciones universidad-industria, inversión institucional en compañías desarrolladas por profesores, o cuotas y colegiaturas de estudiantes (p. 11).¹⁹

Los intentos de orientar las actividades y la producción de bienes de las universidades hacia el mercado, así como la adopción de prácticas similares a las del mercado en las instituciones de educación superior, han producido tendencias de comportamiento del personal académico en las que se asimilan o se simulan conductas parecidas a las de actores que desarrollan sus actividades en el mercado. Estas tendencias se producen fundamentalmente a partir de dos procesos que interactúan entre sí.

El discurso hegemónico de la globalización enfatiza la preeminencia de lo privado sobre lo público, del mercado sobre lo social, lo político y lo cultural, de las relaciones económicas sobre otro tipo de interacciones en la sociedad. En consecuencia, la desconfianza sobre lo público y la alta valoración de conceptos como la productividad y la competencia –características esenciales de la “eficiencia” del sector privado y del mercado- permean profundamente las percepciones sociales sobre las instituciones y el trabajo. Entre los académicos universitarios, como en otros sectores de la sociedad, impacta una percepción crítica sobre las actividades tradicionales de docencia e investigación en la universidad. Se interiorizan visiones acerca de la poca efectividad y productividad de los universitarios, del mal uso de los recursos públicos con los que se sostiene a las instituciones y se remunera a los profesores, de la falta de compromiso de académicos y estudiantes, y de la baja calidad o escasa pertinencia de la docencia y la investigación.

En este contexto se pone en crisis el concepto tradicional de mérito asociado al trabajo académico (Slaughter, 1988; Slaughter y Leslie,

¹⁹ La traducción del texto original y el uso de cursivas son responsabilidad del autor.

1997). La sustentación del mismo en la creación y recreación del conocimiento así como en la formación de educandos es sustituida, al menos parcialmente, por el éxito en la competencia por recursos externos para investigación, la generación de patentes, la venta de productos del trabajo académico y colocación de estudiantes graduados, en el mercado laboral (Slaughter y Leslie, 1997; Rhoades, 1998).

La reproducción acrítica de este discurso por parte de autoridades universitarias y educativas así como por los “líderes académicos tradicionales” - y aunque de manera contradictoria, por buena parte de los propios profesores - fortalece el mito de la baja calidad e ineficiencia de las instituciones públicas y sus académicos. Esta diversidad de actores institucionales contribuye a la institucionalización de los nuevos indicadores y símbolos de status académico. Se establecen así las bases para la puesta en práctica de políticas específicas que buscan orientar a las universidades y a sus académicos hacia la producción de bienes privados cuantificables y realizables en el mercado.²⁰

Bajo la cobertura del concepto vacuo de excelencia (Readings, 1996) - hoy compartido como medida de calidad y satisfacción de los consumidores por organizaciones productivas y culturales, por instituciones públicas y privadas - la necesidad de establecer indicadores de calidad y productividad ha adquirido significado propio en las instituciones de educación superior (Rhoades, 2001). En consecuencia los procesos de evaluación, asociados a la idea de medición y mejoramiento, se han convertido en piedra angular de las políticas de elevación de la productividad, la competencia y la calidad en el sector educativo.

Las dos décadas de experiencia mexicana - en su intento de sujetar los ingresos del personal académico a intercambios en el mercado o prácticas similares a las del mercado - ponen en evidencia las limitaciones explicativas de las teorías dominantes elaboradas en los países centrales. En estas se parte de una realidad económica idealizada muy diferente a la que prevalece en los países periféricos y en particular en México. La presencia del mercado como elemento regulador y racionalizador de la producción académica se topa de frente con la

naturaleza limitada y restringida de los mercados en estos países. Las aproximaciones críticas a la visión empresarial de la universidad, elaboradas también en los países centrales, tampoco toman en cuenta el hecho de que las relaciones económicas en la periferia -y consecuentemente en la mayor parte del mundo y sus universidades- con corresponden a las del mundo desarrollado. No puede por ende, hablarse de un capitalismo académico en el sentido que se hace respecto a las universidades anglosajonas, su interacción con los mercados y su inserción en los nuevos procesos de acumulación. En todo caso estas limitaciones explicativas aparejadas a la expansión de un discurso dominante, que ubica al proyecto emprendedor o empresarial como única posibilidad para las universidades contemporáneas, obliga al desarrollo de una conceptualización alternativa, al estudio del desarrollo de la universidad y sus relaciones con el proceso de acumulación en el marco del capitalismo periférico.

A manera de conclusión, las políticas de evaluación de la educación superior constituyen uno de los ejes fundamentales en el desarrollo de las políticas públicas en todo el orbe. En el discurso y las políticas dominantes, los procesos de evaluación se conciben como uno de los mecanismos más eficaces para establecer relaciones adecuadas entre los “clientes” que demandan diversos productos de la educación superior -educandos, empleadores y consumidores de conocimientos- y las instituciones educativas postsecundarias. Consecuentemente, los procesos de evaluación constituyen uno de los instrumentos a través de los cuales se busca incorporar relaciones de mercado o prácticas similares a las del mercado a las instituciones universitarias.

La adopción de sistemas de pago por méritos es un tema ampliamente analizado en la literatura y las discusiones sobre las empresas y las organizaciones productivas. En la educación superior, sin embargo, ha tenido un desarrollo desigual. Los programas de merit pay difieren notablemente en extensión e impacto en diversos incluso en países centrales como Francia y los Estados Unidos. El caso mexicano de remuneraciones asociadas al desempeño en la educación superior destaca por su larga aplicación, por su extensión y relativa homogeneidad en el sistema, y por su impacto significativo en los ingresos de los académicos.

²⁰ Sobre la producción de bienes públicos y privados en la educación superior ver Marginson (1997) y Ordorika (2002b).

Para comprender a fondo la naturaleza, extensión y magnitud de estos mecanismos de remuneración en México, resulta fundamental analizar el origen y la intencionalidad de su incorporación como parte esencial de las políticas públicas de educación superior. En este trabajo hemos puesto en cuestión el argumento de que estos sistemas constituyen sólo una respuesta al deterioro salarial del personal académico. La evidencia presentada en este artículo muestra con claridad que, pasado un primer momento de reducción salarial producto de las crisis de fines de los setenta y principios de los ochenta, hubo una intención deliberada de contención de los salarios del personal académico con el fin de establecer mecanismos alternativos de remuneraciones. Estos mecanismos alternativos están sustentados en conceptos percepciones clásicas de la economía. Con ellos se ha buscado introducir la competencia como mecanismo regulador, con el fin de garantizar calidad y eficiencia en el trabajo académico y reducir los costos de la educación superior.

El debate en México sobre los sistemas de pago por méritos se ha polarizado entre las aproximaciones procedimentales y las sustantivas. En las primeras se argumenta que los sistemas son esencialmente benéficos como elementos que dan racionalidad e institucionalidad a la profesión académica. Se critican como efectos perversos o fallas de implementación los problemas de corrupción, simulación académica, orientación temática y destrucción del tejido social de los académicos. Desde la segunda perspectiva, se analiza a estos mecanismos de pago por productividad como intrínsecamente nocivos y destructores de la naturaleza esencial del trabajo académico. A partir de los enunciados más tradicionales de la literatura empresarial, en este trabajo se afirma que los efectos de los sistemas de pago por méritos en la naturaleza del trabajo y en las comunidades académicas son consistentes con las características sustantivas de estos mecanismos y con los fines que persiguen. Esta vertiente de análisis sugiere la necesidad de profundizar en el estudio de los sistemas de remuneración asociados a la productividad desde la sociología del trabajo para una mejor comprensión de los cambios que están ocurriendo en la naturaleza del trabajo académico.

La intención de establecer en México un sistema de remuneraciones asociado a las prácticas de mercado explica la homogeneidad, extensión e impacto de estos mecanismos. La debilidad de los mercados para conocimientos y productos

académicos en nuestro país ha obligado a la adopción de sistemas de competencia simulados desde la acción pública. La demanda de productos de la universidad – en un contexto de mercados limitados o prácticamente inexistentes – se ha sustituido por un sistema de incentivos sostenido a través de fondos públicos gestionados y administrados por las universidades de acuerdo con reglas establecidas por el Gobierno Federal. La dinámica de competencia entre productores en el mercado, es sustituida por procesos de competencia por recursos públicos limitados, a través de procesos de evaluación. Las reglas de esta “competencia” (en este caso reglas y criterios de evaluación) no emanan del mercado sino que se establecen arbitrariamente por autoridades educativas y comunidades académicas. Esto explica la extensión de los sistemas de merit pay y su extraordinario peso en los ingresos de los académicos mexicanos.

Conclusiones

El caso que se ha analizado en las páginas anteriores resiste a cualquier caracterización fundada en un esquema de racionalidad administrativo y neutral, si es que este pudiera existir. No habla del diseño y la puesta en práctica de un modelo universitario que se alinea con los lineamientos internacionales y el discurso de orientación al mercado y la productividad. Muestra el tipo de aberraciones que pueden producirse cuando la adopción de prácticas y comportamientos de mercado se introducen a la universidad. Evidencia la contradicción entre discurso y condiciones estructurales y el tipo de políticas que se desprenden del voluntarismo de administradores y políticos. En otro terreno, también es una evidencia del rejuergo de fuerzas y relaciones de poder que interactúan y dan forma final a las políticas prácticas.

Todos estos elementos nos permiten tener una mejor comprensión acerca de un proceso que se nos ha presentado hipotéticamente como racional y científico, distanciado de la política, y de naturaleza esencialmente técnica. También nos muestra la contribución de perspectivas analíticas que emanan de la sociología y la ciencia política para desentrañar las características reales del diseño y puesta en práctica de políticas en la educación superior.

En suma, el estudio de caso pone en entredicho al mito de la racionalidad y a la ideología del apoliticismo que dominan el estudio de políticas

públicas y el campo de estudios de la educación superior. De esta forma nos permite entender mejor la relación entre producción de conocimientos y toma de decisiones y el papel que debe jugar la academia en la comprensión de nuestro campo de conocimiento y en la transformación de la educación superior.

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THE UNIVERSITY ON THE
GROUND:
REFLECTIONS ON CANADIAN
EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This paper begins with a critical overview of changes that have taken place since the mid-1970s in Canadian higher education policy. Three distinct but overlapping stages of change are identified: retrenching, retro-fitting and repositioning. Part two critically reviews the implications of recent policies promoting the commercialisation of academic research and intensifying institutional competition among local universities. Part three contrasts the contemporary "university-on-the-ground" with the idealised university represented in policy documents and web-site pronouncements. The loss of public trust, the increased regulation of academic work, the rise of the student consumer, and the effects of production pressures on creative work reveal the contradictions and incoherencies in the university's responses to prevailing public policies. The paper concludes by raising questions about accounting for these university changes in terms of neo-liberalism. It argues for a greater acknowledgement of the complicity of university constituencies in bringing about the changes that are taking place and conversely, for making room for these constituencies to challenge these changes.

Keywords

Canadian universities, corporatisation,
commercialization, codes of ethics regimes,
student consumer, production pressures

La Universidad en la tierra: Reflexiones sobre la
experiencia canadiense

Resumen

Este artículo comienza con una visión general de los cambios que han tenido lugar desde la mitad de los 1970's en la política de educación superior canadiense. Se identifican tres etapas de cambio diferentes pero que se traslapan: reducción, actualización y reposicionamiento. La parte dos examina críticamente las implicaciones de políticas recientes que promueven la mercantilización de la investigación académica y la intensificación de la competencia institucional entre universidades locales. La parte tres contrasta la contemporánea "universidad en la tierra" con la universidad idealizada representada en documentos de política y en pronunciamientos en sitios Web. La pérdida de la confianza pública, el incremento en la regulación del trabajo académico, el surgimiento del estudiante consumidor, y los efectos de las presiones de producción en trabajos creativos revelan las contradicciones e incoherencias en las respuestas de las universidades a las políticas públicas prevalecientes. El artículo concluye levantando cuestionamientos sobre la justificación o explicación para estos cambios en la universidad en términos del neoliberalismo. Plantea un mayor reconocimiento de la complicidad de los constituyentes universitarios en provocar los cambios que están ocurriendo y en cambio, haciendo espacio para que dichos constituyentes desafíen estos cambios.

Palabras clave

Universidades canadienses, corporativización,
mercantilización, códigos de ética, estudiante
como consumidor, presiones de la producción

INTRODUCTION

When I was first asked to contribute to a seminar on how research on higher education can or does influence public policy, I did not think that I was the right person for the job. Thinking of my own research as well as that of some other colleagues¹, my first thought was that there has been no influence. Since the mid 1980s, my work, like that of the colleagues I mention, has been critical of successive shifts in Canadian government funding policy taking place over the past twenty-five years. Our research¹ has attempted to

demonstrated that and how these policy shifts have facilitated a significant transformation of Canadian universities which undermines their role as public serving institutions. In spite of our critiques, government initiatives and interventions have continued in the same direction unabated.

This is not to say that all higher education research has had no influence on public policy. Public policy makers recognize the value of research in this field and they draw from it in many different ways. Institutes and research units have been created at universities for this very purpose. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), now a part of the University of Toronto, the John Deusch Institute at Queen's University, and policy analysis units at the University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta, for example, routinely provide governments with research-based advice on education, often supporting, sometimes critical of specific aspects of policy, and in some cases designing the policy choices that governments have made².

However, the influence of research that has been distinctly critical of the prevailing direction of higher education policy of the past twenty-five years has been negligible³. On the contrary, as each intervention has had its effects, subsequent policies have intensified and enhanced the changes accomplished in preceding stages. It should not be hard to understand, then, why I did not initially believe that I had anything to say that could shed light on how research on higher education can or does influence public policy.

However, Dr. Waldemiro Velez, the seminar organiser, assured me that my "critical" perspective on higher education policy in Canada was well suited to the purpose of the seminar. Nevertheless it is important for the readers of this paper to realise that I represent a body of work on Canadian higher education⁴ that differs from perspectives that are taken by those who are not critical of the prevailing policy direction, or who are critical of specific aspects or of its implementation but not of its overall direction. (see fn. 3 for examples and elaboration).

GENERAL PERSPECTIVE:

My work on the university places less emphasis on analysing policies *per se*, and more emphasis on how policies are taken up and enacted by individuals and groups as agents within academic institutions. I believe that individual and collective responses of academic communities and their members to government policies have been a necessary vehicle for accomplishing what I (and others) conceive to be a fundamental transformation in universities. Correspondingly, my work has been oriented more toward influencing members of the academic community about their role in enacting specific policies than it has been toward influencing policy makers directly.

One way to influence academics is to make visible how these policies are shaping their own teaching and research practices as well as the practices of the institutions in which they carry out their activities. In other words, while I do not dismiss the important role of policy discourse in shaping orientations, I am more interested in how the "university on the ground" has responded to policy changes than in the policies in and of themselves.⁵

In this paper, I will follow this same tack. I will not of course be able to report in detail all the significant turns in policy that have marked the past two to three decades. Nor will I be able to reveal the complexities of university responses which, significantly, are marked by internal struggles and alliances between and among university constituencies. There is an extensive literature on this complexity to which I have contributed.⁶ Here, I will briefly overview the key turns and summarise the ways the Canadian university on the whole and "on the ground" has responded to them. Then I will focus more closely on three of the latest policy initiatives which build upon, and continue the trajectory of, the policy interventions that preceded them. These latest initiatives constitute an aggressive intervention by the federal government⁷ which, in my view, strongly induces universities to transform themselves into knowledge businesses⁸ that are networked into a global higher-education industry. I will conclude with a

discussion of concerns that arise out of the university's responses to these new policy initiatives.

PART ONE: RETRENCHING, RETRO-FITTING AND REPOSITIONING CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES 1975-19959

"It is only recently that policy makers have begun to understand the critical links between expenditure patterns, cost and efficiency in higher education and the mechanisms by which institutions receive funds ...Many governments now see financial incentives as a more effective way of *influencing the pattern of activities in higher education institutions* than administrative intervention." (Paris: OECD, 1990, as quoted in Zinberg, 1991, p. 45. italics mine)

Fiscal retrenchment.

By the late 1970s, fiscal restraint (at least the idea if not always the practice) had become the priority of Canadian public sector funding policy. Earlier in the decade, both provincial and federal governments had begun to reduce the rate of growth of funds allocated to the higher education sector (see endnote 19 for a clarification of federal and provincial governments' role in education). Combined with inflationary pressures and increased enrolments, universities across the country began to experience financial shortfalls to varying degrees. On the whole, the university community tended to respond to these financial pressures as temporary — a condition that had to be endured for now. Eventually, it was believed, things would return to "normal", to the expansion that had characterised the post-war period.

Even so, for institutions that for well over a decade had been in the groove of building new programmes, hiring new faculty, and enrolling more and more students, the relatively shallow budget cuts that were required in the early stages of restraint were crisis inducing. Many universities during this period experienced internal conflicts within the academic-administrative leadership — Deans versus Deans, Deans versus Presidents — as well as between the academicadministrative

leadership and the faculty. Beginning around the middle of the 1970s in Anglo-Canada and earlier in Québec, the faculty had begun to adopt collective bargaining strategies, sometimes as unions under labour legislation and sometimes through "special plans" collective bargaining. Their aim was to secure their terms and conditions of employment against the threat of declining budgets and also to preserve collegial governance in the face of increasingly assertive and expanding administrations.

By the early 1980s, "temporary" funding shortfalls unfolded into chronic under funding, a condition that remains into the present. The task of "managing the budget" began to assume a central place in planning and decision-making. Along with it, the role of the administration began to transform incrementally but decidedly into "management". As advocated by George Keller, "management" requires a more strategically-oriented style of leadership which takes charge of the university by setting the path of its development, devising strategic plans and measurable objectives, and creating the necessary financial and organisational mechanisms for realising them.¹⁰ In other words, as compared to the style of academic administration that had become institutionalised during the post-war expansion of higher education, management initiates policy as opposed to simply implementing academic decisions made in collegial bodies such as senates and faculty councils.

By the end of the decade, an array of practices that are now identified in critical literature as either intrinsic to, or associated with, "managerialism¹¹" had begun to infuse most if not all Canadian universities, including¹²....

* embedding "efficiency", "accountability" and "productivity" as primary criteria for all decision-making;

* fragmenting the academic workforce by creating separate classes of academic appointments with distinct terms and conditions of employment (e.g. full-time tenure stream, full-time contractually limited, part-time course by course contracts) as a means of achieving cost-efficiencies;

* appropriating policy-making activities to administrative offices, which were once carried out by faculty members as part of their service function;

* instituting forms of documentary-based decision-making whose parameters are designed and controlled by managerial concerns and initiatives, such as mission statements and five-year plans;

* orienting institutional decisions toward the expectations of external constituencies such as government, business, funding agencies and community organizations;

* measuring various activities in terms of in-put and out-put to assess the relative cost-efficiency of , and demand for, various university programmes, services and activities;

Accompanying this growth of managerialism was a corresponding decline in the influence of collegial bodies over universities' overall academic direction. Academic criteria and academic assessment became less significant in planning exercises, designing programmes and managing the day to day operations of academic units. By the late 1980s, academics collectively (that is, through bodies like senates, faculty council, departments and faculty associations and unions) had become relatively marginal participants in making decisions that had major consequences for the academic direction of their institutions.

The fiscal restraint created by changes in government funding policies was not the only impetus to the growth of managerialism and the corresponding decline in faculty influence, however. Beginning in the early 1980s, a second more invasive phase of policy intervention overlapped with fiscal retrenchment — university-corporate linking. University-corporate linking:

It is ironic that policies promoting greater collaboration between universities and corporations were first presented as a kind of rescue effort, promising to relieve university communities from declining morale and annual

crises associated with budgetary short-falls. In 1984, the inaugural report¹³ of the Corporate Higher Forum¹⁴, an organisation founded in 1983 by two McGill university professors, articulated the benefits of university-corporate collaboration to universities and corporations. Universities would acquire new sources of funding to counteract government under-funding, and corporations would gain much needed expertise — a window on science — to enhance their competitive edge in the international marketplace.

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the federal government developed policies that followed the Corporate-Higher Education proposal almost like a blue-print¹⁵. These policies include ...
* Allocating federal monies through the three national research councils to targeted research programmes and to matched grant research programmes that required research partnerships between academic researchers and (primarily) private sector corporate funders¹⁶.

* Allocating federal monies to establish new institutions on campus that were designed to attract and facilitate university-corporate research partnerships, such as Industrial Liaison Offices and Technology Transfer Centres;

* Establishing Centres of Excellence Networks that brought together academic and industrial researchers to work on research areas designated by governments as high priority. (Some provincial governments funded their own centres of excellence programmes as well)

* Changing legislation to allow private ownership of the intellectual property rights to knowledge created through federally funded research grants;

Critics faced a number of difficulties with trying to challenge this new policy direction¹⁷. For one thing, no public debate took place about the merits of

the policy direction even though it represented a significant change in ideas about the university as a public institution in Canadian society. Instead, specific policies were adopted incrementally and pragmatically without opening them to critical assessment either within the academic community nor to the public more generally. Moreover, public bodies in which academics themselves were influential, such as the three national research granting councils, helped to implement the policies. They justified their actions on the grounds that to not cooperate with government might result in deeper cuts to their basic research budgets¹⁸. To the extent that debate took place at all, it occurred in small committees out of sight of either the public at large or the academic community and, given the specific mandates of these committees, it mainly focused on specific details rather than on the policy direction as a whole.

For another thing, most academics were unaware that these developments were taking place. Visible manifestations of the policies — campus building renamed for corporate donors, in-house research businesses, commercial advertisements — did not emerge until the mid-1990s, by which time both the organisational, procedural and legislative changes necessary to support this policy direction had already been put into place.

But perhaps the most important reason that the academic community as a whole did not challenge these policies is that these new opportunities for improved research funding were thought to be the only game in town. After a decade and a half of fiscal restraint, both university administrations and individual academics chose to take from them what they could to support their ongoing activities.

Consequently, by the end of the 1980s, significant changes in the university “on the ground” had begun to take place. New structures emerged which began to assume a central place in achieving the (shifting) objectives of the university, as though they were part of a shadow institution that was growing parasitically off the traditional one: for example, spin-off companies, Centres of

Excellence, innovation centres, centres of technology transfer and other units which promoted and embodied the idea of corporate-university collaboration. They began to draw upon the university's resources while many features of the “traditional” university began to shrink or disappear.

Policies of fiscal restraint and corporate linking thus interacted in ways similar to priming a pump. Continued under-funding was a powerful lever for seducing or pushing universities in the direction of corporate partnerships¹⁹. At the same time, universities' responses to these enticements and pressures reinforced the expansion of managerial controls. Industrially relevant science required infra-structural arrangements and cultures that differed from the collegial arrangements and cultures of academic communities — such as the need for secrecy, quick decision-making, and responsiveness to changing market pressures. An assertive and strategically oriented administration acting independently of collegial bodies could expeditiously negotiate contracts with corporate partners and develop them in a spirit that was compatible with the needs of private sector business.

Taken together, changes in Canadian universities that were commensurate with university-corporate linking and fiscal restraint were not merely “add-ons” to the university-as-it-was. They were fundamentally transformative. The practices of managerialism introduced a methodology through which universities could maximise their efficiency, cost-effectiveness and present themselves as accountable “businesses”. Linking academic resources to corporate objectives through specific contracts and partnership arrangements both required and legitimized a practical conception of knowledge as “intellectual property”, a commodity which could be privately owned and protected through patenting and licensing agreements. Through these changes, the focus of the university's role in creating and disseminating knowledge began to shift from serving broadly defined *social* purposes and public constituencies — in other words, the “common good” — to serving *market-oriented* purposes for targeted and private clientele or customers.

At the same time, these overlapping policies of fiscal restraint and university-corporate linking did not cohere well in the university "on the ground": they posed opportunities and constraints that conflicted with each other, feeding some parts of the university while starving others, and often fueling internal tensions and political struggles. For example, while the federal government was allocating funds to targeted and partnered research, provincial governments' were still under funding teaching programmes and the routine operational costs of maintaining university facilities. (See important endnote²⁰) Moreover, funding flowed disproportionately into research areas in the natural, physical, and new technology-based sciences — areas deemed by government to be of high priority to the "new economy". By contrast, areas of the social sciences and humanities, seen to be less relevant to corporate growth and innovation, were more likely to feel the full pressures of provincial governments' fiscal restraint policies. Universities were therefore trapped between contradictory and competing pressures from these two levels of policy intervention. They had to coordinate and re-balance their responses to constantly changing policies coming from each level of government. I will return to this point in the final section of this paper.

Perhaps the most significant transformation in Canadian universities was a change in their political and intellectual positioning as public institutions. In contrast to collegially governed institutions which received their programmatic direction largely from the political and intellectual currents that operated *within* them, the corporate-linked, cost-efficient and economically accountable universities that began to emerge in the early to mid 1990s were more directly attuned to *the outside* and were thus responsive not only to corporate demands, but also to the programmatic interventions of granting agencies and government ministries. In other words, corporate-linked universities were "plugged in" to external economic and political agents and agendas which served increasingly as

the bases for determining their educational and research objectives. By the early to mid 1990, it was possible to argue that Canadian universities to varying degrees had begun to exist in the world less as distinctively academic and educational institutions and more as business organizations which sell knowledge-based products to paying customers and targeted markets.

PART TWO: LAUNCHING CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES AS KNOWLEDGE BUSINESSES IN THE GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE INDUSTRY: 1995 to the present

"Just as the research university emerged in Canada at the start of the twentieth century, perhaps a new species, the service university, is evolving in the last decades. In such an institution teaching and research would not be displaced so much as they would be re-oriented. *The essence of such a university would be a dynamic, integral relationship with society.* Just as the research university underwent structural and functional change, so too will the service university." (Enros & Farley, 1986, p.16. Italics mine)

Prior to the 1990s, policy makers, university administrators and faculty members (to the extent that they were aware) tended to either deny or down-play the idea that universities were being transformed by a "corporate agenda²¹". But by the mid 1990s, not only were there visible signs on university campuses of a growing corporate presence but also, public policy statements and university publications of all kinds unapologetically and without qualifications adopted the language and conception of universities as businesses. Nor did they back-off from associating publicly-funded universities with profit-making activities.²²

Interestingly, this flagrant and often flamboyant celebration of the university's recent conversion to the practices and objectives of business has been matched by a growing scholarship that is critical of converging trends in higher

education in many national contexts. These trends have been analysed in a variety of ways²³. Sheila Slaughter and Larry Leslie has conceived of the changes taking place in U.S. universities and other national jurisdictions in terms of academic capitalism. Australian scholars, most notably Simon Marginson, have employed a conceptualization of marketisation that is rooted in Foucauldian scholarship. Henry Etzkowitz has advanced “the triple helix of universities, governments and corporations” based on the economic theories of Joseph Schumpeter.

Canadian scholarship including my own has employed the terms “corporatisation” and “commercialisation” to analyse these trends²⁴ and to signal the growing corporate influence and commercial orientation toward research and teaching activities on Canadian campuses. However, some commentators employ the term “corporatisation” in a narrow and uni-directional sense, arguing that corporate leaders in general have seized control of university resources through their financial donations to support particular programmes and building projects and their dominant role on Boards of Governors. As well, they argue that particular pharmaceutical, agribusiness, resource extraction, biotechnology, and computer technology firms have gained an unseemly foothold in specific university faculties and research units.²⁵

I agree that these influences exist and that they have grown substantially since university-corporate collaboration became a policy emphasis in the mid 1980s. For example, changes in legislation allowing private entities to own the intellectual property rights to knowledge created through publicly-funded research grants has also opened university campuses to commercially oriented research and teaching enterprises.

However, the complexity of what is happening is not sufficiently captured by one-sided unmediated influences flowing from external business interests into the university. I conceive instead of corporatisation and commercialisation as two-way rather than one-way processes that are mediated by the political

interests of governments and the professional and administrative interests of individual as well as collective agents of the academic community. One set of processes involves the movement into universities of economic and political influences that, in previous times, were considered “external” to their programmatic development; and the other involves the movement outward by universities to sell their services to specific clientele and customers. These inward and outward movements encapsulate the dual nature of the university’s changing relationship to social, economic and political agents in both the private and public sectors of Canadian society.

In this, the university has been an agent in its own right. Rather than mechanically adapting to pressures, it has actively engaged in ordering these relationships, giving them concrete form through changing their own practices and orientations. The corporatisation of universities and the commercialisation of their research and teaching activities are thus enabled not just by government policies that support a particular model of economic innovation which favours corporate-sector interests. It is also enabled by a re-orientation within universities toward creating and disseminating knowledge as a commodity for targeted markets and clientele, and adopting business practices as their *modus operandi*: in other words, transforming themselves into knowledge businesses. A new array of government policies adopted since the mid-1990s are building on these developments. These policies treat universities more forthrightly as local “knowledge businesses” that need to be regulated and integrated into a Canadian knowledge industry. Of particular significance are three initiatives undertaken by the federal government: the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI), The Millennial Chairs Programme (or the Canadian Research Chairs Programme, CRC), and the Framework Agreement of 2002 which implements several key recommendations of the Report of the Expert Panel on the Commercialisation of Academic Research.

The Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and The Millennial Chairs Programme (CRC):

In 1997, the federal government tabled a budget which allocated almost 1 billion dollars to update the Canadian research infrastructure. This budget was subsequently expanded to 3.15 billion dollars through to 2010. Rather than following the long established practice of distributing these funds to academic researchers through the three existing research grant councils — the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR, Formally the Medical Research Council) — an independent “crown corporation” called the Canada Foundation for Innovation was created to allocate these funds not to individual researcher applicants but to institutional applicants. It consists of a Board of Directors²⁶ appointed by the government, responsible for setting policies and designing programmes that will achieve the foundation’s objective of promoting “state of the art” research both in Canadian universities and other research institutions. In order to receive funds under this programme, the applying institutions must have partners that will provide 60% of the total cost of the proposed infrastructural developments.

In 1999, the same federal government announced an allocation of just under 1 billion dollars over 5 years to fund 2000 Canada research chairs²⁷ to generate “research excellence” by supporting the work of emerging and established “star” researchers. While these chairs are being established in “all areas of research”, the programme in fact allocates the funds on a proportional basis: 45% to the natural sciences and engineering, 35% to health, and 20% to the social sciences and humanities.

The CFI and CRC programmes mark a particularly significant turning point in research funding for at least two reasons. First, they insert a massive dose of federal monies — over 4 billion dollars — into a university system which,

over the previous two decades, has suffered from government underfunding. Moreover, they insert these substantial funds disproportionately into areas identified elsewhere in government documents as relevant to economic growth and innovation. Taken together they thus have the potential to fundamentally reshape the balance of disciplines and programmes in local institutions and to more narrowly focus the educational and research objectives of the university system across the country in ways that are compatible with the economic objectives of the federal government.

Claire Polster²⁸ argues that the introduction of the CFI and CRC programmes are a significant turning point because they represent a “break from the past” in the federal government’s approach to research funding in several important ways. Among the many important differences she identifies and analyses are three that I want to especially emphasise: These are that ...

* local institutions’ share of CFI funds and CRC positions is determined by *an institution’s* (rather than individual researchers’) previous track record, based on their success in securing research funds from the three national research councils;

* applicants to both the CFI and CRC programmes are universities, rather than individual academics or groups of academics;

* assessments of applications for these programmes take into account the local institutions’ strategic planning document rather than the intellectual and research priorities of individual academics or groups of academics, thus tying the initiatives of individual academics and associated academic units to the strategic management agendas of their institutions;

Universities are especially motivated to compete for these awards because (a) the amount of funds allocated through these programmes is substantial; (b) as Polster points out, the size of the awards are higher than those

received through other programmes; and (c), the relative positioning of local institutions within Canada is highlighted by the number of awards they receive from these programmes. Polster argues that, through their participation in the CFI and CRC programmes, Canadian universities will become more in tune with, and equipped for, advancing Canada's position in the global knowledge-based economy, (a) because the federal government's own economic innovation agenda is built into their criteria and (b), because government officials and appointees are highly influential over decisions made within these programmes²⁹.

Polster proposes that, insofar as they represent a "break from the past", universities' involvement in the CFI and CRC programmes may significantly transform *the social relations of academic research* in Canada. She predicts, for example, that each university will step up their competition with all other Canadian universities not only to acquire CFI and CRC awards but also to improve their relative ranking, since their entitlement to a greater or lesser share of the resources is determined by their overall success in research funding competitions. Universities will thus become much more attentive to the inner workings of other universities and to the strategies they employ for improving their rank.

... the main point is that these programs shift the gaze or orientation of all Canadian universities, encouraging them to take developments within the national university system into consideration in determining their future course. (Polster, 282)

She also predicts that participation in the CFI and CRC programmes will further limit local universities' autonomy vis-a-vis government. For one thing, these programmes require universities to organise their priorities around strategically selected focus areas (as determined by their institutional strategic plan), rather than around, for example, the intellectual and research priorities of their "front line" researchers and academic units. For another thing, the highest

level decision-making bodies of the CFI and CRC programmes composed of government officials and appointees, "exercise de facto veto over university proposals" (Polster, p. 283) and there is no provision to appeal these decisions.

Polster shows how the CFI and CRC programmes may also lead to significant transformations in the relations between the government and the private sector, and between universities and the private sector. She concludes as follows:

... it is not clear that CFI and CRC programs, as presently constituted, will produce academic research that is radically different from that which currently exists. It is clear, however, that they will stimulate some radical changes in relations among and between all of the parties involved in academic research. ... given the significance of these shifts ... these programs may end up having more impacts, and more profound impacts, on academic research than their creators ever imagined or intended. (Polster, p.296)

Polster's analysis focuses primarily on the implications of the CFI and CRC initiatives for universities' role in the social relations of *academic research*.

However, two other recent public policy initiatives undertaken by the federal government provide further insight to how the relatively massive influx of research funding made available through the CFI and CRC programmes may have significant implications for local universities *as emerging knowledge businesses* — a central theme of this paper. The Expert Panel on the Commercialisation of Academic Research and the 2002 Framework Agreement:

In 1996, the federal government created the Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Science and Technology to review Canada's performance in research and innovation, to identify issues of national concern and to advise on a forward-looking agenda that would position Canada in the international context. (http://ACST-CCST.gc.ca/home_e.html, modified 2004-09-13). To proceed with

its mandate, the council created several expert panels one of which was The Expert Panel on the Commercialisation of Research. The panel consisted of nine “expert” members including technology transfer practitioners from Canada and the U.S., venture capitalists and other representatives from government and industry. In a report published in *University Affairs*, a monthly newspaper put out by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC)³⁰, Peggy Berkowitz described the panel as “heavily weighted toward industry.”

According to Berkowitz, an early draft of the panel’s report was heavily criticised by all segments of the academic community, including organisations representing university faculty members such as the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the AUCC which represents university administrations as a whole. The panel released a final report in May 1999 titled “Public Investments in University Research: Reaping the Benefits.” The report, which is only concerned with university research supported in any part by federal monies, addressed a number of concerns previously raised by the AUCC and individual university administrators but it did not settle the objections of the CAUT and many faculty members³¹.

An August 1999 news release by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) describes the objective of the expert panel’s recommendations as follows: The objective of the recommendations is to provide the greatest possible economic return to Canadian taxpayers on the investments they make in university research. This research takes the form of new economic activity when research results produce new high value-added goods and services. Commercialization of university research creates good jobs and social benefits, for example, through improvements in health care made possible by the application of medical research discoveries.³²

Among other things, the report recommends ...
*that the federal government invest 50 million dollars, which represents

5% of what it already invests in university research, to enable universities to commercialise intellectual property;

*that, in exchange for these increased funds, universities annually report to government on any federally funded intellectual property that has commercial potential;

*that universities adopt a flexible policy toward ownership of IP, but where federally funded researchers want to commercialise the IP they own, that the IP be disclosed and assigned to universities;

*that universities be allowed to assign IP to affiliated research institutions, private sector corporations and other researchers under specified

conditions, including when another partner will be better able to maximise returns to Canada without undue conflicts of interest

* that changes be made in taxation on personal income, capital gains and employee stock options so that “start-up companies and established businesses that are dependent on universities as a source of innovation can grow.”³³

The most controversial recommendation of the expert panel is that commercialisation be named the fourth mission of the university, along with teaching, research and service to the community. The panel defended this much criticised recommendation by arguing that there is a strong “cultural bias” against innovation in some university departments and “potential innovators are afraid of putting their academic careers in jeopardy”^{34 35}

These recommendations have not, to date, been acted upon as a package by the federal government — but that is not unusual. In reports like these, recommendations may be incorporated into a variety of specific policies and practices, often in modified form and on a piecemeal basis. It is not insignificant then, that since it submitted its report in May of 1999, the influence of the expert

panel has been reflected in both federal and provincial public policy initiatives.

For example, in the 2001 budget, the federal government affirmed its intention to promote increased commercialisation of the research that it funds. The 2002 Speech from the Throne committed the government to pursue a permanent solution to indirect costs of research for universities and strategies for research commercialization. In 2003, the governments of Canada and Ontario each contributed \$20 million to a new Medical and Related Sciences (MaRS) Centre that will cost a total of 345 million dollars to be contributed by private and public sector funders. More revealing than the relatively small amount of the financial contribution is the ceremonial rhetoric that accompanied the federal government's announcement of these funds. An Industry Canada press release described the centre as a research and development facility "*designed to accelerate the commercialization of innovative academic research* in areas such as biotechnology, medical devices and genetics (italics mine for emphasis)". Alan J. Rock, then Minister of Industry, stated that "The resources at MaRS *will help publicly-funded universities and research hospitals identify research with commercial potential, develop innovative new products and forge partnerships with the private sector* (italics mine for emphasis)." Dr. John Evans (previously President of the University of Toronto), the Chair of the Board of the new centre added, "We are delighted that the provincial and federal governments are both supporting this world-class convergence centre for life science, information technology and other related disciplines. This program will create a close-knit research community that will attract the best and brightest researchers, entrepreneurs, venture capital and professional services. The MaRS Discovery District *will make Ontario and the rest of Canada leaders in the development and commercialization of new technologies* (italics mine for emphasis)."³⁶

Perhaps the most significant indication of the influence of the expert panel recommendations is the Framework Agreement reached in the Fall of 2002 between the then Minister of Industry, Alan Rock, and the Presidents of Canada's Universities. According to the press release from Industry Canada, the university Presidents committed their universities to doubling the amount of research they perform and tripling their commercialisation performance by 2010.³⁷

To my knowledge, none of the Presidents to date have revealed how these targets will be achieved. Moreover, none of them consulted with the academic senates of their own universities *before* making these commitments. Finally, no announcements have been made that clarify how "commercialisation performance" will be measured. Nonetheless, the full text of Minister Rock's press statement clearly links increased research productivity and commercialisation of research with the massive increase of funds that will have been achieved by 2010 through the CFI and CRC programmes. In other words, the Framework Agreement is a step that ensures that the increases in research funding since the mid-1990s will propel Canada's universities farther down the path toward functioning as knowledge businesses within a knowledge industry that is harnessed to economic innovation and market success.

Consequently, university Presidents (occupying positions that are frequently equated to CEOs of major Canadian businesses) have responded to the expert panel's recommendations as strong exhortations from a highly placed and influential policy advisory body. The panel's recommendations thus induce universities to increase their collaborations with private sector firms in order to convert research discoveries into marketable products. They also provoke strategically-thinking university administrations to adopt a proprietary attitude toward their faculty members as potential income generators, and toward their research findings as potentially sellable "product". In sum, they help to

strengthen and consolidate universities' transformation into knowledge businesses.

The foregoing discussion has tracked Canadian universities' engagement with public policy as a relatively straight and cumulative line of development, beginning with their responses to fiscal restraint in the early stage and culminating in their responses to strong fiscal and other incentives to diversify funding sources and become investment-maximising if not profit-making businesses in their own right.

As previously mentioned, however, public policy has not been evenhanded and consistent in the way it has opened new opportunities for universities and their sub-constituencies to pursue while closing off others. In addition, policies from one level of government have not always cohered with policies from another. As well, policy initiatives even from the same level of government have been contradictory and have even undermined, or threatened to undermine, governments' stated purposes. Finally, it has not been simple and straightforward to install an economically-oriented agenda designed to generate support for private sector innovation and development, into a public institution that, until recently, has pursued more broadly conceived social purposes.

In the final section of this paper, I will briefly touch on some of the ways these imbalances, contradictions and incoherencies are playing out in the university "on the ground." The discussion is by no means comprehensive.³⁸ The most I can do within the space of this paper is to name some of the critical tensions in these emerging knowledge businesses. On a more optimistic note, these tensions that may offer critics of this policy direction opportunities for intervention.

PART THREE: TROUBLE IN THE UNIVERSITY "ON THE GROUND."

We know that the universities are in crisis and are attempting to ride out the storm by aligning themselves with various corporate interests. That is short sighted and self destructive. *From the point of view of their*

obligation to society, it is simply irresponsible. (emphasis added: John Ralston Saul, *The Unconscious Civilization: The 1995 Massey Lectures.* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1995): 173

Citing Dorothy Smith's³⁹ view that public policies are active forces rather than discrete events, Claire Polster makes the following important observation: ...when a policy involves or produces a qualitative break from the past, it is likely to generate a greater number of issues to be addressed and to transform possibilities for strategic intervention to a greater degree than is generally the case.⁴⁰

Among this "greater number of issues to be addressed" by Canadian universities in the current context, one of the most troubling is the loss in public trust, arising in large part because, as John Ralston Saul states, universities have attempted to "ride out the storm by aligning themselves with various corporate interests."

Loss of public trust:

Interestingly but not surprisingly, dramatic indications of this loss in public trust recently focused around Canada's most internationally reknown and prestigious research university,⁴¹ the University of Toronto. In June 1998, an investigative journalist constructed an article around the University of Toronto's highly controversial \$400 million⁴² fund-raising campaign carried out in the mid 1990s under the leadership of its then President, Robert Prichard. Author Trevor Cole titled his article "Ivy League Hustle."⁴³ In it, he represents Prichard and the university's chief development officer, Jon Delandrea, as artful deal-makers who mix and match the university's most highly prized programmes and intellectual resources to the particular interests of primarily corporate donors. Cole asks, "Is Rob Prichard, a man of hand shakes and 'how-are-ya's, more interested in protecting the university's cash than its academic freedoms?"

As if to answer this question, within a year the University of Toronto found itself in the midst of two widely reported international "scandals", one involving

a family physician and medical researcher, Dr. Nancy Olivieri, and the other involving psycho-pharmacologist David Healy. In the Olivieri case, the university administration refused to back Dr. Olivieri's decision to tell her patients about potential dangers she had uncovered with a drug she was researching under a funding contract with Apotex, the drug's manufacturer. Apotex was interested in commercialising the results of research carried out by Olivieri and several other medical researchers based at the University of Toronto and the Sick Children's Hospital in Toronto. The university administration justified its stand on the grounds that Olivieri, in the early 1990s, had signed a funding contract with Apotex in which she agreed to not disclose the results of her research without prior permission from Apotex. The incident took several years to resolve, involving, among other things, several in-house investigations, an international panel of experts to assess Olivieri's research, and two formal inquiries, one undertaken by the Canadian Association of University Teachers which was highly critical of the conduct of the University of Toronto's administration. It also received world-wide media coverage and was discussed extensively in distinguished medical research journals as an example of how corporate funding of research can lead to conflicts of interest among the various partners to the contracts and in the process, endanger the public interest. Olivieri's own account⁴⁴ of the incident makes note of the fact that the same President of the University of Toronto who was described by Trevor Cole as "an artful dealmaker", had been angling for a large donation from Apotex and initially refused to back-up her stand about disclosing her research results.

In the fall of 2000, David Healy accepted a job offer from the University of Toronto's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health(CAMH). Prior to commencing the position, he was invited to speak to an international conference on psychiatry held at the Centre. In his talk, Healy argued that Prozac, a drug manufactured by Eli Lilly, could provoke suicide attempts in users. Healy's

position on Prozac and similar psycho-tropic drugs was a matter of public record and already known to people involved in making the job offer. Nonetheless immediately after the lecture, the job offer was withdrawn, inciting a prolonged investigation of whether Eli Lilly and Company, a significant donor to the CAMH, had pressured the university into the withdrawal. Although the university President and Centre officials denied that pressure was exerted on them by Eli Lilly and Co., Canadian Association of University Teachers' representatives who had become involved in the case as a breach of academic freedom argued ... "Whether the pressure came from a pharmaceutical manufacturer, from a University or CAMH official worried about offending a donor, or from administrators at the university and/or CAMH without any serious thought of the pharmaceutical industry, the action appears to be a very serious attack on academic freedom that should not be countenanced by any university in this country."⁴⁵

That university-corporate partnerships may pose dangers to academic freedom and the integrity of science is not new. Concerns about conflicts of interest and undo corporate pressures have been voiced for some time, especially by critics of policies encouraging university-corporate collaboration. In fact, in the United States, several notorious cases in the late 1980s and early 1990s prompted intervention by the U.S. Congress. But what is particularly significant about the Olivieri and Healy cases is that they have focused attention on one of, if not the, most highly respected academic institution in the country⁴⁶; and that they have received international attention and have provoked strong reactions from prominent professional and scientific organisations.

Cases like these, even if few in number, feed a growing image of university administrators as money-grubbing wheeler dealers who can not be trusted, and whose every action is interpreted as pandering to corporate interests. Moreover, this distrust extends to the research that universities produce since many new

research initiatives are being funded, at least in part, by corporate donors who stand to benefit financially from the knowledge they will produce. In this sense, then, policies supporting commercialisation have provoked questions about the university's legitimacy and trustworthiness. Such challenges play into a cultural climate that is already less favourable for public funding of universities, hence making universities even more reliant on other sources of funds. At the same time, the university's engagement with commercialisation deprives Canadians of a source of independent assessment and judgment, precisely when scientific and technological developments in many areas require independent evaluation⁴⁷.

Regulating and overseeing academic work:

A second troubling issue is that, as day to day life in the Canadian university-on-the-ground has become increasingly regulated, academics activities are being more and more governed and directed by policies and guidelines that limit the scope of their professional authority. I can't discuss all of the forms of regulation here⁴⁸ but instead will focus on one particularly significant development, the implementation of a national level ethics regime for overseeing research involving human participants.

As of 2000, all research undertaken in universities by members of the university community (faculty, staff and students) must be reviewed and approved by the local institution's research ethics board/committee (REB or REC). REBS are required to apply criteria that define appropriate research conduct as they are specified in the code of ethical conduct developed by the three national research councils⁴⁹.

What distinguishes this form of ethics regulation from previous forms is that (a) it uses the same criteria for all research, whether in professional fields like law, medicine, and business, the natural and physical sciences or the social sciences and humanities; (b) it applies to ALL research undertaken by members of the university community (faculty, staff and students, including undergraduates), *whether or not the research is funded*; (c) the local process of

review is overseen by, and integrated into, a national level structure and (d) universities that fail to ensure that the protocol is implemented in full will be denied access to federal research funds.

Ironically, the development of this extensive, compulsory system of ethical regulation (and similar regulatory procedures at the local institutional level) is justified largely on the grounds that public confidence in universities and their research needs to be restored, especially in the face of cases like those involving Olivieri and Healy as described above⁵⁰. In other words, these forms of regulation over research conduct are designed to assure the public that potential threats to their interests will not occur, while at the same time, the overall policy direction that leads to these threats is being maintained. In many ways, ethics reviews under the tri-council policy can be likened to the good-house-keeping seal of approval: they certify that certain — but only certain⁵¹ — ethical standards have been employed in undertaking the research. They are part and parcel of university-corporate collaboration and a necessary addition to the public relations instruments of competitive knowledge businesses⁵².

What is especially troubling for many academic researchers, however, is that this ethics protocol constrains their academic and professional judgments about how to conduct their research relationships, even to the extent of limiting their academic freedom to choose research strategies commensurate with their own intellectual, moral and political commitments. For example, researchers who want to engage participants as collaborators rather than as subjects, and research that focuses on politically contentious issues in an organisation or community are greatly impeded by the requirements of the protocol. In other words, the protocol does not have a neutral effect on the kind of research that is undertaken.

Academic researchers “on the ground” are adopting a variety of strategies to deal with this problem. Some are refraining from research that involves human participants. Some are choosing to engage in quantitative, positivistically oriented (rather than qualitative) studies since they are

more compatible with the protocol requirements. Some are discontinuing the practice of involving their students in research projects as part of their training, because securing ethics approval is time-consuming and also compels them to teach their students the approach to research ethics that the tri-council policy endorses. Some are taking the risk of engaging in research without submitting an ethics review.

But these strategies are also not neutral in their effects. For example, through changing research designs in order to receive ethics approval (and thus, receive funding), academics are more likely to engage in research that serves and favours the interests of political and economic elites, or that creates knowledges that are supportive, rather than critical of, dominant ways of understanding the world. Moreover, even though this form of ethics regulation has emerged as part and parcel of a policy direction that is premised on the need to promote innovation and cutting edge developments, in practice it limits, rather than encourages, innovative thinking. The development of new knowledges and practical techniques require research designs and strategies that provoke and challenge, rather than reinforce, established ways of knowing and acting in the world.

Diminished teaching and the rise of the student-consumer:

Another area where “the university on the ground” reflects troubling contradictions, inconsistencies and incoherence between and among the policies reviewed above is the balance between the research and teaching functions of universities. There are growing indications in “the university on the ground” that both the priority assigned to research activities and the kind of research that is most highly valued does not cohere well with providing high quality undergraduate education.

No Place to Learn (University of British Columbia Press, 2004), a recently published book based on interviews with professors working in Canadian universities in a variety of disciplines and at different career stages is sharply critical of Canada’s universities for short-changing undergraduate education

while increasing their involvement in specialised areas of research. Political scientists Tom Pocklington and Alan Tupper of the University of Edmonton support this charge by pointing to (a) the increased use of short-contract lecturers to teach first year and foundational disciplinary courses; (b) large lecture formats for courses; (c) the greater significance assigned in tenure decisions and other decisions that affect a faculty member’s career prospects to their research productivity as compared to their teaching performance; and (d), the recruitment of students to graduate programmes based on their research potential rather than their teaching potential.

Tupper and Pocklington criticise university administrations and faculty members for prioritising the research function of universities over their educational function. They also implicate the national research grant councils (NSERC, SSHRC and CHIR identified previously) for encouraging this trend through providing teaching replacement costs as part of research grant awards so full-time tenure stream academics can receive teaching release. Furthermore, they argue, the “mutual reinforcement hypothesis” — that research enlivens teaching and that good researchers are good teacher and vice versa — is in the current context a myth that university administrators and faculty members hold on to in spite of their own contradictory practices. Among other reasons for discrediting the mutual-reinforcement thesis, Tucker and Pocklington cite the priority assigned by the granting councils — which university administrators and researchers accommodate — to highly specialised “cutting edge” research which does not enhance undergraduate teaching. In a recent commentary, Pocklington states ...

...universities equate “research” as one type of research, that which they designate as “frontier” or “cutting edge”. This means research that discovers new facts. Research that involves critical examination of widely accepted assumptions, speculation about the connections between apparently diverse phenomena, and reconsideration of aesthetic and moral postulates and political lore — the kind of research that has a

bearing on undergraduate teaching — is seen as second rate.⁵³

It is not difficult to relate the experiences and perspectives that Tucker and Pocklington gleaned from the interviews with faculty members “on the ground” to the policies previously discussed. For almost a decade, the public funding policies of the federal government has pumped large sums of money into university research while monies from the provincial governments that support university teaching programmes and operating budgets have been well below levels required to maintain their quality⁵⁴. Moreover, government spokespersons as well as high ranking members of the research councils along with the written descriptions of, and prescriptions for, their various research grant programmes have emphasised and prioritised research that contributes to “wealth-creation”, economic innovation, and leading edge, commercialisable “knowledge”. It is therefore not surprising that administrations’ and faculty members’ actions “on the ground” have followed the money.

But “following the money” has created a paradoxical situation for students as well as for university administrators and faculty members: the same policy direction that promotes greater research productivity and commercialising academic research — thus contributing to the declining quality of teaching⁵⁵ — also promotes the idea that, as the individual beneficiaries of their education, students should contribute more to its costs. Consequently, while university teaching and learning is taking a second seat to research and declining in quality, tuition fees for students attending universities have increased to an unprecedented degree across the country.

I don’t have space to discuss all of the “dominos effects” of this contradictory situation. Suffice it to say that many Canadian universities, including my own⁵⁶, are busily trying to advertise their way out of their “declining quality of education” problems⁵⁷. Correspondingly, students adopt an increasingly consumerist orientation toward their education⁵⁸, while faculty

members respond to their students’ consumerism with bewilderment, or frustration, or condemnation, or defeat, or neglect or a mix of all of these⁵⁹.

I recently conducted a study⁶⁰ in which faculty members of universities from across the country were asked about their workload, their ways of managing time, choosing priorities and using on-line technology in their work. Many of them commented upon the consumerism of students as not only a major teaching challenge but also one reason that they feel less enthusiastic about teaching. They cited students’ aggressive demands that courses be made as easy and convenient as possible — for example, that faculty members post lecture notes on line and respond to their questions through e-mail communication rather than requiring them to attend classes or meet them in their office hours. They reported that students have stated explicitly that the high cost of tuition entitles them to “convenient” service and even to high grades, sometimes prefacing these demands with phrases like, “my tuition pays your salary” or “I pay enough for this course and you should make sure that I know what I need to know to get a good grade” or “I shouldn’t be required to shut off my cell phone in class”.

To be sure, comments like these do not come from the majority of students.⁶¹ Nevertheless they reveal a growing and not uncommon orientation among students toward their education that matches the increasingly corporate culture of universities. Students regard themselves, and are regarded by universities, as customers who pay for a service and who therefore have the right to make demands that the “product” they receive will serve their particular purposes well.

Compounding the situation is the increasing reliance on student course evaluations to assess teaching performance not only for tenure and career-related decisions that affect faculty members individually, but also for measuring the status of programmes, faculties and whole institutions vis-à-vis other institutions. In order to avoid poor performance evaluations, faculty members as well as administrators anticipate (and through advertising, try to influence)

students' consumerist concerns, either to accommodate them or to avoid imposing conditions and requirements that might lead to complaints and dissatisfaction. Students' consumerism thus exerts a growing influence on the pedagogical and curricular decisions that both faculty members⁶² and university administrations make. Moreover, the legalistic "student rights" framework adopted by university administrations as part of their corporate-managerialist strategy encourages and re-inforces students to appropriate the consumer model. Elisabeth Brulé, a doctoral candidate at OISE/University of Toronto argues that a consumer-rights framework is the only legitimate political space available to students within the corporatised university, as customers of the university (rather than citizens or members of an intellectual community), from which they can exercise influence⁶³.

Canadian economists such as David Laidler, Lorne Carmichael and John Chant of the University of Western Ontario, Queens University, and Simon Fraser University respectively advocate funding policies which, they claim, will help to ameliorate the problem of declining quality of education while also being equitable and fair. Their somewhat different proposals build upon, rather than seek to diminish, students' power as consumers of education.

Laidler, for example, acknowledges that recent initiatives in government funding policy have encouraged universities to allocate their resources to "applied and results-oriented research, interdisciplinarity and serving a corporatist agenda." These priorities involve high overhead and maintenance budgets, drawing resources away from other areas of activity and encouraging administrations to use areas such as the humanities and social sciences as "cash cows" that operate at lower academic standards. Therefore, he argues ... "Allowing tuition revenue to become the main source of universities' income would allow students to seek out good quality academic programs and universities to compete more directly to offer such programs as a

counterweight to current reliance on government and business sectors in setting universities' priorities. Allowing fees for different programs to better reflect actual program costs while allowing students to choose among these differently priced programs would end up allocating resources within universities efficiently without the need for central or ministry direction. This would also foster greater differentiation and specialization across different universities with students playing a significant role in this resource-allocation process."⁶⁴

Chant takes the argument a step further. He proposes that governments should not fund institutions at all but rather fund only students, thus eliminating what he views to be the central problem of Canadian higher education: that it is too highly directed and overly regulated.⁶⁵

I do not have space here to critically comment on these policy proposals. Suffice it to say that they rest on assumptions which can be challenged in several ways. One challenge is that enhancing students' leverage *as consumers* in no way ensures that educational quality will increase, since one cannot assume that student applicants have direct or reliable knowledge of the factors that are relevant to higher educational quality and even if they did, that these factors would be the reason for their choices. However, my reason for referring to these proposals is that they continue and even extend the policy direction that has been pursued for the past twenty five years. Even though scholars like Laidler and Chant criticise and seek to redress certain aspects of higher education policy in Canada that they find problematic, they frame both the problems and their proposals within the context of the university-as-knowledge-business — engaged in the competition for resources; responsive to external, especially economic, pressures; and infinitely flexible in supplying whatever programmes and services are in demand. If adopted, these policies would drive universities even farther along that path of development.

Creative time and production pressures:

Perhaps the most troubling of all concerns that arise out of the cacophonous interplay among and between recent policy initiatives is one that strikes at the heart of the university's *raison d'être*, that it serves as one of a society's main repositories of intellectual creativity and reflection.

On the one hand, the policy direction traced in parts one and two of this paper is continually justified as a way of enabling universities and university scholarship to engage in innovative, "cutting edge" knowledge quests for the benefit of Canadian society as a whole. Words such as "creative", "world class", "excellence" and "path breaking" are often embedded in the policy documents that promote these policies, and in university academic plans and mission statements that claim to respond to them. On the other hand, academics themselves frequently report that conditions in the university "on the ground" are hardly conducive to creative scholarship and reflective thinking.

For one thing, many argue that the university is now being expected to do too many things, often without adequate resources and university faculty members, as a consequence are pulled in too many directions. For example, more and more they are expected to compete for the large sums of money that have been recently made available to support their research initiatives, including developing partnerships with potential funders and when successful, managing the organisation and reporting requirements of often very large sums of money. As well, the change in students' orientation as described in the previous section often pressures faculty members into providing students with on-line assistance at all hours of the day and week, and to prepare lecture materials and other supportive documents for on-line posting. Administrative cost-trimming, computerisation and on-line systems of reporting have all helped to transfer to faculty members tasks that were once carried out by support staff. Moreover, administrations have chosen (or are pressed by limited funds) to serve increasing numbers of students through using short-term and part-time contract teaching positions. As a consequence, the responsibility for programme development and

the day-to-day functions of their departments and faculties falls disproportionately on the smaller numbers of full-time faculty members.

Added to these increased expectations on faculty members individually is the increased production pressures on the university as a whole. As described previously, universities are now in competition with each other to retain their rankings and eligibility for shares of research funds. As reflected in the 2002 Framework Agreement, Presidents of universities have agreed to double their university's research productivity and commercialisable research performance. Hence, pressures increase on faculty members to engage in "productive" research, to pursue commercialisation opportunities and they are inundated with reporting requests and requirements that will enhance their university's production record.

Arguably, these intense and diverse demands on faculty members time and energy squeeze out the kind of reflective time and focus that is needed for creative work. In fact, the recent study that I conducted with Heather Menzies provided some evidence to this effect: regardless of discipline, career stage or gender, the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they had less time (than in earlier stages of their career) for reflective and creative thinking and that their reading and knowledge of scholarly literature was narrower and more specialised than it used to be and than they liked it to be. Many affirmed that the current state of their working conditions mitigates against the kind of creative and reflective thought that they ideally associate with scholarship⁶⁶. The study by Tom Pocklington and Alan Tupper⁶⁷ adds witness to this situation. Pocklington reports that, in their interviews with Canadian faculty members from across the country, several science and technology professors told them ... " ... there is an almost irresistible temptation to publish a stream of short, partial, episodic papers instead of occasional, broad and deep ones."⁶⁸

Advocates of the new policy direction would probably argue that these

manifestations of the contradictory and conflicting pressures created by universities' attempts to respond to recent policy initiatives are temporary. They might say that the current cohort of university faculty are unaccustomed to new ways of doing science, working with industry and delivering educational services to specific markets; and that after a period of adjustment and faculty turnover, a new, more innovative and entrepreneurial breed of academics will emerge to take advantage of the new opportunities made available through these policies.

However, even if time for adjustment is given and the current generation of academics is replaced, a fundamental issue raised by the prevailing policy direction remains: does the pursuit of creative and innovative intellectual work cohere with the objectives, time-tables and methodologies of industry? Advocates have argued that academics are overly attached to an academic culture that is isolated from the world and out of step with the needs of progressive knowledgebased societies. Hence, they need to let go of "cherished traditions" such as academic freedom and scientific autonomy in order for knowledge to progress⁶⁹. Others have argued that, through care and persistence, corporate and academic culture will merge into a new mode of knowledge production that will bring benefits to universities, corporations and society as a whole⁷⁰.

By contrast, Dik Pels⁷¹ argues that institutional frameworks that are suitable to conducting business, politics and media relations do not match with the kind of time, uses of time and modes of communication that are required for scientific thought to advance. He identifies the "external" pressures of enterprise culture, performance-based measurements, media publicity and the spread into the academe of the cult of celebrity as factors that rush scientific thinking and discovery to the point where it threatens to lose its "specialness" and hence its value to society. Science, says Pels, requires "deceleration" and "unhastening" to distinguish it from the faster-paced cultures associated with politics, economic management, and journalism. He argues ... "Surely, the primary condition for a successful working of the 'logic of

scientific discovery' is absence of haste, or a systematic and critical deceleration of thought and action which sets science apart from the demands of urgency, immediacy, simultaneity, and publicity which are imposed by more 'speedy' practices. This gesture of *unhastening* the everincreasing velocity of everyday life and professional cultures, which aimsto unravel and reduce their astounding complexity, immediately goes with the pragmatic requisite of clearing a relatively bounded space, within which intellectuals and scientists can be rigorously selective about their topics and legitimately ignore the plethora of other issues that might clamour for their attention. This selectivity enables them to 'freeze frame', take things apart, focus on tiny details, and leisurely ponder on their broader significance; to slow down conversations and conflicts by means of quiet turn-takings and long communicative intervals (e.g. reading and writing rather than talking face-to-face); and more generally, to postpone decisions about what the world is like and what one should do about it."⁷²

It remains to be seen, of course, whether the oil and water mix of academic, business, political and public relations interests will produce the innovative and creative breakthroughs in knowledge that advocates of current policy have anticipated.⁷³ However, as someone who believes that in the high speed, geographically scattered cultures that increasingly colonise the local and particular places where people live and create their social worlds, I am convinced that one of the most pressing priorities of our time is that space and time must remain for reflective, evaluative critical thinking and for cultivating the capacities and sensibilities to sustain it. If the university fails to address *this* urgent societal need, then the knowledges and know-how that it produces may no longer feed the soul or nurture reasoned, ethical stances as the basis for intervening in world affairs. Other spaces for doing this will have to be found.

A CONCLUDING STATEMENT

I have traced a path of development in Canadian universities over the past twenty-five years, and identified several troubling issues that are confronted by administrators, faculty members, staff and students in the university “on the ground,” as they respond to the policy initiatives that have set the university on this path.

This same path of development and similar troubling issues can be found in universities in other national contexts. Some scholars attribute this apparent convergence in university development across the globe to the influence of “new ideologies” such as post-modernism, neo-liberalism and third-wayism⁷⁴. Neoliberalism has been especially influential in accounts of changes in systems of higher education on a national as well as global basis, as anyone will find out if they browse through academic journals on education and social theory issued over the last decade; or if they google “neoliberalism” and “higher education” or “universities” on the internet. Simon Marginson has contributed immensely to our understanding of how to detect neoliberal ideas in the policy changes and the current state of higher education in Australia as well as elsewhere.

I believe that there is value in collecting together the various aspects of university transformation and relating them to an over-arching theoretical framework or political-economic “forces” or “the dominant discourse,” as long as analysts are careful to explore how the manifestations of such phenomena vary according to particular local conditions. Even so, I have tended to resist doing this in my own work. On the one hand, over-arching theoretical accounts can sometime obscure the particular processes by which social and cultural transformations take place: the details are too often “seen” through the lens of the theory and are not allowed space to “speak for themselves” *before* they are assimilated into the theory.

On the other hand, as already discussed, I have wanted to avoid the theoretical implication that there is a direct line between government policies and

its implementation by universities and their constituencies. Frequently one finds in writings on higher education statements such as “higher education has been invaded by neo-liberalism” or “the university has succumbed to post-modernism” or “governments are privatising universities and colleges” as though external political and economic “forces” are able to mechanically transform complex institutions like universities without the mediation of diverse “internal” social actors and agents.

Equally important, terms like “succumbing” and “invading” leave very little room for intervention. I think there is great value in making visible the role of various actors and agents in mediating policy initiatives that are designed to advance a particular “idea” of the university and serve particular political and economic interest. For one thing, it reveals the ways in which these policies are agented by more than governments. In fact, they often originate within the academy itself through policy proposals designed by scholars who themselves are wedded to particular intellectual and professional orientations, discourses and even “ideologies”. For another thing, it also exposes points of leverage, where interventions can be made to subvert, challenge or even transform the apparent objectives of these policies.

But perhaps most important for future research on the current state of higher education is that the university and its members are implicated in their own transformation as well as in the transformation of society and the world at large. Using neo-liberalism as the example here because of its contemporary currency in critical higher education scholarship, I think it would be intellectually fruitful to consider the ways in which “neo-liberalism” or at least policies and policy discourses that seek to implement it have been shaped by, among other things, the university’s complex “engagements” with it. Without being able to defend it well at this point – offering it more as a discussion point than a definitive position — I will conclude by saying that neo-liberalism should not be understood, implicitly or explicitly, as a way of thinking “from nowhere”. I want

to propose that the path that it has taken over the past twenty-five years or so of its ascendancy has been shaped by the particularity of the social and cultural institutions and locales to which neo-liberal ideas and policies have been applied.

We who seek to better understand the world in which our universities are currently functioning may well benefit from this realization.

I am referring here to English Canadian academics who, through their research and writing on higher education, have developed critiques of the public policies that have guided the overall direction of higher education in Canada over recent decades. Among these colleagues are:

Professor Paul Axelrod, historian, York University;
Professor William Bruneau, social historian, University of British Columbia (retired);
Professor Howard Buchbinder social scientist, York University; (deceased),
Dr. Adrienne Chan, policy analyst, Centre for Policy Studies in Education and Training, University of British Columbia;
Professor E. Anne Clarke, plant-life biologist, University of Guelph;
Professor Marjorie Griffen Cohen, economist, Simon Fraser University;
Professor Peter Emberly, humanist, Carleton University;
Professor Donald Fisher, sociologist, University of British Columbia;
Professor Ursula Franklin, metalurgist, University of Toronto (retired);
Professor E. Margaret Conrad, historian, Acadia University;
Professor Len Findlay, humanist, University of Saskatchewan;
Professor Wiilliam Graham, philosopher, University of Toronto;
Dr. Janet Grossjean, sociologist, University of British Columbia;
Professor Alison Hearn, humanist, University of Western Ontario;
Professor Colm Kelly, St. Thomas Univesity, New Brunswick
Professor Jamie Magnusson, sociologist, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto;

Professor John McMurtry, philosopher, University of Guelph;
Professor Dianne Meaghan, sociologist, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto;
Professor Linda Muzzin, sociologist, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto;
Professor Blair Neatby, historian, Carleton University (retired);
Professor David Noble, historian, York University;
Dr. Nancy Olivieri, physician and medical researcher, University of Toronto;
Professor Tom Pocklington, political scientist, University of Alberta (retired);
Professor Claire Polster, sociologist, University of Regina;
Professor P. Rajagopal, computer scientist, York University (retired);
Professor Wayne Rencke, lawyer, University of Alberta;
Professor Kjell Rubenson, higher education policy analyst, University of British Columbia;
Professor Arther Schafer, Centre of Professional and Applied Ethics, University of Manitoba.
Professor Daniel Schugerensky, education policy analyst, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto;
Professor Hans Schuetz, , education policy analyst, University of British Columbia;
Professor Neil Tudiver, social worker, University of Manitoba and Canadian Association of University Teachers;
Professor Alan Tupper, political scientist , University of Alberta;
Professor Howard Woodhouse, philosopher, University of Saskatchewan;
(I do not intend that this list be taken as comprehensive. For example, it does not include graduate students at Canadian Universities who are writing Masters and Ph.D theses that are critical of the current direction of higher education policy.)

2 For example, research by demographer, Professor David Foote of the University of Toronto, in the early 1980s significantly influenced the debate over higher education funding, at least in the province of Ontario. Foote's work challenged assumptions that government statisticians were

making at the time based on a decline in 18-24 year olds, arguing instead that new pools of applicants — women returning to school after raising children, immigrants requiring educational upgrading, growing interest in life-long learning etc. — had begun to effect, and will increasingly heighten, the demand for higher education spaces. Similarly, economists such as David Stager (University of Toronto) and David Cameron (Dalhousie University) have provided important advice to the federal government on higher education funding. A recently published book from the John Deutsch Institute at Queens University, *Higher Education in Canada*, edited by Charles M. Beach, Robin W. Boadway and R. Marvin McNis (2005) is an example of research that is specifically targeted to higher education policy makers. Typically, books and reports like these are edited collections, often based on a conference in which academic researchers, public policy analysts and policy makers are invited to participate. They tend to focus on mapping out possible solutions to several key problems which higher education is currently facing. The “value” to policy makers of the “advice” offered in them is bolstered by the way the book’s project is set up: that is, higher education is deemed to be “in crisis” or “at a cross-roads” and the book is presented as offering a way through. A final typical characteristic is that they concentrate on “technical” advice, that is, on advice about the advantages and disadvantages of specific funding options, or enrolment strategies – in other words, advice on how to manipulate the factors that are deemed determinants (usually measurable) of specific “outcomes”. The Beach et.al. book, for example, frames its offerings as a response to the fact that the Canadian higher education system is “under strain” and “fraying”. The issues that need to be addressed to lessen the strain are underfunding, tuition fee levels and faculty renewal. Contributors offer a number of specific options for how these “problems” can be addressed. Their language is heavily economic and market-oriented: for example, universities are said to have “two products” – educated graduates and new knowledge, and the advantages of one solution to a problem over another is typically phrased in terms of maximising “rates of return on investment”. Perhaps with the single exception of Michael Skolnick’s piece on the dangers inherent in blurring the distinction between universities and

colleges and accrediting private for-profit institutions, the individual contributions of the book largely support the prevailing direction of current government policies: their focus is on problems that governments have “overlooked” or failed to address adequately and their solutions are designed to ensure that “the system” as it is functions more efficiently and coherently.

3 Occasionally I have found a reference in government policy documents to the work of critical scholars, most often acknowledging a criticism that the current documents claim to address or correct. Once I was surprised to find a reference to Ivan Illich’s provocative 1976 book, *Deschooling Society*. His proposal for establishing educational vouchers was used to support neo-liberal policy reforms which Illich would never have supported and in no way intended by his critical analysis of publicly funded education.

4 It should also be noted that my work is limited to analyses of Anglo-Canadian higher education. The Franco-Canadian system of higher education is not within the scope of my research and writing. As well, even though “higher education” in Canada includes all post-secondary institutions within the various college systems as well as universities, I have restricted my discussion here to universities.

5 This statement could provoke debate with some colleagues, particularly those who do critical discourse analysis and others who employ a Foucauldian approach in their analysis. However, I only mean to emphasise a point with which I hope we agree, that government policy statements are several steps removed from the activities of the members of academic communities who enact the policy. These members individually and collectively respond to the policy based on their orientation toward both the opportunities and the constraints created by the policy. For example, policies are interpreted by agents in local institutions based on shared meanings and conditions that are particular to that institution or to groups of institutions. As well, policies often have

unintended “effects” – courses of action in relation to a given policy are adopted or impeded that the writers of the policy may not anticipate.

6 Detailed discussions that offer a critical perspective on public policy direction in the late 70s, 80s and early 1990s can be found in: Buchbinder, Howard and Janice Newson (1990) “Corporate-University Linkages in Canada: Transforming a Public Institution.” *Higher Education*, 20, pp. 355-379; Fisher, Donald and Kjell Rubenson (1998) “The changing political economy: The private and public lives of Canadian universities. In Currie, Jan & Janice Newson (eds.) *Universities and Globalisation: Critical Perspectives* (pp. 13-28). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications; Newson, Janice & Howard Buchbinder (1988) *The University Means Business: Universities, Corporations, and Academic Work*. Toronto: Garamond Press. Newson, Janice (1994) “Subordinating democracy: the effects of fiscal retrenchment and university-business partnerships on knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination in universities,” in *Higher Education*, Vol. 27, pp. 141-161. Polster, Claire (1996) “Dismantling the Liberal University: The State's New Approach to Academic Research” in B. Brecher et. al. (eds.), *The University in A Liberal State*. Ashford: Avebury Press; Polster, Claire (1998, Winter) “From Public Resource to Industry's Instrument: Redefining and Reshaping the Production of Knowledge in Canada's Universities”. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 23(1), pp. 91-106.; Watson, Cecily (ed.) (1985) *The Professoriate: Occupation in Crisis*. Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Woodhouse, Howard (1988). *Legitimacy or Transformation: The Role of the State in University Education*. In Cicely Watson (ed). *Readings in Canadian Higher Education*. Toronto: Higher Education Group/OISE Press, 1-29.

7 To distinguish the Canadian experience from some other jurisdictions whose overall patterns of change may be

8 The term “knowledge business” comes from Claire Polster.

9 The dates are approximate, of course – they designate a prolonged turning point rather than a definitive moment .

10 Keller, George (1983) *Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution in Higher Education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

11 Managerialism is discussed extensively in literature on higher education. It is a common feature in a wide range of national systems of higher education. However, the tendency to use this term as short form for an array of particular practices or policies may lead to the assumption that managerialism has the same characteristics, meaning and implications wherever it appears. I am not convinced that this is the case. For one thing, the array of practices associated with managerialism may differ from place to place. For another thing, managerialism has changed over time. In higher education, managerialism was initially employed to centralise control over activities taking place within local institutions. As managerialism matured, these local systems of oversight and control have been linked to extra-local agents such as government ministries and other funding agencies. In Canada, for example, the three national research granting agencies have been sites for developing and exercising significant mechanisms of oversight and accountability

12 Here , I am summarising practices at the local institutional level because I am focusing on institutional changes that were taking place in universities at a particular historical moment. However, these practices were also emerging in relation to external bodies, such as government ministries and funding bodies.

13 Maxwell, Judith and Stephanie Currie (1984). *Partnership for Growth*. Montréal: The Corporate-Higher Education Forum.

14 The organisation consisted of 25 Canadian university presidents and 25 leading Canadian business executives. It was a counterpart to the Business-Higher Education Forum established in

the U.S. in 1979.

15 By the early 1980s, the idea that at least a proportion of federally funded academic research should be directed toward national priority areas had gained a foothold, even though some members of the academic community who were involved in council governance opposed it on the grounds that the independence of academic research would be jeopardised. Since the late 1970s,

the National Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), had already been allocating a proportion of its funds for "targeted" research, that is, research directed toward national priority areas as approved by government. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) was in the process of considering adopting funding programmes for similar targeted research areas.

16 Claire Polster's doctoral thesis tracks these funds, showing how the federal government reallocated its limited financial resources to support research programmes that encouraged collaboration between university researchers and corporate partners. See Polster, Claire (1994) "Compromising Positions: The Federal Government and the Reorganization of the Social Relations of Canadian Academic Research". Unpublished doctoral dissertation, York University.

17 Throughout the 1980s, published critiques of this new policy direction for universities were few:

In fact, many higher education scholars were either reluctant to publicly express their position on

this matter or they tended to downplay the significance of the policy changes that were being

enacted. In addition to my own work and my collaborations with Howard Buchbinder, Paul Axelrod, E. Margaret Conrad, Len Findlay, Ursula Franklin, William Graham, Michael Katz, Blair

Neatby, and Howard Woodhouse are among the few who publicly criticised these policies.

18 For a detailed example, see Newson, Janice (1996, October). "Positioning the Social Sciences

and Economic Re-structuring." Presidential Address to the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association, Université du Québec a Montréal, Montréal, June 1995. Published in Society/Société, October.

19 The authors of Partnership for Growth (op. cit) come close to recommending that governments continue their under funding policies in order to promote their proposals for university-corporate collaboration.

20 To fully grasp the implications of the discussion here, readers should note how governmental responsibility for higher education works in Canada. Education falls within the constitutional jurisdiction of Canada's ten provinces. In other words, there is no national level ministerial responsibility for higher education policy *per se*.

However, the federal government has three significant levers for indirectly influencing developments in the higher education sector. The first lever is through transferring significant monies to the provinces to operate their education systems. Through controlling the extent of these fiscal transfers, the federal government can thereby influence the level of provincial grants to various education sectors. Secondly, the federal government is the primary funder of research

carried out in universities. In earlier times, federal monies to fund research were largely concentrated in the hands of the national research councils (of which there are now three) but since the mid 1980s or so, research funding has been allocated through a variety of government ministries as well — the ministry of trade and industry, the ministry of state, the ministry of science and technology are examples. In the late 1990s, an important new national funding body — the Canadian Foundation for Innovation — was created to distribute funds to improve the research infrastructure of universities. The third lever is under the federal government's responsibility for job training, through which it has recently become a significant source of student grants, loans and scholarships.

This division in governmental jurisdiction has significantly shaped the way universities have been

drawn into the processes of change that I am describing here. While policies initiated by provincial and federal governments may pursue a similar direction of development, nevertheless the divided jurisdictions mean that fiscal and political control over higher education does not come from one direction but two. Even if the government in power in a particular province shares the same political outlook as that of the current federal government, each level may have different priorities for higher education and face different pressures on their resources. Moreover, because provincial governments assume responsibility for the university's teaching programmes and overall operation, while the federal government assumes responsibility for research, the relative weight of funding for teaching versus research and the basis on which it is allocated by each level can often conflict.

21 Howard Buchbinder and I used the term "corporate agenda" in 1985 in the first paper we wrote together about an impending shift in government policy direction. One of our colleagues who, as a natural scientist was already aware and critical of pressures toward engaging in corporate-relevant research, said that we should avoid this term because it implied a conspiracy of sorts and would make our case less credible.

22 For example, as the chairperson of the Ontario Council of Universities(COU), David George, President of McMaster University in Hamilton Ontario, recently joined the World Bank in referring the purpose of Ontario's public universities to be "wealth creation."

23 I have not resolved whether these different conceptualisations reflect differences in intellectual approaches and orientations or differences in the way the changes have proceeded in particular national contexts. I think this would be an interesting line of questioning to pursue in discussions at this seminar.

24 See Turk, James (ed.) (2000). *The Corporate Campus: Commercialization and the Dangers to Canada's Colleges and Universities*. Toronto; James Lorimer and Co.; and Newson, Janice (1998) "The Corporate Linked University: From Social Project to Market Force" in

Monopolies of Knowledge: Papers in Honour of Harold Innis. Special Issue of the *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 23, pp. 107-124, 1998

25 See Tudiver, Neil (1999). *Universities for Sale: Resisting Corporate Control over Canadian Higher Education*. Toronto; James Lorimer and Co.

26 It includes academics and a substantial number of corporate executives.

27 Hence the name, Millennial Chairs programme to mark the turn into a new millennium.

28 Claire Polster has written the definitive analysis of the CFI and CRC programmes and their implications for Canadian higher education in "A Break From the Past: Impacts and Implications of the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Canada Research Chairs Initiative". *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 39(3), August 2002, pp. 275-300. I draw here from her work.

29 For elaboration, see Polster (ibid) especially pages 276-279.

30 Berkowitz, Peggy (1999, June/July). "Panel Softens Stance on Commercializing IP". *University Affairs*, p. 1-4.

31 For an extensive discussion of these objections, see (1999, May). "Minister Rapped for Reaping the Benefits", *CAUT Bulletin*, p. 1. (Also available at CAUT Bulletin On Line, http://www.caut.ca/en/bulletin/issues/1999_may/lead.htm); and Renke, Wayne N. (2000). "Commercialization and Resistance: Commercial Take-over of Post Secondary Education." In Turk, James (ed.) *The Corporate Campus: Commercialization and the Dangers to Canada's Colleges and Universities* (pp. 31-49). Toronto: James Lorimer and Co.;

32 (1999, August 30) "Backgrounder: Summary of the Expert Panel's Report." <http://www.nserc.ca/news/1999/p990830.htm> 33 Op. cit., August 2002, p. 297.

34 As paraphrased from the Expert Panel's Report in "Backgrounder: A Summary of the

Expert Panel's Report" as cited in endnote 31.

35 This is a peculiar argument. It is reminiscent of the first report of the Corporate Higher Education Forum which, somewhat derisively, argues that universities need to give up some of their "cherished cultural traditions" in order for university-corporate collaboration to take place. From the point of view of critics of commercialisation etc. such as myself, these "cultural traditions" are in fact conditions that help to protect the public interest and ensure that the university will pursue and uphold its public service mission. It is also peculiar in that it implies that academics continue to have considerable power to influence the careers of their colleagues, an implication that flies in the face of the many changes to academics' influence in universities that have been described in this paper and elsewhere. See for example, Newson, J. (1992) "The Decline of faculty influence: confronting the corporate agenda." In Carroll, W., Christiansen-Ruffman, L., Currie, R., and Harrison D. (Eds). *Fragile Truths: Twenty five years of sociology and anthropology in Canada*(pp.227-246). Ottawa: Carleton University Press;

36 Press release from Industry Canada, dated April 22nd, 2003.

37 Press release from Industry Canada dated November 22, 2002.

38 Gerard Delanty follows a similar tack in identifying cultural contradictions in the effects of new ideologies on higher education. See Delanty, Gerard (2003). "Ideologies of the Knowledge Society and the Cultural Contradictions of Higher Education." *Policy Futures in Education* 1, 1, pp. 71-82.

39 Polster's work as well as my own draws upon Smith's approach to the social organisation of knowledge. See for example, Smith, Dorothy E. (1999). *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory and Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; and (199 0). *Conceptual Practices of*

Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 40 Op.Cit. p. 297.

41 Based on long-standing reputation as well as various quantitative ranking schemes, including the ones used to determine proportional shares of CFI and CRC funds.

42 Under the subsequent leadership of Robert Birgeneau, the \$400 million target was extended to 1 billion dollars and reached, ahead of schedule, in 2004.

43 Cole, Trevor (1998 June). "Ivy League Hustle." *Report on Business Magazine*. Toronto: The Globe and Mail Publishers. Interestingly, Cole's article was followed by similar article with an equally provocative title "The Kept University," written by Eyal Press and Jennifer Washburn, about corporate collaborations undertaken by leading U.S. research universities. See (2000, March) *The Atlantic Monthly*. Washburn has recently published a book under the same name.

44 Olivieri, Nancy (2000). "When Money And Truth Collide." In Turk, James (ed.) *The Corporate Campus: Commercialization and the Dangers to Canada's Colleges and Universities* (pp. 53-62). Toronto: James Lorimer and Co. For a more recent and comprehensive discussion of the Olivieri vs. Apotex affair, see Shukman, Maria (2005) *Drug Trial*.

45 (2001, May) "Academic Freedom in Jeopardy at Toronto." *CAUT Bulletin*, p. 1.

46 Ironically, in the early 1990s, on several occasions I discussed my concern about growing corporate involvement in university affairs with colleagues at the University of Toronto. They insisted that their university was not in as much danger from this influence because it had a strong, internationally recognised academic reputation and it also had substantial endowments to buffer it from financial pressures. They said that newer universities that were less financially secure and still struggling for intellectual recognition would be more affected by the current direction of public policy.

47 I am thinking here particularly of the recent controversy over COX-2 inhibitors like

Celebrex and Vioxx. Both the FDA in the U.S. and Health Canada have been heavily criticised for too quickly approving these drugs and some groups have called for a source of assessments that is “independent” from either government or corporate influence. Not more than three decades ago, the university would have been seen as that source.

48 As in other national jurisdictions, performance-based indicators in Canadian higher education have been part and parcel of managing and regulating activities throughout the sector. See Polster, Claire and Janice Newson (1998). “Don’t Count your Blessings: The Social Accomplishments of Performance Indicators.” In Currie, J. and Newson, J. (Eds.). *The University and Globalisation: Critical Perspectives* (pp. 173-192). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publishers Inc., 1998,. However, performance indicators have not been applied to individual faculty members’ activities in most Canadian universities to the same degree that they have in the United Kingdom and Australia, for example. This may be, in part, because of the divided jurisdictions of the provincial and federal levels of government for funding teaching and research activities: no one level of government holds all the funding levers.

49 (1996). *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Code of Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. Ottawa: The Medical Research Council of Canada, The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

50 How new forms of ethics review are related to the loss of public trust is a too complex issue to develop here. Suffice it to say that I do not believe that the loss of public trust has caused ethics reviews in any simple way – in fact, in some ways, ethics reviews may help to “cause” a loss in public trust. I have written about this more extensively in “Re-making the space for professional response-ability: Lessons from the corporate-linked university.” In Owen, Graham (Ed.) *Architecture, Ethics and Globalization*. Spon Press, 2004; and in an unpublished paper titled “Codes of Ethics Frameworks and the Commercialisation of University-based Research.”

(Revised and updated) Paper presented to the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association Meetings, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 2003.

51 The tri-council criteria apply only to the researchers’ relationships with their “participants” – they do not address issues related to funders, to the contracts signed with funders and to the possible uses of the research. In other words, the ethical review is extremely narrow. I elaborate on this in the papers cited above.

52 For example, most Canadian universities post their procedures for ethics approvals on the pages of their web-sites that are designed to attract research business.

53 Pocklington, Tom (2005, April 25th). “Why Universities Aren’t Working.” *Express News*, University of Alberta . Accessed at <http://www.expressnews.ualberta.ca/article.cfm?id=2684>

54 An important exception is that provincial governments have made monies available for technologising teaching and learning — monies for equipment purchases, wiring buildings, and even building new “state of the art” learning centres. The debate over whether technology mediated instruction improves or debases the quality of education is extensive and contentious(see for example Ferneding, Karen (2003) *Questioning Technology: Electronic Technologies and Educational Reform* (New York: Peter Lang). Suffice it to say that even some academics who have experimented with technologies in their teaching, and who argue that on-line learning has much to offer, also acknowledge that employing instructional technology in order to gain costefficiencies is not compatible with the ways in which these technologies can be most beneficial for learning. Yet there is little doubt that one of the primary motivations for governments’ promotion of instructional technology is to gain cost-efficiencies. Equally important, apart from providing financial support for equipment and buildings, provincial governments have not addressed the ongoing and persistent underfunding of their systems of higher education, thus preventing faculty members who wish to pursue the use of instructional technologies from constructing the best

pedagogical conditions in which to do so. (See Newson, Janice (1995) "Technopedagogy: A critical evaluation of the effects on the academic staff of computerized instructional technologies in higher education," in *Higher Education Policy*, Vol. 7, pp. 37-40; and (Sept.-Oct. 1999) "Techno-pedagogy and Disappearing Context" in *ACADEME*, pp. 52-55.)

55 I acknowledge that I am endorsing Tupper's and Pocklington's claim that "declining quality" is an appropriate way to characterise the overall state of teaching and learning in Canadian universities. I am sure that there are exceptions, especially in universities that have focused on undergraduate education and have retained a small college atmosphere, such as Trent University in Ontario, St Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia and parts of larger universities.

There is no nation-wide data to my knowledge that would provide greater nuance to the "declining quality" thesis or that allows reliable comparisons between present and past performance in this regard. McLean's Magazine, a leading nation-wide news magazine, annually publishes a report that ranks Canadian universities' performance in all areas of activity to guide students' decisions about which university to attend. However, the data and methodologies used to support the rankings, as well as the meanings attributed to them, have been the subject of much criticism.

56 This spring, my university (which does not rank well in McLean's Magazine's performance assessments described in fn. 51) embarked on a controversial campaign of displaying video advertisements for the university in movie theatres.

57 I don't mean to undervalue the efforts that some academics, supported by some administrators, have been taking to address the serious teaching and learning issues with which universities are now confronted. Nor do I wish to encourage an overly simplistic analysis of these problems by attributing them to recent government policies alone. To be sure, these policies have exacerbated tensions between the teaching and research functions of universities. However,

these tensions pre-date the stage of university development that I have been discussing. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that contemporary students bring new challenges to university teaching. Nevertheless, my point is that, unlike the primacy given to the university's role in promoting economic innovation, these new challenges have not been declared a national priority and substantial financial resources have not been made available to address them.

58 For elaboration see Newson, Janice (2004) "Disrupting the Student-Consumer Model" in *International Studies* Vol 18 (2), pp. 227-239.

59 For U.S. examples, see Edmundson, Mark (1997). "On the Uses of a Liberal Education: Part I- As Light Entertainment for Bored College Students", *Harper's Magazine*, Sept., pp. 39-49; and Bromell, Nick (2000) "Summa Cum Avaritia: Plucking Profit from the Groves of Academe", *Harper's Magazine*, Feb. 2002, pp. 71-7

60 This pilot study was conducted jointly with Heather Menzies, Canadian author of books on technology and an adjunct professor of Canadian Studies at Carleton University in Ottawa.

61 Comments like these have also been reported in numerous discussions at academic conferences that I have attended as well as in my own departmental and faculty meetings.

62 In the study with Menzies referred to above, some respondents indicated that they felt as though the traditional student-teacher relationship is being reversed, with student preferences exercising greater influence over pedagogy than the intellectual judgment and concerns of faculty members.

63 Brulé, Elisabeth (2004) "Going to Market: Neoliberalism and the Social Construction of the University Student as an Autonomous Consumer". In Marilee Reimer (ed.) *Gender and the Corporate University*. Toronto: Sumach Press, chapter twelve.

64 I am quoting from a summary of an article by Laidler published in Beach, Charles M.,

Robin W. Boadway and R. Marvin McInnis (eds.), (2005). Higher Education in Canada. Kingston, Ontario: John Deutsch Institute, Queens University. The summary is found on <http://jdi.econ.queensu.ca/Publications/HigherEducation.html>

65 Chant, John (2005) "University Accountability." In Beach, Charles M., Robin W. Boadway and R. Marvin McInnis (eds.), (2005). Higher Education in Canada. Kingston, Ontario: John Deutsch Institute, Queens University, p. 587.

66 Academic publications based on this study are in progress. A newspaper report on the study by Heather Menzies titled "Dumbed down on campus, bit by bit. Are Pcs making professors more absent-minded?" can be found in the Focus Section, *The Toronto Star*, April 29th, 2005.

67 See the discussion of their book *No Place to Learn* in the previous section on teaching.

68 See endnote 52. See also the quote to which endnote 52 is a reference.

69 From Judith Maxwell and Stephanie Currie *Partnership for Growth*. See endnote 12.

70 The reference here is to Gibbons, Michael, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwartzmas, Peter Scott and Martin Trow (1994). *The New Production of Knowledge*. London and Thousand oaks, California: Sage Publications.

71 Pels, Dik (2003). "Unhastening Science". *European Journal of Social Theory* 6(2), pp. 209–231. This article is a lead up to his book with the same title.

72 Ibid, p. 221.

73 Adrienne Chan and Donald Fisher of the University of British Columbia's Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training recently conducted case studies of four Canadian Universities concerning (among other things) the kinds of knowledge that is being produced by academic researchers in the context of the policy initiatives described in part II of

this paper. Results are reported in "Academic Culture in Canadian Universities: Contexts for Change." In Chan, Adrienne and Donald Fisher (eds) (2005 forthcoming) *Transformation of Academic Culture*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

74 For example, Gerard Delanty (op.cit., 2003). Some would object particularly to identifying post-modernism and neoliberalism as ideologies rather than as discourses or philosophies. In this paper, Gerard defends this usage.



THE SHIFTING
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
HIGHER EDUCATION
RESEARCH AND POLICY
MAKING: LESSONS FROM
THE SOUTH AFRICAN CASE

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*Higher Education Research as Basis for
Public Policies*

Puerto Rico Higher Education Council
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Abstract

This article reviews the shifting relationship between higher education (HE) research and policy-making, with particular focus on the possible lessons to be learnt from the South African case. It is commonly assumed that the impact of HE research is, for a variety of reasons, limited. The article outlines a number of ways in which the real or perceived epistemological and cultural gap between HE research and policy-makers can be conceptualised: a strict bipolar view, a soft bipolar view and a 'third way' integrated approach. It is argued that our understanding of this relationship also depends on our conceptions of the two constitutive elements: research and policy. These two elements are discussed. Drawing from this framework, historic shifts in the relationship between research and policy in South Africa are outlined. The main conclusion is that the principle contribution of research to policy will rest on the longer-term, more diffuse shaping of thinking and discourse, rather than on the shorter term problem-solving approach, important

though this remains. It is argued that measures are possible to bridge the gap and that therefore the soft bipolar view of the optimal relationship between research and policy is the most appropriate and accurate.

Keywords

Higher education, Higher education research, Higher education policy, Policy making, Policy makers

La cambiante relación entre la investigación sobre educación superior y el establecimiento de políticas: Lecciones del caso de Sur África

Resumen

Este artículo evalúa la cambiante relación entre la investigación sobre educación superior y el desarrollo de políticas, con particular énfasis en las posibles lecciones que podemos aprender del caso de Sur África. Comúnmente se asume que el impacto de la investigación sobre educación superior es, por una variedad de razones, limitado. Este artículo presenta algunas de las maneras en que la brecha epistemológica y cultural, real o percibida, entre la investigación sobre educación superior y los que hacen las políticas, puede ser conceptualizada: la perspectiva bipolar estricta, la perspectiva bipolar suave y una "tercera vía" de acercamiento integrado. Se argumenta que nuestro entendimiento de esta relación también depende de nuestra concepción de los dos elementos constitutivos: la investigación y las políticas. Estos dos elementos son discutidos en el artículo. A partir de este marco de referencia se presentan los cambios históricos en la relación entre la investigación y las políticas en Sur África. La principal conclusión es que la aportación más importante de la investigación va a depender, en el largo plazo, de una conformación más difusa del pensamiento y los discursos, en lugar

de los acercamientos para solucionar problemas, en el corto plazo. Se argumenta que se pueden tomar medidas para reducir la brecha entre la investigación y las políticas, y que la perspectiva bipolar suave es la más apropiada y precisa a este respecto.

Palabras claves

Educación superior, investigación sobre educación superior, políticas de educación superior, establecimiento de políticas, responsables de hacer políticas

Introduction

The relationship between higher education research and policy/practice has been the subject of much ongoing debate and reflection. It is characterised by a mixture of realistic and unrealistic expectations, by considerable mutual frustration and by many attempted interventions to rectify these problems and make the relationship more effective and beneficial.

The optimal relationship between these seemingly separate domains is easily stated. Higher education policy-making and practice should ideally be informed by the accumulated systematic knowledge and the findings of rigorous and relevant ongoing inquiry. Conversely, policy and decision-makers should be politically and practically disposed to consider seriously the findings and evidence provided by reliable scholarly outputs in this field. This implies that policy-related research should be relevant, informative and skilfully disseminated in a variety of forms and appropriate formats to the variety of policy agents and agencies in order to have tangible impact.

This normative state of affairs is far from the reality. Despite national and regional variations, the relationship between higher education research and

policy is generally tenuous, even fractured, and fraught with tension (Teichler, 2000). It is commonly assumed that these problems are symptomatic of a distinct gap between these two worlds with regard to the roles, work, interests and orientations of policy scholars and policy makers. Such barriers between researchers and policy makers mean that the utility and policy relevance of higher education research is limited and not effectively linked to policy and practice. As a result, policy-making does not derive the benefits of research and scholarly perspectives. While the critics of the chasm in higher education are particularly strong, it by no means the only sector in which the gap between social science research and policy is experienced (Birnbaum, 2000). Given the fact that higher education policy research is conducted largely by university-based researchers, the issue is however a particularly important one for higher education, in keeping with the reflexive practices of critical researchers.

The relationship between research and policy and commonly presumed gap between them can be conceptualised in a variety of ways. Each of these will determine different interpretations and ideas about appropriate responses. As Stone suggests: "Policy solutions as to how researchers and policy-makers build bridges are shaped by *how the problem is defined* in the first instance" (2002: 286, original emphasis). How each of the domains is understood and how the nature of the gap between them is conceived will determine the kind of relationship possible and, importantly, whether the gap can, or cannot be bridged. In the case of many analysts, it is commonly assumed that bridging measures are possible. In others, this is questioned. Still other analysts query the assumed gap in certain ways. Many analyses distinguish between the role of researchers as critics of policy (researchers-as-critics')

and as contributing *to* policy (researchers-as- 'reconstructors') (Muller, 2000; Badat, 2004; Young, 2004). In turn, some of these assume that these roles are discretely separate, and others that, under certain conditions, they can be integrated.

Considering all these issues, we can distil three idealised fundamental positions:

1. *A strict bipolar view*: This view assumes that the two worlds of research and policy making are distinct in their intentions, epistemologies, work rhythms and procedures. For a variety of reasons, we should not expect social science to be able to solve the immediate and distinctive needs of policy makers. While this is not precluded, in this view, research can make its best contribution by having an incremental, slow, cumulative and indirect impact on policy making. This view requires a shift from a simple linear short term model of research impact to one which sees the influence of social science research on policy thinking as a broad, long-term and cumulative one (Birnbaum, 2000; Badat, 2004; Young, 2004).
2. *A soft bipolar view*: The assumption here is that while the two worlds are largely distinctive, and that the optimal contribution to policy will be the long term one, the immediate impact of research can be enhanced by a range of measures including: maximising the relevance of research agendas; creating appropriate forums for policy dialogue; improving dissemination strategies; and utilising appropriate formats, etc. In this view, certain kinds of good quality applied research can address the specific needs of policy makers under certain conditions, and with certain challenges (Stone, 2003; Badat, 2004).
3. *A 'third way' or integration approach*: Here, it is assumed that the worlds of research and policy are each more diffused and socially distributed and therefore, for a variety of reasons,

not as distinct as commonly assumed. Again, specific kinds of applied research can, in this view, have an immediate impact on policy making. In this view, the seemingly antagonistic role of researchers as critics and as reconstructors can, under certain conditions be reconciled into that of 'critical reconstruction' or 'critical policy intervention' (Badat, 2004; Young, 2004). Such a role explains policies and critique how they work (and do not work) as well as provides some basis for making prescriptions about future policies and how to implement them.

Further, our understanding of the nature of the two constitutive elements in the relationship, namely policy and research, will shape our conceptions of the gap and its potential bridging. This involves conceptually reviewing a) key aspects of policy, specifically the elements and agents involved in the policy 'cycle' and the various roles of research within this; and b) the nature and kinds of policy research (including institutional location, motivation and intention, funding, and the knowledge and epistemological issues involved). In particular here, it is important to consider the nature of higher education studies as an emerging field of expertise, as this, in part, shapes its potential contribution to policy (Maassen, 2000).

This paper focuses on the case of the relationship between higher education research and policy in South Africa and the possible lessons which can be learned. It will be shown that this relationship is a shifting one, determined by changing policy moments. It is therefore important to view this case (and others) through the analytic lens of a historical sociological perspective (Badat, 2004). This provides the basis by which we can understand how the relationship between researchers (and research centres) and policy makers is shaped

by changing conditions in the specific national and historical context.

The South African experience is particularly informative, given its recent history and the enormous changes which have taken place in the lead up to the demise of apartheid and in the establishment of a democratic government. One of the reasons why these momentous historical events have captured the imagination of the world is that they represent the struggles and challenges facing a developing country in a rapidly globalising world to establish—not only formal democracy and human rights—but also substantial equity, social justice and prosperity for all. Higher education, as we all know and assume, has a crucial role to play in this, and to achieve this, good policy based on quality research is a necessary condition. Within the momentous events which have recently taken place in South Africa and in the light of the policy ‘moments’ associated with them, the role of critical researchers has shifted dramatically through three distinct phases—from critics and intellectual activists in the anti-apartheid struggle, to reconstructors in the building of new policy framework for post-apartheid transformation, to functioning again as critics of emerging policy. These shifts are illuminating, not only in relation to individual researchers, but also crucially in relation to where and how they are institutionally located. This raises the important question of what we might call the ‘political economy’ of research centres and the formidable challenges—and sometimes precarious positions—that they face in developing countries in attempting to maintaining sustainability, quality and relevance. This is particularly so given the limitations of human and financial capacity which they experience in negotiating the choppy and dangerous waters between the Scylla of scholarly

work and the Charybdis of applied policy research.

In drawing out such lessons, however, the perils of comparative international research should constantly be borne in mind. It is self evident that, while the research-policy gap is a universal and ubiquitous one, the form and extent of its manifestation will vary widely according to the national and regional historical context. This is why Badat (2004) emphasises the importance of adopting a critical historical sociological perspective in examining these matters. In the light of this, it is therefore not possible, as Stone (2002: 286) also argues: “to generalise either about how research is utilised in policy or why some forms of research are favoured over other sources. Not only is the demand for research, analysis and policy advice extremely diverse but the degree of research use varies across time, country and policy domains”.

This approach also accords with the assertion of Kempner and Tierney (1996) that the local political economic context and culture provides the key to understanding the characteristics of national higher education systems. In so doing, they draw on a theoretical framework which they call “critical postmodernism”, which “combines critical and postmodern theories by framing their investigations in a cultural perspective that addresses the inherent oppressive nature of social reality” (Kempner and Tierney, 1996: 3). Understanding a nation’s educational features and policies therefore depends on looking for deeper cultural explanations of its social structures, its political-economy and its position in global relations. In higher education, this approach emphasises the history and culture of the specific environments in which higher education is situated and how this shapes universities, knowledge production and academic work in national contexts. By extrapolation, for the purposes of this

paper, we may assume that such an approach provides the only way to fruitfully understand and explain the shifting relationship between social science research and policy in a specific national setting in relation to the broader goals of higher education's contribution to equity and development in the current global context.

With this background in mind, in the first section, the paper draws from various local and international sources to conceptualise key aspects of the relationship between research and policy and the nature of the presumed gap between these two worlds. As part of this, the nature of policy and that of research are briefly discussed. Thereafter, drawing from this, shifts in this relationship in the South African context are tracked, and lessons from this experience are drawn out. From both the literature review and conceptual framework, and the outline of the South African experience, it is argued that the main contribution of research to policy will rest on the longer term, more diffuse shaping of thinking and discourses, rather than on the shorter term problem-solving approach, important though this remains. Regarding the latter, it is assumed that measures are possible to bridge the gap, and that therefore the softer bipolar view of the optimal relationship between research and policy is upheld.

Section 1: The relationship between research and policy: conceptual issues

The gap expressed in terms of supply-side, demand-side and policy current explanations

Stone (2002), drawing from the experience of keen interest of development agencies in the impact of research on policy, provides an innovative and useful conceptualisation of the different perspectives and explanations as to why research is or is not utilised by policy makers. These

perspectives are categorised into three broad types of explanation: supply-side; demand-side; and what she calls 'policy currents'. These provide a useful framework by which to understand the nature of the gap between research and policy, and its possible bridging. In setting these issues out within this framework, I incorporate the views of other analysts as well as my own.

Supply side explanations of the gap

This set of explanations relates to the need of researchers to be heard and recognised. It points to the building of bridges by addressing supply-side problems, mainly in terms of improving the dissemination, communication, flow and formats of research outputs to policy makers. The supply-side perspective commonly places the onus on the producers of research to customise their research focus and outputs to meet the needs of policy makers.

In general, the perceived and experienced problem on the supply-side is that policy makers, advisors and decision-makers often feel that researchers' outputs are not relevant, too esoteric and pursue theoretical concerns which do not accord with policy makers' needs. Higher education research is, in this view, seen as irrelevant and stale, parochially inwardly concerned, with the result that institutional leaders rarely consult or use the literature (Birnbaum, 2000). The cynical consequence is that if higher education research were to disappear, its absence would not be missed (ibid). The following passage captures the supply-side concerns of policy makers:

Research ought to provide concise, definitive and categorical evidence of issues of policy import – for example, whether quality assurance frameworks effectively improve quality and whether they are cost beneficial. They do not

want to be bombarded with voluminous, well documented accounts of problems and extensive literature reviews. These evidential findings must be presented in user-friendly formats which are accessible to busy people. They do not generally want to be confronted by expansive academic formulations which (seek to) capture complexity. They prefer brevity and the provision of precise synthetic overviews of key issues. For instance: what are the latest trends regarding technology-enhanced distance education, and how effective and cost beneficial are these? For these reasons, quantitative accounts are privileged, especially amidst the dominant orthodoxy of fiscal constraint and managerialism. As a result of these prevailing attitudes, policy makers who use research tend to be researchers or those well connected to research networks (Subotzky, 2002: 5).

Stone (2002) identifies four strands of argument associated with supply-side problems. First, there is an *inadequate supply* of policy relevant research. This could mean either that good quality research is being produced but that it is not sufficiently relevant to policy makers' current concerns, or that the capacity to produce such research is lacking. Regarding relevance, the problem is often that while good quality research findings may produce new knowledge, they do not provide the basis for specific policy and decision making. Regarding capacity, an obvious solution is to build capacity in this regard. However, the erroneous underlying assumption here is that merely producing relevant research will inform and improve policy (Birnbbaum, 2000 – see below).

Second, rather than a lack of relevant research, there is a *lack of access* to such research, data and analysis for both researchers and policy makers. Solutions here include making these available through websites and email

distribution lists as well as more conventional measures such as scholarships, exchanges and training programmes.

Third, the problem of the poor flow of research is explained in terms of researchers' *inadequate comprehension* of the policy process and how research might be relevant. In this view, researchers' lack of attention to key issues and political realities—central to which is cost-effectiveness—prevents the utilisation of research-based recommendations by policy makers. As Birnbbaum (2000) observes, policy research is perceived to be of limited utility because it lacks at least one key variable required for specific decision-making. Addressing this lack of understanding necessitates researchers conceptualising the policy process in a more sophisticated way (Subotzky, 2003; Badat, 2004), understanding and incorporating political realities, targeting appropriate points of the policy process (Badat, 2004), and demonstrating the relevance of research through appropriate methodologies for evaluating this.

Fourth, rather than lacking in comprehension, researchers may be *ineffective communicators*. They are often unable—or reluctant—to provide the kind of brief, unequivocal solutions to particular problems required by policy makers, rather than the perceived rambling academic investigation of complex problems. To address this, the style and format of presentation should be improved and communication conduits should be improved. An additional measure is to develop and utilise 'policy entrepreneurs' who have the skills to simplify, translate and repackage findings for public consumption.

Regarding the problem of formats, researchers on the other hand feel that key issues cannot be dealt with superficially; they require in-depth

inquiry and academic/theoretical perspectives. Translating research findings into user-friendly formats runs the risk of distorting as it summarises; the constitutive nuances of theoretically-based explanations are inevitably lost in translation of this sort (see also Young, 2004). For these reasons, it is often argued that qualitative accounts and meso- and micro-level analyses have a vital role in informing policy—despite the traditionally antagonistic attitudes of policy makers to these. The need to translate findings is accepted, with the proviso that not all researchers can and need to conduct this specialised activity—hence the need for the ‘policy entrepreneurs’ mentioned a moment ago.

Demand side

By contrast, certain problems in the research-policy relationship can be explained in terms of the demand side. Researchers perceive that there is no political audience for their findings despite the importance of these and the policy-relevant explanations they offer. Policy makers are too busily preoccupied, or are politically unreceptive to research findings and analyses. “Is there anyone out there listening?” is the ubiquitous heart-felt plea coming from well intentioned researchers (Subotzky, 2003).

Regarding demand-side problems, Stone (2002) identifies four explanations. Here, the onus falls on the recipients of research to remain receptive and to undertake various measures to improve the utilisation of research for policy through greater awareness and absorption of research. Measures that contribute towards government agencies to become intelligent consumers of research include: establishing in-house policy units; sabbaticals for government officials in universities or research agencies; training in research

management and evidence-based policy.

First, the utilisation of research is inhibited by the *ignorance* of overstretched policy makers and bureaucrats about the existence of policy-relevant research. However, this explanation assumes that policy makers will automatically be receptive to good quality available findings if they were aware of them. As Birnbaum (2000) argues, this cannot simply be assumed.

Second and closely linked to this, a *tendency towards anti-intellectualism* is evident in government. This is clearly apparent in aspects of the South African case which are elaborated below. Policy makers are often politically vulnerable to research findings and “fear the critical power of ideas” (Stone, 2002: 290). They may therefore resist and mistrust certain outputs or even groups of researchers and tend to rely on selected known and trusted sources which are either in-house, commissioned or close to the centres of power. Particularly in developing countries and unstable democracies, this problem may be exacerbated by the deliberate withholding of key information from researchers, making the production of policy-relevant research especially difficult. More extreme cases include overt and covert forms of censorship and the harassment and even imprisonment of academics. The overall solution here lies in the strengthening of democratic institutions, freedom of speech and access to information. As Badat (2004) and Young (2004) both show, an important consideration in the relationship between researchers and policy makers is the degree of ideological consensus between them regarding values, goals and principles.

Third and linked to the previous point, the inevitable *politicisation of research* renders it vulnerable to “abuse, either through selective use,

decontextualisation, or misquotation" (Stone, 2003: 290; see also Birnbaum, 2000; Young, 2004). Research is often selectively used to support policy preferences, positions, prejudices and to legitimise decision outcomes. In addition, policy makers are faced with multiple sources of information and research outcomes which are sometimes conflicting (see also Birnbaum, 2000). Such competing claims are resolved mostly by political choice and not by scholarly deliberation.

Fourth, rather than being ignorant or censorious, Stone argues that the character of demand may be flawed in that policy makers may themselves be *incapable of utilising research*. This relates to the often-cited mismatch between the necessarily lengthy process and rhythm of producing research findings and the needs of policy makers to address immediate problems. Research, Stone suggests, "often produces information that is unintelligible, irrelevant or strongly discrepant—and will be either discarded by decision-makers or construed by them in ways that are consistent with their preconceptions" [and—following the previous point, it may be added—their immediate political positions] (Stone, 2002: 290). A possible solution is to create capacity in the form of 'research editors' in government to identify good quality and relevant research.

Policy currents

Stone (2002) argues that the conceptualisation of the problem in strict binary terms of supply and demand generates a series of solutions essentially based on the bridging metaphor. This assumes a pre-determined and discrete set of producers and consumers, the onus on whom is to address supply- and demand-side problems respectively. This accords with what I called the

'strict bipolar' view earlier which sees the worlds of the researcher and policy maker as fundamentally different and therefore unbridgeable. In contrast, according to Stone, the reality of the situation is more complex than this, as the wider policy research community is more diffuse in character and comprises numerous research stakeholders, producers and users. Badat (2004: 8) makes a similar point in arguing that "in practice a wide range of social actors—individual higher education institutions, representative bodies of higher education institutions, popular organisations and movements of students, academics and workers, business organisations, political organisations, etc.—are involved in the making of policy and in the shaping of policy outcomes". In Stone's terms, 'policy current' perspectives emphasise the "need for long-term engagement of researchers with policy-makers, creating common understandings and identities. This implies developing practices that take researchers beyond supplying and/or brokering research in a one-way direction and allow a more productive exchange between decision-makers and implementers on what does and does not work in the transition from theory to practice" (Stone, 2002: 293). Policy currents approaches interpret knowledge-in-policy "as a more organic process and focus on the social construction of policy problems, policy belief systems and political identities. The emphasis is on shared problem definition within policy communities of researchers, policy makers and other key stakeholders ... Researchers are only one set of stakeholders" (Stone, 2002: 293). This approach thus moves beyond the strict bipolar separation of the worlds of research and policy-making and sees power and knowledge as inter-related within a wider policy community situated in a broader social and political context. In this view:

the very idea of 'bridging research and policy' is a false one as it presents a biased view of two autonomous communities. As a consequence, there is less agonising in these perspectives about the 'weak link between research and policy'. Instead, research and policy are viewed as mutually constitutive in the sense that knowledge is power. Indeed, there is less concern for how knowledge is used, and the instrumentalism that that position entails, and greater interest in the longer term, diffuse or atmospheric character of dominant thinking" (Stone, 2003: 294).

Regarding the 'policy currents' perspective, Stone identifies four key issues. First, the two worlds of researchers and policy makers are separated by a "*societal disconnection*" (Stone, 2002: 291). This relates to the identification of two separate cultures, discourses, epistemologies, practices and needs (see below, Birnbaum, 2000; Young, 2004). In some cases, this can lead to an isolating "group think" in government and the ivory tower syndrome in the academy. An additional element is the technocratic gap between both researchers and policy makers on the one hand, and the public on the other. Solutions regarding this include the reconceptualisation of the gap in terms of the notion of 'policy currents' explanations, and the application of participatory methodologies and measures to enhance the public understanding of science.

Secondly, a more sophisticated and less binary approach implies shifting from expectations of the automatic and immediate utility of relevant research to conceptualising the utility of research as a *longer term, more diffuse process of contributing to policy*. While Stone may be seen to conflate the two worlds in making claims for the 'policy currents' approach and by placing less emphasis on the distinctiveness of the

two domains, her conclusion about the longer term cumulative impact of research on policy is similar to that of Birnbaum (2000), Badat (2004) and Young (2004), which can be captured in terms of the 'soft bipolar' view defined above. In shifting thus, the question changes from asking how specific research findings can acquire direct policy impact to understanding how more general research-based insights shape broader socio-political, economic and cultural patterns of thinking and practice. This more gradual influence of research is partly achieved through the expanding diffusion of research capacity in non-academic institutional settings, including government. Universities, think tanks and other research organisations often "serve as political training grounds, grooming emerging political leaders in policy debates" (Stone, 2002: 291). In the South African case, education policy research units in the anti-apartheid period fulfilled precisely this purpose. Linked to this, certain research outputs or organisations may have particularly strong impact in one area of public research utilisation (for example, the media) and not in others (for example, government).

Third, Stone argues that "building bridges does not necessarily resolve conflict over policy choices" (2000: 291). Enhanced flows of research can in fact highlight *contested findings and even knowledges*. Linked to the point about the politicisation of research mentioned earlier, ideology clearly shapes policy makers responses to research, highlighting the close relationship between knowledge and power (see also Young, 2004). As Badat (2004) argues strongly, the social and political context shapes the patterns of research uptake. This includes the discursive climate (Subotzky, 2003). Together, "institutional arrangements, the nature of the regime in power, the culture of public debate (or lack of it) and the prevailing idea of truth or

hegemony, structure what is considered 'relevant' or 'useful' knowledge" (Stone, 2002: 291-2). Dominant ways of interpreting the world, policy priorities and valid knowledge(s) are further shaped by the interests of key global agencies such as powerful governments, international financial institutions and corporations.

Fourth, and linked to the previous point, the relationship between research and policy raises more *fundamental epistemological issues* relating to ways of knowing and power. It relates to contestations between knowledge(s), discourses and world views, and in particular the challenge to the dominance of elite, expert and technocratic knowledge and the exclusion of indigenous, practical and NGO knowledges. Prevailing social scientific discourses shape both policy agendas and perceptions, naturalising specific ways of thinking, defining problems and ideologically delimiting the permissible range of solutions (Ball, 1993)—which, it may be added, are increasingly shaped by the dominant neo-liberal practices of minimal government, fiscal constraints and market-driven approaches. This relates to the varied nature of research, and the different kinds of knowledge(s) involved in policy implementation: academic, technical, practical, local, political and indigenous.

Indeed, one way of understanding the necessary conditions for successful policy implementation in the developing country context, especially in rural and urban community settings, is in terms of the need for the convergence of these various kinds of knowledges (Subotzky, forthcoming). For instance, an effective community nutrition intervention depends on the confluence of technical/medical knowledge (comprehension of basic bio-medical facts); local and practical knowledge (of the specificities of the particular context, for example demographic and

cultural patterns); political knowledge (in order to negotiate the specific interests, power concentrations, possible corruption in the local setting); and indigenous knowledge (understanding of the potentially complementary or conflicting knowledge and practices conducted by locals). Effective policy implementation and development practice thus requires the complementary alignment of these various approaches. In similar vein, Stone (2002) observes that policy makers are reliant on local government officials, NGOs and others for effective implementation. Rather than constituting a simple rational and technical top-down process, policy implementation can be subverted not only by inadequate or incomplete research but also by bureaucratic incompetence and resistance, inadequate capacity and resources. In this regard, research cannot be seen as a "panacea for policy" (Stone, 2002: 295), based on a romantic assumptions that if research and policy work together, social problems can be solved.

In defending the 'policy currents' approach, and thus moving away from the simple bridge building model, Stone shows that attempts to bridge the gap and to make research more policy relevant have been the subject of numerous conferences and workshops. Calls for strategies and mechanisms to understand and bridge the divide are constantly being made within the international higher education sector as well (see Maassen, 2000; El Khawas, 2000 and other chapters in Teichler, 2000). An example of the former include the three annual conferences of the Global Development Network (an independent transnational NGO composed primarily of social science centres and think tanks) focused on how research might impact on policy-making. Stone (2002) provides some insight into the gathering experience of these. The initial emphasis on arriving

at "definitive conclusions as to how miscommunication could be resolved or how research could be better utilised, an appreciation of how varying interpretations of policy makers provide different parameters of understanding of the research-policy nexus came to the fore" (Stone, 2002: 287). In summary, it was not possible to rationally devise answers or solutions. This conclusion does not imply diminishing efforts to build bridges between research and policy. It does, however, recognise "that different policy environments, institutional structures and political arrangements produce different sets of opportunities and constraints for dialogue, call forth varying strategies for policy researchers and have dramatically diverse implications from one political system and/or policy sector to the next" (ibid).

The nature of policy and its implication for the research-policy nexus

Tracking the shifting relationship between research and policy necessitates the conceptual unpacking of the notion of policy. In particular, it is important to understand how different elements of policy will effect what is deemed to be relevant and acceptable policy research. These considerations could be seen to be part of the demand-side set of issues, as defined by Stone (2002). This section of the paper briefly addresses these points.

Policy is, of course, a complex, multi-faceted, indeterminate and inevitably contested process. It comprises distinct types and involves several non-linear but inter-related elements and a variety of agents and stakeholders in different institutional settings (Subotzky, 2003; Badat, 2004). Policy research and analysis is plagued by numerous unstated assumptions and multiple meanings about the nature of policy. Much of this work consequently remains theoretically thin. As Ball argues:

One of the conceptual problems currently lurking within much policy research and policy sociology is that more often than not analysts fail to define conceptually what they mean by policy. The meaning of policy is taken for granted and theoretical and epistemological dry rot is built into the analytic structures they construct. It is not difficult to find the term policy being used to describe very different 'things' at different points in the same study (Ball, 1993: 15).

The *elements* of the policy process are often assumed to comprise sequential linear steps, namely: research; identifying and choosing options; policy formulation and adoption; planning and implementation; monitoring, evaluation and adaptation. In reality, of course, these steps inter-relate in complex non-linear ways and iterate among the various agents involved. They are mediated or obstructed by context and by the diverse policy agents involved in the process. These agents, located in different institutional settings are driven by their own exigent interests and agendas, and thus shape policy outcomes at different points. These include: government, parliament, the bureaucracy, organised business, civil society (organised labour, teacher and student organisations, academics, researchers and other stakeholders), foreign advisors and the donor community.

A key point here is that policy research, as is often assumed, does not only occur prior to the identification of options or in the evaluation phase. As Badat (2004) shows, there are multiple potential points of contribution of research to policy within the policy cycle:

Research and writing can enter into policy making in numerous ways, and can seek to shape the policy thinking of social actors at different moments of

policy making. They can vary considerably in their nature, from theoretical and conceptual work to concrete empirical analysis, and from description and analysis *of policy*, to that concerned with description and analysis *for policy*. Research and writing related to description and analysis *for policy* can in turn encompass only the contextual conditions under which policy making must take place and within which policies must be implemented, or can extend to include the construction of policy options and actual policies. In addition, the research and writing can draw on a range of methodologies, and methods (quantitative, qualitative) and techniques (documentary research, interviews, surveys, and collection and processing of statistical data using frequencies, cross-tabulations, regression analysis, etc.) (Badat, 2004: 11).

The distinction between research *of* policy and research *for* policy is a very significant one, particularly so in the South African historical context, as will be seen below. This distinction relates to the role of researcher-as-critic and researcher-as-reconstructor mentioned above. Research *of* policy comprises the independent critical review of policy, informed by a combination of the theoretical perspectives of scholarship, the evaluation of policy achievements in terms of stated values, goals, objectives and indicators, and (necessarily also) the researchers' own ideological and values framework. This critical role implies independent distance from policy makers and where the critique is strong and critical or where there is a lack of consensus regarding values, principles and interests between researchers and policy makers, potential antagonism. Research *for* policy, on the hand—that is, providing support and evidence directly for the process of policy formulation—implies a close relationship and (usually) high degrees

of consensus regarding values. This relationship—and the role of theory and scholarship within it—is shaped by the political economic conditions in a particular context at a particular time. As will be seen, the unfolding history of the anti-apartheid struggle and the democratic victory presented shifting conditions in which researchers shifted their role radically from critics *of* apartheid policy, to reconstructors *for* post-apartheid policy, and then to an ambiguously uncomfortable combination of ongoing reconstructors *for*, and critics *of* current policy.

Further, in understanding the research-policy relationship, it is important to highlight the fact that policy is inevitably *ideologically contested* and political in nature. It is unavoidably linked to furthering specific socio-economic values, goals and interests. As resources are universally constrained, making policy is always subject to tensions, contradictions, competing priorities and inevitable trade-offs. Researchers and policy makers will therefore either share or contest prevailing ideological frameworks. As indicated, this is a key factor in the researcher-policy relationship. Badat (2004: 7) notes that “social conflict and struggle might not be confined to only the moments of policy formulation, adoption and implementation. They could be present at the very outset of policy making, in contestation around what count as policy ‘problems’ and ‘issues’ and, indeed even what are the fundamental features of social structure and contemporary social conditions”. For Badat, these considerations raise two issues for critical researchers involved in higher education policy making. One relates to the extent of congruence between critical researchers and policy regarding goals, values and principles. The other is that the inevitability of social conflict in policy making implies that critical research in higher

education policy could also be the object of conflict.

Policies can be classified in terms of a number of *types*, including: distributive, regulatory, material, procedural, symbolic and substantive policy (Subotzky, 2003; Badat, 2004). For the purposes of this paper, it is important to distinguish between the last two types. The notion of symbolic policy has emerged as a key construct in explaining the course of the South African higher education policy process (see Jansen 2001; Cloete et al 2002; Subotzky 2003). It can be defined as follows:

Symbolic policies signify general values, principles and normative ideals with very little or no indication of implementation procedures or resource allocations. Symbolic policy captures aspirational goals sufficiently broadly, without operational details, in order to consolidate general consensus, which disguises the nature of the political settlements and trade offs. It thus makes decisive breaks with the past and signals new directions (Cloete et al, 2002), which are especially important functions in post-conflict situations (Subotzky, 2003: 4).

By contrast, substantive policies relate to the content of decisions, that is, the concrete actions governments intend taking. Successfully implementing symbolic policy, that is, translating its visionary character into the concrete steps of substantive policy, depends on various enabling resource and conjunctural conditions, including: structural impediments; resources and capacity; interpretation and operationalisation of policy by various policy agents; the discursive environment; and contingent and factors related to individual agents and their political and biographical trajectories (see Subotzky, 2003 for an elaboration of these). This is a key point in understanding the conditions

shaping the relationship between South African higher education researchers and policy makers.

Another key point—and one highly relevant to the South African case—concerns the romantic expectations of *grand policy as a driver of change*. Understandably in the post-apartheid South African context, anticipation was high for the dramatic and far-reaching socio-economic and political transformation of society to achieve democracy, social justice and human rights. It was automatically—and somewhat rationalistically—assumed that the creation of a comprehensive progressive policy framework would lead automatically to this. In keeping with this, the creation of a symbolic policy framework in higher education, as in other sectors, was prioritised. However, with hindsight and informed by the realities and constraints of government, the existence of a grand policy framework has been recognised as a necessary but not sufficient condition for social transformation. Recent analyses have only lately acknowledged not only the formidable challenges of substantiating and implementing symbolic policies but also the role of other increasingly market-driven factors—global forces, competitive institutional strategies and student choice—as significant drivers of change alongside government policy.

Linked to this, the inevitable *indeterminacy* of policy (Subotzky, 2003) is an important consideration in relation to expectations of the impact of research on policy. As Stone (2002) and others argue, the outcome of policy is shaped by a range of broader political-economic conditions, contingent factors and change agents, over which policy makers have little or no control. Sound research is therefore only one contributory element in the pursuit of desired policy goals.

Adopting these broader and more mature perspectives on the nature of policy have an important bearing on the kind of research which researchers conduct and which policy makers find relevant. Overcoming policy naivety is a final necessary condition, through understanding the constraints of change and the limits and indeterminacy of policy, especially regarding the limits of 'grand' policy and planning, outlined above. In explaining the apparent gap between symbolic policy and implementation, Muller (2001) identifies the realisation that symbolic policy cannot deliver on implementation as a sign of policy maturity, and as Badat (2004) expresses it in the title of his paper: moving from 'Innocence to Critical Reflexivity'.

The kind of research that is *deemed relevant* by government and its receptivity to critical perspectives is shaped crucially by the prevailing discursive climate (Subotzky, 2003). Ball's distinction between policy as *text* (representations which are encoded and decoded in complex ways) and policy as *discourse* (the way in which policy ensembles exercise power through a production of 'truth' and 'knowledge' as discourses) illuminates the discursive function of policy. These two elements of policy, though distinct, are implicit in each other. Drawing from Foucault, Ball argues that "discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority" (Ball 1993: 21). In this way, "the effect of policy is primarily discursive, it changes the possibilities we have for thinking 'otherwise'; thus it limits our responses to change" (ibid: 23). Policies thus "create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes set" (Ball 1993: 19).

Finally, Badat (2004) also identifies the *diffusion of policy* across multiple sites and spaces, namely the state, government, civil society, business, public and private institutions and organisations. Too frequently, he argues, "critical researchers confine themselves to seeking to influence governments (in their various forms), political parties, and statutory policy advisory bodies through their research and writing" (Badat, 2004: 8). Consequently, little consideration is generally given to contributing to policy process involving other key social agents (in the case of higher education: institutional associations, labour unions, organisations of academics and other professionals, student organisations, business interest groups, etc.) and to that of the critical researchers' own institutions. The tendency to target governments, political parties and other authorised bodies assumes that these actors are the only or key policy makers—an assumption which rests on a restrictive conception of policy making. The key implication is that, in order to more effectively influence policy, critical researchers must carefully consider the targets of their research and writing across a variety of institutional locations and among the multiple and diverse audiences.

The nature of research and its implication for the research-policy nexus

Investigating the nature of research—the other constitutive element of the relationship in question—is important in understanding the dynamics of the research-policy nexus.

A key issue within this concerns the *types* of research conducted, and the shifts in this regard in relation to changing national and global political-economic conditions. The evolution of knowledge production in relation to these broader conditions and the well documented shift from predominantly

basic disciplinary research first to applied multi-disciplinary research and more recently to strategic trans-disciplinary (or 'Mode 2') research (Gibbons, et al, 1994), have important implications for the topic at hand. The theoretical understanding of these shifts (flawed though they maybe in hindsight) had enormous policy impact in South African higher education, and have been the subject of considerable debate (see Jansen, 2000; Kraak, 2000; Muller, 2000). Given the initial promise of Mode 2 strategic trans-disciplinary research of contributing towards developing country priorities (Gibbons, 1998), it was widely assumed that this form of research would be automatically relevant and unproblematically contribute to policy goals. However, the importance of basic research and its potential contribution to policy has recently been reasserted (Badat, 2004).

Gibbons defined the need for the shift to Mode 2 strategic knowledge production in these terms:

To meet both national and community needs a different organisation of knowledge production than Mode 1 is required ... [involving]: a focus on understanding complex systems, an intellectual orientation towards problem-solving, the use of computer simulation and modelling techniques, [and] the teamed involvement of broad ranges of interest and expertise. All countries possess particular complexes of natural resources, local ecologies, and distinct economic and political systems. These could become the objective of exhaustive research, the more so if local teaching programmes were oriented to providing problem-solving skills. As soon as one begins to focus on understanding complex systems, the need for different types of expertise becomes obvious – and the need for partnerships and alliances becomes imperative (Gibbons, 1998: 54).

Such collaborative partnerships provide the opportunity for universities of the developing world to share resources and to enter into the distributed knowledge production system, to focus attention on the needs of their communities, to direct their efforts to the understanding of local and national complex systems, and to create "a new culture of teaching and research – with *relevance built in!*" (Gibbons, 1998: 55, emphasis added).

However, greater critical circumspection on the advisability and feasibility of this in the developing country context emerged in later debates. This has led to the reassertion of the value of good quality basic disciplinary research—both in its own right, and as the necessary foundation for good quality applied and strategic research and in turn for contributing effectively to development priorities. In addition, caution has been expressed about the dangers of uncritical policy borrowing and policy uptake among both researchers and policy makers (Muller and Subotzky, 2001; Subotzky and Cele, 2004; Subotzky, 2005; see also Halpin and Troyna, (1995). In this vein, Badat argues that, despite the universal pressures for research relevance, the disinterested pursuit of knowledge remains

an entirely legitimate standpoint that must be respected, and research of this kind must continue to be supported and funded ... It is vital that the value of knowledge production and research is not judged solely in instrumental and utilitarian terms, and that basic scholarly research is not sacrificed at the altar of 'relevance', defined in the most parochial manner and reduced, ultimately, to market or economic relevance (2004: 12).

As a result—and crucial for the purposes of this paper—Badat goes on to argue that the policy relatedness,

relevance and value of higher education research are not guaranteed by their explicit policy purposes, aims, nature and orientation. Critical higher education research which is with policy can be as invaluable and have as great an impact, if not greater value and impact, than that which deliberately sets out to inform and influence policy making. He states:

... how critical researchers conceive of their knowledge production on higher education, the purposes that they define for their research, the nature and accessibility of their research and writing, and their inclinations and motivations are all immaterial in so far as the potential policy relatedness and policy relevance of their research and writing on higher education are concerned. Put in another way, all research and writing on higher education undertaken by critical researchers are potentially policy related and relevant, the only condition being that they are rigorous and of high quality (ibid).

However, Badat is quick to point out that the corollary is also true: the intention for policy relevant research does not guarantee impact:

If all high quality research and writing on higher education (and even unrelated to higher education) conducted by critical researchers is potentially policy related and relevant, it can also come to prevail that research and writing that are explicitly undertaken to inform higher education policy or policy making, while policy related, may have no or little policy relevance or impact for any number of reasons. These could range from lack of rigour and poor quality, to a change in the policy agenda, to an unreceptive political environment, to ineffective dissemination, to inopportune release of the research (Badat, 2004: 13).

A final important point raised by Badat concerns the issue of capacity of researchers to address policy-relevant issues. Established academic expertise (even where this involves good quality research *of* policy), does not automatically imply the capacity to conduct good quality research *for* policy. He states:

An ability to produce high quality research and writing that are unconcerned with policy issues, or are related to the analysis *of* policy, does not mean an automatic capability on the part of critical researchers to generate high quality analysis *for* policy, and particularly to construct policy options or to design policies. Similarly, the ability of critical researchers to produce high quality research and writing related to a certain kind of analysis *for* policy – such as the description and analysis of structural and conjunctural conditions – is not a guarantee of a capability to undertake other aspects of analysis *for* policy, such as the production of imaginative and creative policy options and policies, or the elaboration of innovative policy making instruments, mechanisms and procedures (2004: 14).

Another crucial consideration—the shifts in the role of researchers as critics or reconstructors—is tracked by Young (2004). This is one of the areas in which the unique case of South African can provide informative lessons. He observes that the debate about the relationship between sociology and education policy is an old one. Most sociologists of education, he argues, have at one time or another been torn between the opposing dynamics of ‘sociology as critique’ and ‘sociology as reconstruction or policy intervention’. This reflects the ambiguous role of policy researchers as scientists, specialised applied researchers and technical innovators. Within this, questions arise as to their role as critics and expert advisers. These dilemmas

regarding role and identity are captured in the South African context in Muller's (2000) distinction between the changing role of policy 'critics' and 'reconstructors'. The implications of this are examined further below.

Young explores the relationship between critical and reconstructionist roles in terms of the conflict and collaboration models of the relationship between sociology and policy. The former (which corresponds to what I called the strict bipolar view) interprets theory as inevitably in *conflict* with policy. As Young (2004: 10) suggests, this model tends to polarise theory/policy relations and sees policy as tending to inhibit rather than support progressive change. Theory, in this view, is regarded as radical and capable of transforming and emancipating educational practice. However, in Young's opinion, the model assigns too powerful a role to the transformative potential of both theory and practice, neglecting the critical role of ideology and the 'conservatism' of educational institutions that is evident in the South African case.

By contrast, the collaborative model sees theory as separate from, but able to inform policy. This is in Young's view achieved through the explicit recognition of the distinctiveness of theory and its role in the *analysis* of policy and *policy making and implementation* (what I identified as the soft bipolar view). Further, the collaborative model involves a fundamental shift from the 'transformative' approach to change of the 1970s in the UK (which saw teachers as radical change agents informed by critical sociology) to a more cautious but arguably more realistic 'evolutionary' or incremental model of educational change (in which the primary role of sociology was informing and educating policy makers). The collaborative model assumes consensus between

sociologists and policy makers which can only be achieved through the blunting of the radical critical element of the earlier social theory of knowledge.

The collaborative model, in attempting to achieve policy relevance by aligning with the context of policy makers, can easily ignore the power relations involved and the constraints of government. Consensus, both in the UK and South African cases, was easier to achieve in the visioning process of opposition to the Conservative and apartheid governments respectively, when opposition policy makers were not constrained by implementation issues. The collaborative model thus neglects the importance of researchers' autonomy to develop theories which may be unattractive to policy makers. It assumes that "the struggle is over, rather than endemic to the relationship between sociology and policy" (Young, 2004: 10). As a result, the failure to assert autonomy in the pre-1997 period in the UK weakened the position of researchers after Labour assumed power and began to shift its policy. South African researchers faced a similar dilemma in having to shift from functioning as 'critics' to 'reconstructors' after the 1994 election. This is addressed further below.

Young asserts that theory and research in the sociology of education offer a crucial epistemologically-distinct contribution to policy and practice, and that sociologists have to continue to assert the 'objectivity' and 'autonomy' of the knowledge they produce relative to both policy and practice. This objectivity must be based on taking seriously its intellectual grounds and the cognitive values of the discipline; it cannot rely on the outmoded claims of positivist social science or a comfortable consensus which can hide differences. He argues as follows:

Despite the fashionable enthusiasm for sociological research leading to evidence-based policy, it is my experience that the productive relationship between theory and policy is conceptual rather than empirical, at least in any narrow way; it is about providing new ways of seeing old problems and questions. There is always likely to be a tension between knowledge based on disciplinary expertise and knowledge based on political priorities. It may be that sociologists of education have to recognise that neither conflict nor collaboration adequately characterises the relationship between their research and policy. The tension between the two will in my view never be resolved in a definitive sense; it will inevitably vary according to both political circumstances and the state of the discipline. Sociologists can only make explicit their broad political and educational purposes *and* their respect for the codes, rules and practices of their discipline (ibid, original emphasis).

This points to the 'softer bipolar' position set out above which recognises the fundamental differences and tensions between, as Young puts it above "knowledge based on disciplinary expertise and knowledge based on political priorities" and therefore sees the main contribution of social science research to policy in terms of indirectly influencing policy thinking and discourses through long-term cumulative insights.

The research-policy gap in terms of two epistemic worlds and two cultures

Given the various distinctions between critical scholarship and policy making drawn out above, many analysts see a fundamental and rigid distinction between the two communities of policy makers and policy scholars. This is based on sharp differences in the roles, modus operandi, epistemological assumptions and practical needs of the

two communities. Birnbaum captures this distinction in the following terms:

The intrinsic differences in the processes of educational policy-making and the processes of educational policy scholarship lead to "two cultures" or two communities, of necessity separate and only loosely coupled. Policy scholars do by thinking; policy makers think by doing ... Scholars read, write, and try intellectually to optimize even as they deal in probabilities; policy makers talk, listen, and try in practical ways to satisfy even as they act to create certainty. Scholars value quiet contemplation, policy makers chaotic activity ... Scholars weigh the evidence, are sensitive to nuance, consider things first on one hand and then on the other, and view their conclusions as tentative and conditional. Policy makers have to decide ... Scholars try to create knowledge that can be used in an indefinite future. Policy makers have "limited patience for academic critique ... They generally want to know 'what do I do Monday'" (Donmoyer, 1996, cited in Birnbaum, 2000: 125).

Despite these sharp characteristic differences, Birnbaum argues that it is erroneous to depict the gap simply in terms of the difference between science and politics. Scholars, in spite of their search for validity in objectivity, are never simply disinterested scholars. Likewise, policy makers can approach their work in a scientific way. Effective practitioners of both kinds base their judgements on deliberate search, as opposed to the casual passive perceptions of everyday life.

In spite of this similarity, fundamental differences exist in their epistemological perspectives, especially regarding validity and relevance. While policy makers often find relevance in fragmentary, anecdotal and impressionistic 'soft' data, the valid data which researchers seek in a structured way is often seen as

irrelevant by policy makers. Each group interprets the world by means of different perspectives and logics. Birnbaum further identifies the differences between policy scholars and makers and their respective strengths as follows:

Policy scholars don't know *better* than policy makers; they just know *different* than policy makers. Policy scholars may reject propositions that deny the ground assumptions of their fields; policy makers may reject propositions that deny their common sense. What is unusual and interesting to one group may be considered common and obvious to the other. The strength of scholars is that they are detached from the problems they study ... The strength of policy makers is that they are completely absorbed by the problems with which they deal (2000: 126).

Similar to Stone (2002), Birnbaum argues that policy scholars should therefore seek to understand policy makers' practice and to recognise the form of inquiry practical knowledge they utilise. What appears to be the uniformed and irrational behaviour of policy makers may often be more sensible than the scholarly prescriptions of policy researchers.

For all these reasons, Birnbaum concludes that "policy scholarship and policy making are, and ought to be, two distinct knowledge-producing activities whose insights may inform each other but are not dependent on each other" (2000: 127). Consequently, the real contribution of applied policy research to policy making is not, as is often simplistically assumed, to provide objective evidence to guide the choice of policy options, but to "transform the nature of the issues in the long term by setting the value and factual constraints within which policy makers construct plausible programs" (ibid).

Regarding the key question of whether researchers can undertake analysis *for policy* and *simultaneously*, in the same space and time, function as critical researchers *of policy*, Muller (2000) is less optimistic than Badat, arguing that "critics and reconstructors can only ... comport themselves in separate and separated fields of endeavour" (Muller, 2000: 279). This is essentially, in his view, because "each discourse has its own grammar, its own language game" (Muller, 2000: 265). Badat (2004), while recognising the essential differences in conditions of production (and reproduction), purposes, approaches, and social functions of these two modes, nonetheless argues they can be undertaken simultaneously under certain conditions. These include: where critical researchers undertake policy research not specifically to confirm the views of social actors on policy issues; where the policy research is commissioned without any conditions; and where there is a very high degree of congruence in researchers' and policy makers' values. Where these conditions are not met, Badat suggests that critical researchers *cannot* produce policy proposals on higher education and also functions as critical researchers:

It is possible for a critical researcher to *concomitantly* undertake different kinds of research and writing on higher education that result in different policy conclusions, and to also conduct policy research for other social and policy actors that point to different policies. Still, in some situations it is not possible to *concurrently* be a critical researcher and also undertake certain kinds of policy research and writing. It is only possible in relation to other social and policy actors and other kinds of research and writing; that is *consecutively* (Badat, 2004: 22).

The main challenges in negotiating the demands of these two worlds, include producing the required quality of

applied policy work—which entails understanding the political nature of policy, while retaining the autonomy and integrity of the scholarly dimension of policy research and resisting becoming the mere appendages of policy makers.

The longer term view of research impact

In adopting a longer term view of the appropriate contribution of research to policy, Birnbaum (2000) follows essentially same argument pursued by Badat (2004) and Young (2004). He argues that the distinctiveness of the two worlds implies abandoning a naive and simple linear model of research impact which assumes that the facts generated by social research will be directly used to make decisions to improve social life. One important way in which this linear model of knowledge influencing practice is undercut is that scholarly-based recommendations for one set of policy actions may be contradicted by another which might suggest the opposite course of action. This linear model underlies the erroneous assumptions and appearances that policy scholarship has so little impact on policy. Policy scholarship, Birnbaum argues, is only one of the multiple elements that shape policy decisions. Before decision-making, it is impossible to predict the specific variables important to a policy maker at that moment.

The desired relationship is therefore not for individual studies to guide individual decisions, but for cumulative scholarly work to inform the systems of knowledge and belief that shape policy making *over time* and to provide evidence for overarching insights into higher education trends. The lengthy process by which ideas and concepts are generally accepted over time means that “today’s problems are influenced by *yesterday’s ideas*” (Birnbaum, 2000: 127). By the time policy

researchers have responded to policy makers’ current concerns, the nature of policy problems will often have changed. Bridging the presumed gap by means of simply creating a policy relevant research agenda is therefore not feasible. Echoing Badat’s defence of basic scholarly research in the face of the unrelenting pursuit of relevance, Birnbaum concludes that scholarship should therefore continue to be shaped by “personal and professional interests developed in the intellectual marketplace of ideas rather than in the planned marketplace of current problems” (2000: 129).

For these reasons, Birnbaum’s view is that it is fatuous for scholars to continually seek to make higher education policy scholarship more immediately useful to policy makers. They should free themselves from the commonly advocated measures to achieve relevance such as: shaping a ‘relevant’ research agenda; emphasising generalised rather than specialised knowledge; and utilising more sophisticated methods and interpretive frameworks to capture the complex processes of higher education. The sobering conclusion is that the many proposals to bridge the presumed scholarship-policy gap appear plausible but are not supported either by theory or research evidence” (Birnbaum, 2000: 127-8).

Like Badat, Birnbaum argues that any form of scholarship *may* be used at some time to inform policy at some time. It is therefore not possible to predict its influence at any one time. Policy scholarship may only be loosely connected to policy making in that it seeks not for the short term and ephemeral influence on decisions, but rather for the long term and pervasive shaping of a policy discourse and framework in which future problems are considered.

In similar vein, Young (2004) further identifies the specificities of (sociology of education) research and policy making in terms of two sets of distinctions. First, he distinguishes between the 'policy visioning' (the establishment of broad policy frameworks for change and policy goals), from the 'explanatory role' of social science. He argues that it is through the recognition of the distinctive theoretically-based explanatory role of social science that its contribution to policy can best be assured. Second, he distinguishes between the slogan-based political discourse of the anti-apartheid struggle and the specificities of educational practices and institutions. Linked to these positions are two approaches to change: the immediatist one (which assumes that large-scale change is the outcome of grand policy) and the incrementalist one (which recognises that the implementation of progressive reforms requires a slow and incremental change process). In the light of the pressures for demonstrable transformation from the ravaging inequalities of apartheid, incrementalism easily becomes associated with the conservative resistance to change on the one hand, and with the perceived lumbering tardiness and lack of capacity in the bureaucracy on the other.

In identifying the distinctiveness and value of sociological theory and research, and its contribution to policy making, Young (2004) further distinguishes between knowledge and opinion or common sense and resists the post-modern tendency to reduce the former to a variant of the latter. Young argues that post-modern epistemology, in reducing all positions to particular interests and opinions, undermines the possibility of critique. Interpreting all knowledge as an expression of an interest or standpoint renders social science critique or scholarship indefensible. In this view,

research and theory are reduced to politics or interests with which we either agree or not. Instead, Young advocates the sociology of education "as an activity and a field that gives priority to cognitive values and theoretically based explanations" (2004: 2). The importance of these explanations is that they "offer distinct cognitive or epistemic gains over, for example, the views and opinions of policy makers, administrators and practitioners", and are thus not reducible to mere points of view (ibid). This is not, of course, to imply that sociological explanations are not contestable or implicated in the dynamics of power and ideology.

Young (2004) identifies the clearly distinct epistemological boundaries between theoretical and political discourses and argues that it is through acknowledging the distinctiveness of the former and retaining its independence that its optimal contribution to policy will optimally be realised. Significantly, Young asserts that greater policy relevance will *not* be achieved through the conflation of these two epistemic domains by blurring the boundary between them.

Theoretical debates within disciplines about policy or practice and *political* (in the broadest sense of the term) debates about the efficacy and goals of actual policies are distinct and different ways of thinking (or discourses); they are as it were, boundaries to be crossed, not blurred. Recognising this distinction is, I would argue, necessary if sociologists are to develop the kind of knowledge about policy that can offer *cognitive gain* or *added value* to policy makers over and above their own experiences and the pressures on them. The distinction between theoretical and political debates points to the epistemological importance of the university as a site of knowledge production and disciplines as forms of socially organised knowledge that are

separate from government departments and agencies involved in policy design and implementation. It highlights the limitations of proposals that equate good research with policy relevance and include users in decision making about research except in defining very broad sets of priorities ... To the extent that the role of sociology of education is to make a contribution to policy development, it needs to be *independent* of specific policy priorities and outcomes. (Young, 2004: 2-3).

In South Africa, the rapid and rather uncritical uptake of policies derived from academically-based theories in the development of the largely symbolic or 'visionary' policy frameworks of the immediate post-apartheid period, occurred through not recognising the "difference between social theories developed within the academic community which tend to be critiques of other theories and theories about policy implementation which necessarily involve many other factors" (Young, 2004: 4). This, in his view, has led to the difficulties associated with the adoption of apparently progressive policies without due regard for the challenges of implementation and capacity.

However, the nature of contemporary higher education studies is such that while it draws from the disciplinary foundations of various fields, it is largely preoccupied with micro-level problem-solving, and for this reason does not build theory in its own field (Maassen 2000). In examining the relationship between higher education research and policy in an international comparative framework, Maassen shows, that in the US the main emphasis is on micro (individual) level and meso (institutional) level, while in Europe, where national systems are more pronounced, macro (systems) level research predominates (Maassen, 2000). Likewise, the higher education research tends to be distinct from a

'normal' discipline, and instead constitutes a theme-focused area of research (Teichler, 2000: 6). The research community is accordingly split into an 'hourglass structure' (Maassen, 2000) comprising clusters of disciplinary researchers who occasionally focus on higher education and provide conceptualisations and theoretical approaches, and those who have migrated from other fields to higher education and who apply these theoretical frames to higher education. The link between them is generally narrow. The result, as Maassen suggests, is that higher education research hardly contributes towards theoretical development of the disciplines from which it draws and does not have a paradigm of its own.

The nature of higher education research in various national settings is changing (Maassen, 2000 and other chapters in Teichler, 2000). In particular, the growing expansion of specialisation of higher education research into vertically detached pockets of institutional policy and practice, particularly in the USA, has not been accompanied by the development of cross-cutting and especially critical theoretical perspectives. Clearly, the narrow institutional focus of much higher education research (especially in the US) with an orientation towards problem-solving and practicality does not engender theory-building.

The bipolar nature of the research-policy gap questioned

In arguing for a less polarised and binary approach to the issue, Birnbaum (2000) questions the validity of critics of higher education research. In so doing, he comes to similar conclusions to Stone (2002). In his view, critiques are generally based on opinion, rather than on reliable data and rest on four implicit but misleading and flawed assumptions, which he sets out to dispel.

First, it is assumed that policy scholars and policy makers agree on the nature of policy problems. Interest groups clearly differ on the definition of the major issues. Policy issues shift over time, according, as Badat (2004) also emphasises, to changing political economic conditions. For this reason, it is not a simple matter to assess the policy relevance of any specific research. Contributing towards policy by means of knowledge-based evidence (as opposed to highly specific problem-solving informational research) requires time and preparation by researchers to develop the knowledge base of theory and practice.

Second, Birnbaum questions the assumption that higher education scholars do not conduct policy relevant research (drawing attention to the variations of this claim, namely that scholars do *no* policy-relevant research, do *insufficient* research of this kind, and do not do policy research in the *important* areas. An informal analysis of ASHE/ERIC higher education reports showed that most could be deemed as policy relevant. A stronger claim is that policy scholars do not focus sufficiently on problems defined by policy makers and in particular on the politically-framed definition of problems. This is pursued below.

Third, Birnbaum rejects the claim that policy makers do not utilise higher education research. Like other forms of social research, higher education research does not necessarily impact in terms of discreet problems or current issues or in a linear sequence. Indeed, expectations (from both sides) for dramatic and immediate impact are unrealistic. Instead, he asserts the more diffuse and longitudinal effect of social science, with earlier scholarship influencing policy thinking in the present in the form of generalisations, broader social science concepts and perspectives and accumulated findings

which permeates the policy environment over time. Birnbaum contends that "We can be fairly certain that some, but not all, of the issues we study today will be *generally* relevant at some time over the next twenty years" (2000: 121). Linked to this, Birnbaum further argues that the concept of usefulness is in itself problematic. Drawing from Weiss, three types can be identified: intrinsic, intellectual and political, each with different factors and logics. In the light of this, there is no consensus on what constitutes the "usefulness" of research nor on how this might be assessed. Studies which try and measure impact run into difficulties related to indicators. In the absence of demonstrable evidence of this sort, the assumption is that scholarship has no effect.

Fourth, it is assumed that disseminating policy-relevant research would improve practice. However, like Stone, Birnbaum argues that better dissemination in itself is not likely to bridge the gap between policy researchers and policy makers, and in particular the differences in their interests, identification and prioritisation of problems. Moreover, policy makers already suffer from information overload and attempts to simplify and reduce scholarly formats often suffer from 'loss in translation'. In addition, the bounded rationality of research leads to the possibility of varying interpretations of the same data and contradictory findings. Therefore, even if *all* higher education research was explicitly policy relevant and effectively disseminated, policy makers would likely face a situation in which researchers were endorsing different policy options and make antithetical recommendations. Policy makers, likewise, exhibit differences in their interpretations, perceptions and beliefs. The simple transmission of research between researchers and policy makers is confounded by these complexities. These dual sets of

differences, Birnbaum argues, obstruct attempts to address the often-cited problem of incompatibility between the format of scholarly outputs and policy makers' preference for simple, short and digestible jargon-free style. This creates the possibility of appropriately formatted but quality-lacking outputs having more influence, as Badat also points out.

Counter to the position of Birnbaum and Young who assert the rigid epistemological and cultural distinctiveness of the two domains, Stone (2002) argues that the wider social distribution of researchers among more diverse institutional locations and the diversifying function of such organisations serve to soften the rigid gulf between research and policy. Organisations whose explicit role is to bridge the gap between the two worlds—such as think tanks and philanthropic foundations—have been the focus of particular studies in this regard. While less work has been done on the crucial role of consultants and on NGOs, the bridging role and extending research roles of all such organisations is significant. According to Stone (2002), these organisational developments provide the basis for

... contesting the commonly held view ... that research and policy-makers live in different worlds. Increasingly, a capacity not only to understand but also to *undertake* rigorous research is a professional requirement for NGO leaders, officers of professional associations and government bureaucrats. More researchers are becoming practitioners—co-opted onto advisory committees, joining government for limited terms or acting as consultants to international organisations. Knowledge networks and policy communities overlap. The dividing line is very blurred in many policy instances." (Stone, 2002: 288)

Nonetheless, she concedes that a cultural gap does exist with the result that research output is insufficiently utilised in policy-making. The non-utilisation of research for policy has largely been explained as a "cultural gap between researchers and policy-makers in relation to their values, language, time-frames, reward systems and professional affiliations to such an extent that they live in separate worlds. Hence the metaphor and donor desire to 'build bridges'" (Stone, 2002: 288).

From this review of key literature on the topic at hand, it can be seen that while there is general acknowledgement of a gap between research and policy, this involves a more complex set of circumstances than is suggested by a straightforward strict bipolar conceptualisation of the issue. For all the reasons advanced above, the matter cannot simply be characterised in these terms. Most importantly, the literature reviewed suggests shifting from a linear model of the transmission of research findings into policy-making for the purposes of short-term problem-solving. Instead, there is consensus among key analysts that a more robust model comprises adopting a longer term view of research impact. In terms of this, the contribution of social science to policy making is best achieved not by blurring the epistemic and other distinctions of each domain, but inform the policy discourses and belief systems in the long term through the accumulation of relevant scholarly work and evidence for the broader trends in higher education. This is not to preclude the direct servicing of policy makers' needs, but places emphasis on the long term element as the main conduit for contributing to policy.

With all this in mind, I now turn to track the changing relationship between higher-education research and policy in

South Africa in order to draw out potential lessons.

Section 2: Higher education research and the policy process in South Africa

In South Africa, the link between higher education research and policy and the nature of this relationship has been directly shaped by the trajectory of political developments. This changing relationship between the mid-1980s and 1994 and subsequently has been very well mapped in a number of important review papers (see Muller and Cloete, 1987, 1991; Muller and Vinjevold, 1991; Muller, 1993, 2000; Chisholm, 1992; articles by Singh, Nzimande and others in the 1992 special double issue of *Transformation* 18/91; and Price's (1995) insightful account of the changing role and challenges of a progressive health policy unit; Denyssen and Breier, 2003; Badat, 2004; Young, 2004).

Badat (2004), in setting out a framework of critical historical sociological for the understanding of the changing relationship between critical researchers and policy, captures the importance of the opportunities and constraints facing researchers as follows:

The research and writing of critical researchers must ... necessarily be understood in relation to social structure and conjuncture, social relations of authority and power, and continuities and discontinuities in conditions, even if the research and writing may impact on and contribute to changing these aspects of social reality (Badat, 2004: 3).

Adopting this approach, and drawing from the various texts mentioned above, we can periodize the developments in the South African policy process in order to identify the changing conditions which shaped the research-policy relationship. Within the

scope of this paper, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive account and analysis of the policy process in these terms. Instead, the main developments in policy are outlined with a view to highlighting the changing role of, and relationship between policy makers and researchers.

It will be seen that, at the outset, there was a very close link between the two—indeed, they were largely indistinguishable in the unity of purpose which constituted the anti-apartheid struggle. As the history of the victory over apartheid and the installation of the new democratic government unfolded, this unity gradually dissolved, with researchers again facing the tensions and challenges outlined above in terms of their role as critics *of* policy and reconstructors *for* policy. Muller (2000a) provides a detailed account of these successive phases between 1987 and 1994 and the distinctions which emerged. He shows that civic and political work were first distinguished, then critical/scholarly research was detached from reconstructive advocacy-based research—that is, the emerging distinction and central tension between research *of* policy and research *for* policy respectively, identified and discussed by Badat (2004). Within this process, Muller locates the emerging role and focus of the early Education Policy Units (EPUs) and points rightly to the ongoing dilemma of their relationship with the new government in terms of this central tension. Motala (2003) also provides an important critique of the process from unity of purpose to what he calls the separation of “politics and administration”, which signals the growing gap between government and the bureaucracy which is increasingly driven by the dictates of global neo-liberal market-driven managerialism on the one hand, and the progressive political goals of the new democracy on the other. Young (2004) draws from his experience in South Africa to understand the

changing relationship between sociology and policy in similar terms. In addition, hard lessons have been learnt about the challenges of maintaining quality, relevance and sustainability in policy research centres. These perspectives are incorporated into the periodisation of the South African policy process which now follows.

The 1980s: left critique of the apartheid state

During this period of the anti-apartheid struggle, progressive social scientists focused principally on fostering socialist critical scholarship in the universities. While co-operation with the apartheid regime was obviously impossible, links were forged with the trade union movement and subsequently with activists in exile. Young (2004) describes this period as “sociology as critique”. Their main theoretical preoccupation was the race and class question—that is, whether to explain the apartheid state predominantly in terms of racial oppression or class-based capitalism. Such debates, Young observes, became almost irrelevant within the shifting global political economy of the 1990s, along with many similar ones which preoccupied progressive academics worldwide during the 1980s. It should be noted that during this period, Afrikaner academics, situated in the Afrikaans-speaking institutions and in the parastatal Human Sciences Resource Council, enjoyed a close relationship with the apartheid government, providing research *for* policy, such as was needed, and some intellectual support.

Muller (2000a) indicates that during the early 1980s, activism and intellectual work were conflated in the unifying collective effort of the anti-apartheid struggle. This strong initial link between research and policy in South Africa was enhanced by the establishment and staffing of the Education Policy Units

(EPUs) located at English-speaking liberal universities and historically black universities. Three were set up during the 1980s, and another three in the early 1990s. The EPU at the University of the Western Cape, from the outset, focused exclusively on post-secondary education, and then on higher education when it changed its name to the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE—see below). Many of their staff became key government officials in the Ministry, the Department of Education (DoE) and its Higher Education Branch after the first democratic elections in 1994. The specific strategic function of the EPUs was to provide the anti-apartheid Mass Democratic Movement with capacity to monitor and critique developments in education under apartheid as part of the struggle. Their role during this period was clearly, therefore, critiques *of* apartheid policy. Prospects for the reconstructive research *for* policy remained highly remote under the extremely repressive conditions of the late 1980s under apartheid. In addition, they took on the function of building capacity, especially among marginalised black and women researchers, in the field of policy research. The lack of capacity in this field, and the need to train and deliver simultaneously represents one of the central challenges to the policy research community in South Africa. After 1990, in the negotiations phase and after 1994, their role was adapted to supporting the new government in formulating a policy framework for the new South Africa respectively. This was clearly research *for* policy.

A characteristic feature of this period was the strong critical and reflexive tradition among activist policy researchers which had its ideological origins in the leftist intellectual and political ethos of the anti-apartheid struggle. This tradition of critical scholarship was dominant in the various EPUs, research centres and academic

departments, and shaped the debates in the substantial body of critical reviews of policy formulation and implementation undertaken by critical researchers from the mid-1980s on. By contrast, Young observes, such opportunities were rare in the UK, partly because “theories have a much less direct influence on policies and policy debates and partly because educational policy makers in this country rarely reflect on the success or failure of past reforms; the endless innovations of the last two decades are best described as ‘change without memory’ (Young, 2004: 3-4). The strength of this tradition is not only of historic interest, but is highly pertinent to the topic at hand. The critical historical sociological tradition (as captured above by Badat, 2004 as the foundation for critical researchers) remains the guiding framework for researchers in the current EPUs. Indeed, they increasingly now see their role as critics *of* policy which creates ongoing tensions in their relationship with government and their continuing, but receding role as researchers *for* policy. These points are elaborated below.

1990-1994: Negotiations and preparing for government

During the period of political negotiations between the Mass Democratic Movement and the apartheid government which took place from 1990 and 1994, the focus of progressive academics shifted from critique to the building of the policy framework for the first democratic elections. With the release of Mandela and the unbanning of anti-apartheid organisations in 1990, the prospect of democratic government suddenly became a reality, and with it emerged the relishing prospect and need to formulate actual policy for the post-apartheid state. In education, the first effort took the form of the National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI, 1993),

which harnessed the expertise of a large number of progressive academics to develop a series of policy options. This was done in close consultation with the emergent political formations, namely the African National Congress (ANC) and the civil society organisations such as the National Education Crisis Committee. This, as Motala (2003) explains, was characterised by urgency and strong co-ordination, by iterations and consultation with organisations in the democratic movement, respect for the importance of debate, and (reasonable) tolerance of difference, and a particular emphasis in the manner of dissemination and publication of policy reports.

However, as Muller (2000a) shows, the first rupture in the unity of purpose came towards the time of the 1994 election with the split between political party formations—namely the government-in-waiting—and these civil society organisations on the one hand as well as university-based academics on the other. Many activists in both civil society organisations and academic institutions were absorbed into government, with the result that several organisations were weakened and, in some NGOs cases, rendered anachronistic and unsustainable. These developments signalled a distinct divergence in role and identity between policy makers and critical researchers.

The next major policy effort during this period was the construction of the ANC's *Framework for Education and Training* in 1993 which constituted its education election manifesto. It utilised the resources of the EPUs and its own policy centre (the Centre for Education Policy Development) for this purpose. In this way, the ANC directly deployed university-based and independent researchers (including the author) in serving its needs for research *for* policy. This was followed by the development of the *Implementation Plan for*

Education and Training, which was again a direct collaborative effort between the ANC, researchers and academics to provide the new minister with an implementation guide when he took office in 1994.

Young (2004) captures this period in which progressive social scientists were actively involved in constructing possible educational futures as “social science as visioning”. Through this, the boundary between theory and policy futures tended to disappear, with policy equated with visioning and politics tending to lead theory. However, in this authors’ experience, the content of these policy documents tended to be very broad and symbolic in nature, which positioned them somewhere in between theory and policy. In other words, they were informed only very broadly by theory—mostly by general political economy within the framework of critical theory. This provided general principles such as democracy, social justice, human rights, non-racism, non-sexism, equity and redress, which formed the obligatory democratic preambles of all policy documents at the time. This is acknowledged by Young as follows:

My argument ... was that the theories developed in the 1990s had had a *visioning* rather than an *analytical* role in shaping policy formation. In the context of the dramatic democratisation that was taking place in South Africa at the time, it was understandable that this distinction was not given much attention (Young, 2004: 4, emphasis added).

In addition, the attempt to integrate education and training within a common national qualifications framework was strongly advocated by ex-union activists then in the Department of Labour originated from the labour as a measure to enhance equity of access and mobility. Young (Young and Kraak, 2001; Young, 2004), among others,

has expressed recent circumspection about the limited role of a qualifications framework as a means to equity of access. This is a prime example of the uncritical borrowing of policy (in this case from Australia and the UK where the role of qualifications in education reform had a very different history). For Young, the essential problem was that the advocates of qualifications-driven reforms in South Africa (and those on the left in the UK) did not realise that

on their own, qualifications are only definers of *outcomes*; they take for granted the processes and institutions that generate the outcomes. However, whether it is an infrastructure for certifying existing skills or institutions for promoting skill development, it is the *processes* and the *institutions* which were lacking in South Africa (Young, 2004: 6).

This constitutes an important lesson from the South African experience: the uncritical borrowing of seemingly progressive policy and its implementation without due regard for capacity and context (More of this emerges later. See Subotzky, 2005 for a fuller discussion).

During the period up to 1994, then, the relationship between researchers and policy makers was a close one, characterised by high levels of consensus and unity of purpose in the process of supporting the government-in-waiting for the new democracy by creating a policy framework for the elections.

1994-1996: Constructing the new policy framework for higher education transformation

The advent of democratic rule implied translating the visioning of the previous period into a comprehensive framework for change. The immediate task of the new Ministry was to establish the largely symbolic framework for higher

education transformation mentioned earlier (see Subotzky, 2003 for a detailed account of this policy process). This process involved the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, 1996) and the White Paper on higher education transformation (DoE, 1997) and the Higher Education Act. The process was largely consultative in nature, involving and utilising a large number of progressive academics, researchers and civil society formations (student and staff associations, specialised NGOs, etc). In addition, there was wide consensus on the broad principles, values and framework involved in these policy documents and processes. In other words, during this phase of symbolic policy formulation, a great deal of unity of purpose was maintained between government and the broader policy and research community.

It is widely held that the policy framework for change established in the 1997 White Paper on higher education transformation is essentially symbolic in character. While symbolic policy has been characterised as negative in that its political function to obtain consensus masks intent to implement (Jansen, 2001), symbolic policy formation performs a legitimate function in securing consensus and in providing undisputed benchmarks (through stated values and goals) against which implementation can be evaluated. The White Paper and the 2001 National Plan (DoE, 2001) were conceptualized as instruments for what Cloete et al (2002) identify as 'comprehensive' or 'big-bang' theory for system-wide transformative steering which carries the expectation of 'transformation at once'. Embedded in this policy and planning framework are implicit (and ungrounded) rationalist assumptions about the effectiveness of strong centralized policy in steering change. Besides the current discursive frowning on modernist centralist strategies, evidence shows that these

assumptions are questionable, because change is a complex indeterminate process driven by multiple agents and agencies. This casts doubt on the extent to which policies and plans in themselves lead to anticipated outcomes. Cloete et (2002: 448) capture this key point thus:

Changes in the day-to-day realities of higher education are related to a complex set of interactions between government, society and higher education institutions, as affected by globalization. Consequently the changes are not simply the result of specific policies or deliberate actions by a single agency such as the government, the market or a higher education institution ... Social institutions and social actors have a much greater role in change than is generally anticipated in government policy reform.

In contradistinction to grand 'comprehensive' policy, Cloete et al (2002) identify the need for a different kind of change strategy which they call 'differentiated policy'. While consensus is easily attained consultatively at the level of symbolic policy, such an approach is needed to deal with the contested details of implementation. All this has implications for the kind of policy research conducted and for our assessments of the impact of research on policy and its outcomes.

Young (2004) describes the period between 1994 and 1996 as "social science and policy reconstruction". University-based social scientists continued their close links with new democratic government and the parastatals, and were often employed directly by them. In this period, Young observes, social science research was equated with the development of policy and legislative frameworks.

For Young, who had first-hand experience of the post-apartheid educational policy process as a

consultant, South Africa represents a special case of the relationship between research and policy. In his view, researchers and policy makers in South Africa developed much closer links in the post-1990 period than their UK counterparts. After the total separation of sociology and education policy under apartheid, South African researchers had an unusually strong impact on policy. Hungry to rapidly establish a comprehensive policy framework for the grand transformation of post-apartheid society, policy makers readily turned to their erstwhile colleagues/researchers to identify current trends concordant with the democratic and equity-driven values of the anti-apartheid struggle. In retrospect, as noted, this impact had an unintended and counterproductive outcome in that these seemingly progressive policies were mostly very rapidly and rather uncritically adopted and implemented without due consideration to the local context, particularly regarding capacity (Muller, 2000; Young, 2004; Subotzky, 2005). The lack of fit between theories adopted from local and international academic communities and the problems faced in implementation began to become apparent. The pattern of uncritical policy and theory borrowing and implementation without due regard for the demands of substantiating policy, is one of the key lessons to be learnt from the South African experience. It reveals a naïve and flawed view of the policy process, one which is idealistically driven by political goals.

1997-present: Shifts in discourse in focusing on policy implementation

Following the establishment of the main policy framework for higher education transformation by 1997, government was faced with a range of priorities which delayed its immediate implementation. Its main tasks were: to establish the necessary bureaucratic structures (the Higher Education Branch of the Department of Education, and

the Council on Higher Education, with its Higher Education Quality Committee which was to oversee the new quality assurance framework); to operationalise the iterative three-year rolling planning process; to address managerial crises in some historically black universities; and to create frameworks for teacher education norms and standards, not to mention huge priorities in schooling.

During this time, step by step, the shift from symbolic framework construction and visioning exercises to the focus on the substantive policy dimensions of planning and implementation created different conditions which shaped new relationships and identities between researchers and policy makers. As a result, the previous unity of purpose and identity began to disintegrate.

Symptomatic of this is the role of international consultants and the ideological underpinnings and implications of this, which created tensions both with the original progressive ideals of the new democracy and, alongside this, with the critical theoretical framework of critical researchers. Motala (2003) links the rise of consultancy directly to what he calls the "separation of politics and administration", already mentioned. Paradoxically, the new government approached the post-1996 implementation phase by adopting a surprisingly conservative ideological macro-economic framework and market-led discourse in consonance with the dictates of global neo-liberalism. This was manifest in the now well documented shift from the 1994 *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (which prioritised the provision of basic services and was premised on growth through redistribution) to the misnamed *Growth, Employment and Redistribution* (GEAR) strategy which emerged around 1996 and which was premised on the monetarist maxim of redistribution

through growth. GEAR focused on a series of Treasury-led measures designed to create conditions conducive to fixed direct foreign investment and the free flow of capital which, it was hoped, would kickstart growth and employment. These included a range of measures clearly in conformity with the dominant neo-liberal orthodoxy: fiscal and monetary policy constraint; budget deficit reduction; deregulation of trade and foreign exchange control; and lowering corporate tax burdens. Except for lower inflation and budget deficits, other GEAR targets have not been met. In the context of very high unemployment and chronic poverty among the majority black population, these moves have created political tensions within and among the ANC's allies. In terms of some analyses and socio-economic indicators, the majority of blacks are in fact worse off ten years into the new democracy than they were in 1994 (see Terreblanche, 2003).

There has been considerable critical review of this process, seeking explanations for the government's orientation and the implications of this for education, and higher education in particular (see Alexander, 2002; Cloete et al, 2002; Jansen, 2001, 2002; Jansen and Sayed, 2001; Kraak, 2001; Motala and Pampallis, 2001; Muller, 2001; Subotzky, 1999, 2003 and 2005; Young and Kraak, 2001). The extent and depth of this critique, which has largely been conducted by former activist/critical researchers, is in itself noteworthy. It highlights the ongoing role of critical researchers but it has at times in itself exacerbated tensions between the researchers concerned and government. Generally, there are strong perceptions that the Ministry and the DoE are oversensitive to public criticism, and that they react unnecessarily defensibly to these. In the education policy arena, as planning and implementation has become increasingly emphasised, government has adopted a more technocratic and

market-driven approach which gives priority to cost-cutting efficiency measures. This has been accompanied by perceptions of a sceptical anti-intellectualism on the part of government towards critical and academic research. This is seen as self-indulgent and irrelevant to the concrete realities of policy work. This attitude is especially evident towards leftist critique which is disparagingly dismissed as the nostalgic remnants of socialist-inspired idealism and is therefore anachronistic in the brave new world of market realities. In the context of these developments, it is easy to see why Motala concludes "consultancy report writing is of necessity the pre-eminent form and inevitable consequence of the separation of politics and administration" (Motala, 2003: 6). The weakness of consultancy research lies its predominantly technical and purportedly a-political framework, along with "their all too frequent dubious prescriptions and elegant 'solutions'" (Badat, 2004: 17). In the light of these issues, the role and value of critical research should be especially strongly reasserted.

However, as Badat (2004) cautions, the links between research and the policy arena should not be seen exclusively in relation to government but should also consider the other important agents and organisations which constitute the policy community. In this regard, it is important to note that, especially after 1996 and the completion of the overarching policy framework, researchers and centres increasingly engaged in work for and with a range of other local and international agencies. These included: buffer and stakeholder bodies, notably the South African Council on Higher Education, the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association and their technikon counterparts; individual institutions and their regional associations; philanthropic foundations; national

research centres; regional associations, such as the Association of African Universities and the Working Group on Higher Education of Association for the Development of Education in Africa; more international and comparative research involving greater engagement with international HES networks, international higher education-related centres.

In particular, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) has become a major commissioner of policy research, especially after securing considerable independent donor funding to discharge its various responsibilities. It has in fact displaced the DoE in this regard, with the result that there is now generally greater working distance between researchers and government. This was accompanied by a shift in focus to in-house concerns such as the administration of the three-year rolling plans, the reformulation of the funding formula research and the massive preoccupation with the restructuring of the institutional landscape, involving large-scale mergers. For these activities, the DoE utilised a combination of in-house capacity (such that it was) and selective consultants. The type of work conducted for the CHE has been predominantly research *for* policy. One example was a co-operative venture with three research centres (including the CSHE) to construct the conceptual and operational framework for the CHE's project to monitor and evaluate the achievement of policy goals—part of its statutory responsibility. Other work has included the commissioning of background papers and reports for the CHE's annual report on the state of higher education to parliament and the nation. However, it can be noted that fundamental tensions have been experienced in balancing the critical and reconstructive elements of this commissioned work.

To sum up: initially, close links were established between critical researchers

and policy makers immediately prior to, and after 1994 in pursuing the common purpose of constructing the new overarching policy framework for higher education. After achieving this, greater distance emerged after 1996, as new members of government adopted, operationalised and interpreted their new identities and roles in an increasingly technocratic way and as they engaged with the challenges of planning and implementation. Correspondingly, in seeking theoretical and critical perspectives on policy developments (and non-developments), researchers once again adopted a predominantly critical role and in addition forged links with other agencies in the policy community. In the midst of these changes, the position of research centres has become highly challenging. This is now briefly addressed.

Research centres: challenges for maintaining quality, relevance and sustainability

From the researcher side, changes in conditions in the research environment have created greater challenges for education policy research centres in maintaining the quality and relevance of their policy-related outputs and, directly linked to this, in ensuring their sustainability. The EPU were all originally funded by development assistance and donor agencies, especially by the Swedes, as part of their support of anti-apartheid NGOs. After the democratic elections, these agencies signalled that responsibility for this should be borne by the state on the one hand, and through access to competitive funding as part of 'normalised' bilateral agreements for research co-operation. However, in South Africa, the funding of research centres has become something of a national crisis. Funding for this purpose by the statutory National Research Foundation (through its centres of excellence, niche project areas of focus

and other grant categories), by the DoE (through its subsidy for peer-reviewed publications) and by the individual institutions (through direct research funding and posts) is limited and constrained. As a result, centres have had to increase and diversify their income through securing more commissioned research. Inevitably, this meant conducting more research *for* policy, as the opportunities for funding critical research *of* policy are extremely limited. One notable exception is a large-scale 5-year programme of critical research focusing on human rights, democracy and social justice in relation to education policy, which was awarded to the Education Policy Consortium made up of the six EPUs in South Africa. Accompanied as it is by a capacity building and infrastructural development budget, this represents a very enlightened—if transient and solitary—form of support for the EPUs for the conduct of critical research.

Under these competitive conditions, relations between the various research centres remains characterised by a curious combination of co-operation and competition. The statutory Human Sciences Research Council, to take one example, enjoys direct core funding from government through a very substantial parliamentary grant. In addition to this, it competes vigorously for competitive funding. As a result, it can offer substantially higher salaries than academically-based or independent centres. Indeed, it lured away two of the best CSHE researchers recently. The sustainability of independent centres is therefore largely dependent on some form of cross-subsidisation, such as the holding and management of large bilateral programme funds and entrepreneurial activities like conference organisation.

In response to these various developments, the then EPU at University of the Western Cape took a strategic decision in 2001 to focus on

higher education studies—an important strategic move in the light of the concerns of this paper. The purpose was to ground its contribution to policy through high quality and relevant critical scholarship in this field, to build capacity in this field and to ensure long term sustainability through linking to national, regional and international networks. This was based on the strategic reading of shifts in the national and international 'policy moment' and in the competitive institutional environment. It was assumed that the new policy moment would create new demands for policy research from the broader policy community which, as indicated, comprises not only government but also the CHE, stakeholder bodies, institutions and international and local agencies. It was anticipated, that with the large-scale framework in place, the focus on implementation would require monitoring and evaluation of the progress towards the achievement of systemic and institutional policy goals. The role of research in this would be to go beyond the mainly quantitative technical monitoring and evaluation using indicators, to *explain* trends by means of conceptually rich and internationally and comparatively informed perspectives, using complementary qualitative approaches. This would entail more work at the meso- and micro-levels on new relevant themes such as institutional change management, organisational learning and institutional culture and micro-politics. The intention was not to exclude research *for* policy, but to underpin ongoing reconstructive work with high quality, substance and evidence based on rigorous scholarship. The underlying assumption was that the best contribution to policy was not through the short term problem-solving consultancy-type research, but by means of longer term, theoretically rich scholarly-based work, drawing increasingly from international comparative perspectives. In hindsight,

this accorded essentially with the positions of Birnbaum (2000), Badat (2004) and Young (2004)—the reason that these authors were so heavily drawn from in the first part of this paper.

Central to the move was the decision to establish a masters programme in higher education studies: *Policy Analysis, Leadership and Management* which was successfully launched in 2002. Based on block release teaching, this was aimed at providing institutional managers, government and other agency officials, as well as prospective researchers with a critical historical and sociological overview of the history and current trends in higher education, with specific emphasis on developing countries. The faculty draws from prestigious higher education scholars and policy makers nationally and internationally. In this way, the substance of the teaching is directly linked to current scholarship and policy practice, with the overall approach remaining a critical scholarly one—as opposed to the narrow managerialism and professional MBAs in higher education which seems to be the flavor of the day.

At the heart of the visioning and renaming of the CSHE, then, was a fresh conceptualisation of the strategic identity of the centre. The key terms of the debate emerged in the 10th Anniversary Colloquium which the then EPU held on the strategically chosen theme of this seminar, namely *Then and Now: Education Policy Units and the changing relationship between higher education research and policy* (see Denyssen and Breier, 2003 and Subotzky, 2002). The Centre was envisaged as a concentration of critical mass in research and teaching expertise in the scholarly field of critical higher education studies, the overall purpose of which is the equitable transformation of society. The intention was to institutionalise capacity in the

field of higher education studies, and in so doing to combine the critical perspectives pertinent to the goals of equity and development in developing countries with international scholarship in the field. Mindful of the limitations in capacity, this centre would form an emerging node in the growing network of higher education expertise in Africa and, increasingly, in the established network of centres worldwide. This would seize on the strategic opportunities offered by the current initiatives of the Association of African Universities' research programme, the considerable support for African higher education emanating from the Foundation Partnership for African Higher Education (Ford, Rockefeller, Carnegie and MacArthur), the Working Group on Higher Education of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, and the activities of the New York-based Social Science Research Center. It was in relation to these networks here that the future sustainability of the Centre was envisaged.

Physically, the Centre would provide a place for exchanges, visitorships and internships to experienced and emerging scholars and indeed policy makers. Wherever possible, they would participate, in the ongoing research programmes and enjoy access to the Centre's excellent Resource Centre and information service (arguably the best collection of higher education materials on the continent), to a relatively well established IT infrastructure, and the academic activities of the Centre, the Faculty of Education, the University and surrounding universities and agencies.

This move entails a shift from the consultancy-driven strategic Mode-2 research towards strengthening the theoretical and disciplinary foundations of policy research. In this sense, it represents a move—against the current trends—from what Burton Clark (1998) calls the development periphery of

entrepreneurial universities back towards the disciplinary heartland of the academy.

So much for the aspirational and normative goals of the new vision. The success all this depends crucially on the availability and sustainability of adequate human, organisational and financial capacity. As this paper is being finalised, a combination of factors and conditions has conspired to threaten the sustainability and organisational integrity of the Centre. While this is a long story, and one which needs some hindsight and distance to understand fully and unemotionally, for the purposes of this paper the following issues can be highlighted as lessons to be learned.

There were clear leadership and management shortcomings in managing the shift from core funding to the more competitive framework of consultancy and scholarly work. Problems were experienced especially in relation to delivery and accountability arising from the disjuncture in identity and capacity between (some) researchers who saw themselves exclusively as critical scholarly academics and would not, or could not all meet the demands of delivering as reconstructive consultants. As Badat (2004) highlights, the specialised capacity and experience required to conduct this kind of work effectively should not be assumed—even among post-doctoral researchers who have developed academic expertise in their disciplinary specialisations. These problems were overlaid by the complexities and micro-politics of 'race', gender and other identities which are particularly pointed in the South African context. The financial situation—in which more was being spent on researchers' salaries than was coming in—was exacerbated by a cash flow problem and delays in the flow of new projects. This was accompanied by financial constraints in the host University of the Western Cape which was reluctant to carry the risk of 10–15 short term contracts which

relied on 'soft' money. In all, the challenge of building the right kind of balance of critical scholarly and reconstructive policy research capacity *at the same time as* delivering on both, proved a bridge too far in the case of the CSHE. In a developing state, with a finite pool of policy-oriented researchers and constrained capacity and financial resources, it is not surprising that the CSHE and other agencies should be caught in these ambiguities regarding their role as independent critical researchers while serving the needs of the policy community through short-term consultancy.

To sum up: initially, close links were established between critical researchers and policy makers immediately after 1994 in pursuing the common purpose of constructing the new overarching policy framework for higher education. After achieving this, greater distance emerged after 1996, as new members of government adopted, operationalised and interpreted their new identities and roles in an increasingly technocratic way and as they engaged in these terms with the challenges of planning and implementation. Correspondingly, in seeking theoretical and critical perspectives on policy developments (and non-developments), researchers once again adopted a predominantly critical role and in addition forged links with other agencies in the policy community. However, the realities of resource constraints present formidable challenges to achieving the required quality, relevance and organisational sustainability of policy research centres as the experience of the CSHE at the University of the Western Cape shows.

Conclusion: The case of South Africa: what can we learn?

Notwithstanding the caveats outlined at the outset regarding the limitations of generalizations from a single case and

the importance of context in understanding the manifestations of practice in a particular national setting, it is possible to draw out some clear lessons from the South African case. South Africa's unique political history has created particular conditions which shaped the relationship between research and policy in an interesting and informative way. In the shift from apartheid to democracy, researchers were able to adopt an unusually close initial link with policy making. Amidst the subsequent aspirations to embody the fruits of that victory in a substantive form of social justice and human rights, a more distant and once again more critical stance has emerged. Given the politicized nature of the struggle, much reflexive debate has occurred in South African policy circles about this crucial issue.

Drawing together the South African experience and selections of the literature on this topic, it can be seen that it is very important not to seek to bridge the ubiquitous gap between research and policy by improving short term impact, but by shifting to a more sophisticated model which emphasizes the more diffuse, long term impact of cumulative social science scholarship. If theory is to inform policy in this way, the main lesson is to recognize the distinctiveness between discourses of theory and policy and their origins in different communities. In conclusion, taking all the analyses and evidence into account, the softer bipolar position appears to be the optimal one in understanding the best contribution of research to policy.

The South African case also illustrates problems in policy-borrowing and the rapid uptake of policy and visioning theory for essentially political purposes and without due regard for the complexities of implementation.

The central challenge and lesson is that researchers can and will pursue both

critical and reconstructive work to support policy. However, both bring particular challenges regarding the required capacities to meet policy makers' needs on the one hand and retaining the autonomy and integrity of the research process on the other.

Finally, hard lessons can be learned regarding the challenges of the institutionalization of policy research capacity in centres, in maintaining the required quality and relevance for conducting both kinds of research and in ensuring sustainability.

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EL IMPACTO DE LA
INVESTIGACIÓN
SOBRE EDUCACIÓN

SUPERIOR EN LA GESTIÓN Y MANEJO
DE LAS INSTITUCIONES Y EN EL
DESARROLLO DE POLÍTICAS
PÚBLICAS: LA EXPERIENCIA DE
PUERTO RICO¹

Por: Waldemiro Vélez Cardona y
Eduardo Aponte Hernández

Resumen

En este ensayo se destaca la necesidad de que se desarrolle y consolide una comunidad de investigadores sobre educación superior. La falta de continuidad y coordinación en los esfuerzos de investigación se destaca como un obstáculo a superar. Además se presenta un trasfondo conceptual y se recogen varias experiencias internacionales sobre la relación entre la investigación y las políticas públicas, en el contexto de la educación superior. Se divide el devenir contemporáneo de la investigación sobre educación superior en Puerto Rico en tres etapas. En el análisis de éstas se aprecia un proceso paulatino de desconexión entre la investigación sobre educación superior y las políticas públicas para este sector. Finalmente se destaca la importancia de la colaboración entre los investigadores para el desarrollo de agendas de investigación y de esfuerzos investigativos duraderos.

Palabras claves

Investigación, educación superior,
políticas públicas, Puerto Rico

¹ Ponencia presentada en el Seminario, El impacto de la investigación sobre las políticas públicas en torno a educación superior, auspiciado por el CEDESP, los días 2 y 3 de junio de 2005 en Rincón, Puerto Rico.

The influence of higher education research in the management of higher education institutions and in policy making: The experience of Puerto Rico

Abstract

This paper emphasizes the need to build up and strengthen a community of researchers on higher education. The lack of continuity and coordination of research efforts is pointed out as a hindrance to overcome. It presents a conceptual background and draws together several international experiences on the relationship between research and public policies in higher education. The contemporary research about higher education is divided into three stages. In the analysis of these stages, a gradual dissociation process between research on higher education and its influence on public policies is observed. Finally, the importance of collaboration among researchers to develop research agendas and long lasting research efforts, is highlighted.

Keywords

Research, higher education, public policy, Puerto Rico

1. Introducción

Por más de dos décadas se viene intentando gestar una comunidad de investigadores sobre educación superior en Puerto Rico. Esta gesta ha sido promovida por personas en su carácter individual, por asociaciones de docentes, por centros de investigación de la educación, por docentes desde sus puestos en la gerencia académica y por entidades gubernamentales. Uno de los más importantes propósitos ha sido desarrollar la capacidad de incidir en la toma de decisiones, tanto al nivel

institucional como al nivel de las políticas públicas relacionadas con la educación superior. La aprobación de la Ley 213 del 28 de agosto de 2003 que crea el Centro de Estudios y Documentación para la Educación Superior Puertorriqueña (CEDESP) abre la posibilidad para promover la consolidación y desarrollo de una generación de investigadores de educación superior en el país. Además, crea las condiciones para retomar diálogos continuos y fructíferos entre los investigadores, los practicantes y los procesos de formulación e implantación de política pública en la educación superior.

La creación del CEDESP es un paso importante y significativo que se consigna en un proyecto de ley intentando darle a la educación superior el lugar protagónico que tiene en el desarrollo económico, social y cultural del país en la era del conocimiento. Como parte de su encomienda, es necesario elaborar investigaciones que ayuden a dar cuenta del trasfondo histórico, las tendencias y retos que encara la educación superior, así como lo que se vislumbra para la educación superior en las posibilidades de futuro del país.

Este documento de trabajo se orienta en esa dirección, y a establecer lo que podría ser una agenda de trabajo para la investigación que adelante el desarrollo de la generación de investigadores de esta época de la educación superior del país.

Para comenzar, podemos establecer los parámetros de la agenda de investigación a seguir para orientar la gestión de coordinar los esfuerzos dirigidos a integrar el conocimiento existente con las iniciativas vigentes y la prospectiva de la educación superior.

En primer lugar, hace falta establecer el trasfondo conceptual que enmarca la problemática que nos hemos planteado investigar y que se trata de recoger en el título de este

documento. Es ineludible hacer un inventario de los debates alrededor de la temática que nos ocupa en la literatura, como también considerar lo que acontece en Puerto Rico y en otros países alrededor de la situación y futuro de la educación superior.

En segundo lugar, hay que trazar la trayectoria de los esfuerzos de investigación de la educación superior realizados en Puerto Rico en el pasado. Con este propósito, la trayectoria la dividimos en tres etapas: 1) el periodo que va de 1942 a 1966, el que está sin duda marcado por la creación y funcionamiento de la Oficina de Investigaciones Pedagógicas del Consejo Superior de Enseñanza en 1945; 2) el periodo de los años de 1966 al 1993, en gran medida influenciado por las políticas públicas sobre educación superior que se establecen en la nueva Ley universitaria (Ley 1 del 20 de enero) de 1966; 3) la etapa que comienza con la Ley 17 del 16 de junio de 1993 y se extiende hasta el presente, marcada en parte por la creación del CEDESP.

En las páginas siguientes esperamos poder justificar la selección de estos periodos con argumentos que trasciendan el ámbito legal y normativo –en cierta medida legislativo- y que se ubica en el ámbito cultural e histórico-político de la investigación sobre educación superior. Es decir, comenzamos a considerar las transformaciones por las cuales ha venido atravesando el país y el papel social que ha tenido la educación superior en la sociedad puertorriqueña.

Finalmente, presentamos algunas proyecciones para el futuro y unos atisbos de los desafíos que tenemos por delante. No hay duda de que se ha recorrido algún trecho, aunque el camino parezca de huellas en la arena que el viento borra continuamente, llevándonos a imaginar que lo estamos haciendo todo por primera vez. Por eso, uno de los objetivos de este documento es

reconstruir históricamente, una trayectoria marcada por huellas que ha requerido el caminar de muchos, pero que han iniciado los pilares del trabajo investigativo de la educación superior del futuro. Una de las cosas que más dificulta la consolidación de una generación de investigadores es la pérdida de noción histórica, ya que ésta es la que le confiere en cierta medida, identidad. Con esto en mente, retomamos el reto de esta época con el legado de quienes nos precedieron.

2. Trasfondo teórico conceptual

2.1. Conceptos y teorías relevantes

La gestión de conocimiento sobre la educación superior se concentra en la solución de problemas en la cual la investigación se da en tres niveles. En la formulación, implantación y evaluación de políticas; en el análisis de los sistemas e instituciones de educación superior; y en la evaluación y desempeño de lo que acontece en el interior de las instituciones con relación a su entorno. La investigación en ocasiones incluye la consideración de lo que sucede en los tres niveles desde diferentes perspectivas, enfoques metodológicos y técnicas de investigación.

Aquí encontramos dos elementos importantes que hay que puntualizar. Primero, la investigación sobre educación superior no es una disciplina independiente sino un campo de investigación focalizado en los objetos o temas que aborda con conocimiento interdisciplinario y diferentes propósitos. En segundo lugar, la investigación sobre educación superior es un campo de investigación para crear conocimiento aplicado de utilidad inmediata o prospectiva orientado a buscar soluciones o alternativas de acción a los problemas que enfrenta la educación superior. Esto no limita la

tarea de los investigadores en asesorar a los que toman decisiones, sino que también deben aportar con conceptualizaciones y perspectivas que arrojen luz sobre el funcionamiento de la educación superior. (Välímáa, 2000, p.247).

La investigación sobre educación superior viene siendo un área enfocada en el objeto de estudio y basada en un amplio espectro de disciplinas. La base institucional en la que opera es con frecuencia inestable y muy diversa. Aunque la investigación sobre la educación superior es reconocida públicamente, esta enfrenta problemas para establecer unas bases comunes, así como para intercambiar información o acuerdos básicos sobre los principales paradigmas –los que por lo menos se encuentran todavía muy difusos y en continuo cuestionamiento-, y su capacidad para generar conocimiento básico para garantizar unos criterios e indicadores de desarrollo conceptual y metodológico (Teichler, 1996).

Por otro lado, se argumenta que la mayor parte de los investigadores en el área de educación superior se han concentrados en “la erudición del descubrimiento”, la búsqueda del conocimiento por su valor en sí mismo y el compromiso con contribuir a los depositarios de conocimiento sobre un tema particular. Prestándole poca atención a la “erudición de su aplicación”. (Mayhew, 1995; Terenzini, 1995; Kéller, 1998, entre otros)

Terenzini afirma que hay una tendencia a que la investigación sobre educación superior permanezca distanciada de la práctica, para que pueda ser más pertinente en el desarrollo de las políticas institucionales y del estado. Sin embargo esta tendencia ubica a la investigación más cerca de las preocupaciones de tipo escolásticas, lo que lleva a la preocupación de que la investigación sobre la educación superior en una “literatura sin

audiencia". (Keller, 1985) Revertir esa tendencia e involucrarnos en investigaciones más orientadas a la práctica y al desarrollo de políticas, es por lo tanto una responsabilidad social como una necesidad de nuestros propios intereses como investigadores. Sobre todo si deseamos conseguir apoyo financiero para llevar a cabo proyectos de gran envergadura.

Por lo anterior, varios estudios revelan la preocupación por la relación que prevalece entre la investigación sobre la educación superior, las políticas y la implantación de estas. Con frecuencia esta relación dista mucho de ser la óptima y se caracteriza como distante y fragmentada. En el caso de los Estados Unidos, la tendencia es de una investigación que se da en tres instancias separadas: 1) los investigadores son aquellos que ocupan principalmente posiciones académicas en las universidades, 2) los oficiales de políticas, son los que tienen la responsabilidad de formular las políticas en el nivel estatal o nacional, y 3) los gestores son los que ocupan principalmente posiciones administrativas en las universidades (El-Khawas, 2000).

Cada una de las tres instancias tiene diferentes distintivos. La investigación en educación superior es un cuerpo de conocimientos y discursos sin unas claras fronteras o conexiones lógicas entre sí. En el caso particular de la educación superior la práctica, en un sentido más amplio, implica cualquier suceso en una institución de educación superior particular. Pero la práctica en este sentido puede ser dividida en dos conceptos: las políticas que desarrollan las instituciones y las prácticas de docencia e investigación (Kaneco, 2000).

Con relación a los que toman decisiones, esta incluye, según a los políticos y burócratas que hacen las políticas para el sistema de educación superior y a los académicos de alta

jerarquía (presidentes, rectores, vicerrectores, ejecutivos de las instituciones de educación superior, decanos y directores de departamentos) que hacen políticas para y dentro de las universidades individuales. En este sector de los directivos académicos incluye todo el personal académico dedicado a la docencia y el aprendizaje dentro de las instituciones (Hayden, 2000).

Existen diferentes concepciones de lo que implican cada una de las tres categorías o instancias que estamos describiendo, así como el ámbito de acción de cada una de ellas (investigadores, gestores y responsables de hacer las políticas). Esto, no debe sorprendernos debido a la fluidez, volatilidad y de-diferenciación características de la organización social emergente que ha desplazado al Fordismo y a la fragmentación 'post-moderna' de las formas intelectuales. Esto puesto en cuestionamiento la funcionalidad de las demarcaciones convencionales entre investigación, políticas y prácticas- no solamente en la educación superior sino en todos los dominios. Las demarcaciones entre los tres sectores mencionados están siendo continuamente erosionadas. En términos del personal y de la organización social de estos grupos, con frecuencia se dan los traslajos. Proceso de de-diferenciación actualmente en marcha que está disolviendo las identidades conceptuales y profesionales de estos grupos (Scott, 1999, 2000).

La investigación relacionada con las diferentes instancias de la educación superior se ha vuelto un territorio transgresivo, tanto regresivo como progresivo, sinuoso o flexible en lugar de lineal, ambivalente y volátil. La investigación sobre educación superior, se puede argumentar, tiene menos que perder como resultado de estos cambios que la mayoría de los campos de indagación académica –por razones negativas debido a su débil

institucionalización e insegura profesionalización; y por razones más positivas porque es inherentemente similar al modo 2 de producción de conocimientos². Esto se debe a que la investigación sobre educación superior mayormente se genera en el contexto de aplicación, siempre hay una confusión entre los actores en la investigación, algunos de los cuales no pueden identificarse como investigadores académicos; no tiene otra opción que ser intelectualmente ecléctica; siempre es un sistema distribuido (compartido) debido al pequeño número de investigadores, la colaboración se hace necesaria para producir masa crítica y por internacionalización lo que caracteriza cada vez más a la educación superior (Scott, 2000).

Utilizando como referente estas tendencias en la investigación sobre la educación superior, procederemos a presentar la trayectoria del caso de Puerto Rico en donde los traslapes y las fronteras difusas no parecen ser tan problemáticas como en otros países, pero esto puede haber comenzado a cambiar.

Identificaremos a los investigadores como aquellos que abordan temas de educación superior con cierta frecuencia y que sus publicaciones en esta área representan una parte importante de su vida intelectual y que no son algo meramente casuales. En este grupo hay algunos más preocupados que otros por las aplicaciones prácticas de sus investigaciones. Entre estos se encuentran investigadores académicos en el área de educación, consultores profesionales, investigadores institucionales, gestores en empresas o corporaciones con y sin fines de lucro. Dentro del grupo de los investigadores también podemos encontrar a otros más preocupados por producir conocimiento duradero que pueda alterar el rumbo

paradigmático de las concepciones que tenemos sobre la educación superior en general y sobre la Universidad como concepto, en particular. Aquí se destacan los investigadores académicos que se ubican en áreas de estudio diferentes a la educación, (ciencias sociales, historia, administración, filosofía, literatura, etc.)

Por su parte los dedicados al desarrollo de políticas para la educación superior se encuentran en entidades gubernamentales, como el CESP, en la legislatura y agencias públicas relacionadas a la educación (Departamento de Educación) y los recursos humanos (Departamento del Trabajo y Recursos Humanos), pero también a la distribución de fondos públicos (Hacienda y Oficina de Gerencia y Presupuesto) y al desarrollo económico de Puerto Rico (Departamento de Desarrollo Económico y Comercio y el Banco de Fomento). Además, en el ámbito institucional, aquí se ubican las Juntas de Síndicos y los organismos directivos de las instituciones de educación superior. En algunos casos, los presidentes y hasta rectores de las instituciones podrían tener un papel cercano al desarrollo de políticas institucionales.

Finalmente, tenemos a los Directivos. Por directivos nos referimos a los que tienen algún peso en la gestión de las instituciones de educación superior y no meramente a los docentes vinculados exclusiva o principalmente a las tareas de aprendizaje, investigación y servicios.

Los directivos se pueden ubicar desde la presidencia de las instituciones hasta los directores de departamentos y programas. Dependiendo de la institución, también se podrían encontrar en comités u oficinas de planificación institucional en los cuales pueden en ocasiones jugar un papel importante.

² Ver Gibbons, et. al. (1994)

A continuación se presenta un trasfondo histórico de las relaciones entre estos tres sectores.

Trasfondo y experiencias relevantes

Existe un consenso entre los estudiosos de la educación superior de que esta área de estudios se ha desarrollado muy recientemente, sobre todo si la comparamos con otras áreas del saber. En los Estados Unidos, la educación superior como campo de estudio se origina en 1893, año en el que Granville Stanley Hall (1844-1924), Presidente de Clark University, ofreció el primer curso sobre "problemas en los colegios y universidades de Estados Unidos y Europa. La gestión pionera de este directivo duró hasta 1926 (fecha de eliminación o transformación del programa), condujo a la creación del primer programa graduado especializado en el área de educación superior (Goodchild, 1996).

En Puerto Rico, por su parte el primer curso sobre educación superior se ofreció en 1983 y el primer programa de estudios sobre esta área comenzó como una sub-especialidad del Postgrado en Educación de la Universidad de Puerto Rico del Recinto de Río Piedras creado en 1981. Cabe notar que desde hace una década se están haciendo esfuerzos para el desarrollo de un programa doctoral en educación superior, adscrito a la facultad de educación, en el Recinto de Río Piedras de la Universidad de Puerto Rico. Hasta donde sabemos éste se encuentra bajo evaluación en el Decanato de Estudios Graduados e Investigación y todavía no ha llegado al Comité de Asuntos Académicos del Senado Académico, para su consideración. Este proceso hace improbable que este se apruebe durante este año.

El primer programa de postgrado en educación superior fue el Programa de Maestría en Artes (MA) en Administración de Instituciones

Educativas Postsecundaria, de la Universidad Interamericana, el que fue autorizado para operar el 9 de diciembre de 1992 (Certificación 93-065, del Consejo de Educación Superior). En el 1999 se le autorizó un cambio de nombre a Maestría en Artes en Gerencia de Instituciones Postsecundarias (Certificación 99-147, del CESPR).

En los Estados Unidos, uno de los primeros libros que se publicó sobre la educación superior fue el *University Problems in the United States*, del Presidente de Johns Hopkins University, Daniel Coit Gilman, en 1908. Por su parte el presidente de Harvard, reflejando sus 39 años como presidente de, Charles W. Eliot publicó en 1908 su libro, *University Administration*. afirma que en los Estados Unidos, nos encontramos con por lo menos cuatro tradiciones de investigación sobre educación superior distintas, cada una con su propia afiliación institucional y espiritual: 1) las oficinas de investigación institucional, 2) los programas académicos y los centros de investigación sobre educación superior, 3) las organizaciones sin fines de lucro dedicadas a la investigación sobre políticas, y 4) las agencias del gobierno estatal y federal (Fairweather, 2000). Un desarrollo similar a este ocurre en Puerto Rico como veremos más adelante.

Es importante destacar como la investigación sobre educación superior fue cambiando significativamente a lo largo de todo el pasado siglo. De 1920 a los 1950's, la investigación era muy limitada y estaba fuertemente atada a la gestión directiva. La mayoría de los profesores en educación superior tenían un fuerte vínculo con la administración. Para los 1950's, la dialéctica de teoría vs. práctica fue emergiendo. Investigadores con valores disciplinarios entraron al campo de la educación superior. Desde los 1960's, se fue desarrollando una tensión entre

la visión de la educación superior como un campo profesional y el desarrollo desde la perspectiva de que esta debía considerarse como conocimiento de una disciplina de estudio. Por lo tanto, la práctica de investigar la educación superior como profesión está cambiando continuamente, con insuficiente diálogo acerca de los asuntos y temas que constituyen lo que debe apropiadamente investigarse. (Kezar, 2000).

Según Scott (2000, pp. 123-124), se puede apreciar que entre mediados de los 1960's y mediados de los 1980's había una fuerte correspondencia entre los investigadores, y los encargados de hacer las políticas y los practicantes de la educación superior³. Sólo en la pasada década se ha abierto una enorme brecha entre éstos.

Al tratar de proveer una explicación de estas tendencias, podemos considerar lo siguiente: 1) el campo de la investigación sobre educación superior se abre y luego se cierra (se profesionaliza la gestión de este conocimiento), 2) la naturaleza de la investigación sobre políticas experimenta un giro sustancial -la investigación 'desinteresada' llevada que se hace en periodos de tiempo más largos, con agendas abiertas y basadas en los valores y prácticas intelectuales (reflexivas y críticas) se han hecho menos aceptables para los decisores y los recursos disponibles. 3) las investigaciones por encargo para solucionar problemas a corto plazo, similares a las consultorías gerenciales empresariales, se han hecho más necesarias e influyentes para los decisores.

Los temas más importantes relacionados con la educación superior que han sido objeto de investigación

en las últimas décadas han sido los siguientes: 1) la relación entre la inversión en educación y el crecimiento económico son los temas claves de principios de los años 1960's, 2) la relación entre la expansión educativa y la igualdad de oportunidades se convirtió en un asunto principal muy pronto, 3) con variadas fuerzas en diferentes países, los asuntos de diversificación institucional, los nuevos patrones de toma de decisiones y los nuevos acercamientos a los currículos, métodos de enseñanza, guías o consejería, etc. (Teichler, 1998) Estas tendencias vinieron acompañadas o seguidas muy de cerca por las protestas estudiantiles de finales de los 1960's con el agravante de las preocupaciones relacionadas con los crecientes problemas para obtener empleo que experimentan los graduados, vinculadas a la revisión periódica de los currículos (pertinencia). Esto se relaciona estrechamente los talentos, motivaciones y perspectivas de unas carreras profesionales cada vez más cambiantes, lo que inquietaba a un número creciente de estudiantes, era el asunto más importante para la educación superior de mediados de los 1970's y principios de los 1980's, 5) el gobierno y la gestión de la educación superior, combinado con los esfuerzos por evaluar y mejorar la calidad, emergen como asuntos claves de la educación superior a partir de los 1980's y continúan siendo ser objeto de debate durante los 1990's como también al comenzar el siglo XXI.

En los países de América Latina y en Puerto Rico, la educación superior como objeto de investigación representa un campo de estudio que se ha ido desarrollando paulatinamente, con alzas y bajas, durante las últimas tres décadas. Emerge como acompañante de la gran expansión de la educación superior a partir de los años 1960's, pero no ha tenido el mismo grado de desarrollo en

³ Tal vez esa fuerte correspondencia pueda apreciarse en Puerto Rico entre 1946 y 1976, más o menos.

los países de la región. (García Guadilla, 2000)

El sentido de crisis que ha venido acompañando a la expansión de la educación superior por todo el mundo, ha sido uno de los factores más determinantes para estimular el desarrollo e institucionalización de la investigación sobre educación superior en Europa. (Teichler, 1996).

Lo que diferencia a América Latina y el Caribe de Europa y Estados Unidos y Canadá, es que, además de las tres esferas señaladas para el caso de los países avanzados, en la región existe también la presencia de organismos regionales e internacionales que si bien facilitan el desarrollo de las bases institucionales de la investigación en educación superior, no necesariamente contribuyen a una vinculación más efectiva entre las esferas de investigación y de toma de decisiones.

La vertiente de análisis político sobre educación superior en la región, estuvo fundamentalmente dirigida –en la década de los noventa- al problema de la “evaluación” como política pública, y ha estado financiada por organismos internacionales y nacionales. La perspectiva de la teoría organizacional se ha asociado a los directivos y gestores académicos, así como a algunos investigadores. (García Guadilla, 2000b)

En América Latina encontramos notables diferencias entre unos países y otros. Por ejemplo, tenemos a países como Venezuela, Brasil y México que comenzaron a crear programas de postgrado en educación desde los setenta, mientras otros países como Bolivia y Argentina lo hicieron durante la década de los noventa. Solamente algunos postgrados tienen orientación interdisciplinaria, como son los de Dirección y Gestión Universitaria, pero que no están adscritos a ninguna Facultad en particular.

También en la región se puede apreciar, en términos generales, como

las reformas en la educación superior fueron implantadas sin la contribución de la información y el conocimiento que se deriva de la investigación. Básicamente esto respondió a dos factores: 1) bajo nivel de institucionalización de este tipo de investigación en la mayoría de los países de la región, y 2) limitación de apoyo institucional- la mayoría de la investigación llevada a cabo respondía a las necesidades y factores que se relacionaban con agendas anteriores de los problemas de la educación superior, es decir, eran poco impactantes.

La exigua investigación sobre educación superior que se llevó a cabo en América Latina en los 1960's fue directamente estimulada por los cambios en las estrategias de desarrollo implantadas en la Región. Sin embargo, en los 1970's y 1980's la investigación fue separada de la toma de decisiones. Al principio de los 1990's, y particularmente desde que el nuevo discurso sobre la reestructuración de la educación superior caló en la Región, los que toman las decisiones enfrentan una nueva demanda por investigación, no sólo del gobierno sino también de los propios directivos que toman las decisiones en las instituciones de educación superior.

En Canadá, el desarrollo de la educación superior como un campo de investigación estuvo estrechamente vinculado a la expansión que experimentó la educación superior durante el periodo de la post-guerra. La investigación jugó un papel importante tanto en convencer a los gobiernos de que la expansión de la infraestructura de la educación superior era una apropiada respuesta de política pública, como en las discusiones sobre como responder a los retos de dicha expansión industrial que siguió la segunda guerra mundial y mas tarde, con el final de la guerra fría (Jones, 2000).

Los líderes universitarios canadienses están cada vez más conscientes de la necesidad de fortalecer su capacidad de planificar y manejar los asuntos institucionales. La necesidad de disponer de información para apoyar la toma de decisiones del gobierno y las instituciones creó los fundamentos para el desarrollo de la educación superior como campo de estudio. En esta dirección, en 1970 se crea la Sociedad Canadiense para el Estudio de la Educación Superior. Ésta fue fundada por las redes informales de individuos que compartían un interés común en la investigación sobre educación superior, incluyendo tanto a los investigadores como a los interesados en los resultados de las investigaciones. Esta nueva sociedad rápidamente creó un Journal académico con revisión de pares, el *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, seguido de una tradición de conferencias anuales.

En el caso de Japón, la aceptación de la educación superior como una apropiada área de estudio académico se ha visto rezagada con respecto a las disciplinas académicas relacionadas como la sociología, la historia y la educación. Algunas veces, este campo es considerado como un área menor, aún cuando esté exitosamente institucionalizado. Sin embargo, algunas importantes y excelentes unidades o centros basadas en las universidades han sido creadas para estudiar la educación superior (Arimoto, 2000). Además, se van creando otras entidades relacionadas a nuestro campo de estudio. El 1 de abril de 1996 se crea la Asociación Nacional de Institutos de Investigación sobre Educación Superior y el 19 de Julio de 1997 se crea la Asociación Japonesa de Investigación sobre Educación Superior (JAHER).

Aunque Japón todavía está subdesarrollado en términos de la institucionalización de la investigación sobre educación superior, también

piensa que el esfuerzo reciente para establecer varias asociaciones académicas en el campo de la ES y la organización de instituciones individuales, en sí misma sugiere que está comenzado un 'boom' en la investigación sobre educación superior. En ese contexto, la cooperación y el re-modelaje de los centros institucionales establecidos así como las asociaciones académicas están creando gradualmente una red de investigación sobre educación superior a través de la nación nipona (Arimoto, 2000).

En Australia, tal como destaca Hayden (2000, p.81), lo que une a la comunidad de investigadores sobre educación superior es el interés compartido por los aspectos relacionados con las políticas para la educación superior, una identificación compartida con el cuerpo de literatura establecido en las dimensiones social, económica y política de la educación superior, y compartida por las redes de comunicación para informar los resultados y el intercambio de ideas (Hayden, 2000). En general, en Australia, los resultados de la comunidad de investigadores sobre políticas es de mayor interés y relevancia para la comunidad de los que hacen las políticas que para los directivos.

La relación entre los investigadores sobre políticas en la educación superior y los que hacen las políticas al nivel institucional está menos desarrollada, ya que muchas universidades emplean oficiales de investigación para generar y analizar los datos relacionados con las políticas. Mientras que la relación entre los que investigan sobre las políticas y los que las hacen sigue siendo fuerte, por lo menos al nivel de sistema, esta se ve dificultada por algunos asuntos importantes. Un problema es que mucha de la investigación comisionada por la comunidad que hace las políticas es estrecha en su foco y debe ser

completada muy rápidamente. Esto, 2.3. es un problema común a un gran número de países (Hayden, 2000).

En Holanda se da una modalidad que se denomina 'mutua institucionalización.' Allí se inauguró una de las unidades de investigación sobre educación superior más importantes en todo el mundo, el Centro para el Estudio de las Políticas relativas a la Educación Superior (CHEPS). Esta iniciativa fue posible porque el ministro de la época, un académico muy vinculado con las políticas académicas, deseaba desarrollar nuevas perspectivas sobre la educación superior en el país (Kogan & Henkel, 2000).

En Finlandia se expresa la preocupación sobre los problemas prácticos y académicos relacionados con el hecho de que no existen plazas permanentes para profesores en el área de la educación superior. Esto refuerza grandemente el carácter no estructurado de este campo de estudio y dificulta el conseguir apoyo institucional para el desarrollo de programas de estudio en este campo (Välímää, 2000).

Con frecuencia se afirma que el modelo Europeo de investigación sobre educación superior se enfoca mayormente en asuntos de política, teniendo los problemas contextuales presentes. Por su parte se señala que el modelo norteamericano tiene su principal en la práctica o en los asuntos institucionales, mientras que el caso de Australia puede verse como un híbrido entre los dos anteriores. (Scott, 2000). Podría extenderse la consideración de tendencias en el ámbito internacional, pero ahora lo que procede, para el propósito de este trabajo es presentar cuales son las características sobresalientes entre los tres niveles de la investigación y las relaciones entre las tres esferas de gestión de conocimiento.

La relación entre investigación, políticas públicas y gestión en la educación superior

La investigación sobre educación superior, al igual que muchas áreas de investigación, giran alrededor de temas situacionales, más que de disciplinas, está caracterizada por un estrecho vínculo entre la investigación y la solución de problemas prácticos. Podemos notar un alto grado de identidad o similitud en los temas discutidos en público y los que son investigados en el área de educación superior. Actualmente, la investigación establecida al interior de las instituciones de educación superior no puede ser tomada en cuenta como si fuera un subproducto de la docencia-investigación en dicho campo, ya que depende más bien del reconocimiento público de la importancia de los temas y problemas a tratar (Teichler, 1996).

El avance de la investigación sobre educación superior viene siendo un área de estudio enfocada en el objeto de estudio y basada en un amplio espectro de disciplinas. La base institucional es con frecuencia inestable y obviamente también muy diversa. Varias características del campo, notablemente la borrosa distinción entre los académicos y los practicantes reflexivos, contribuyen a una enorme tensión. Aunque la investigación sobre educación superior disfruta de una sustancial atención pública, esta enfrenta considerables problemas para establecer bases comunes, así como para intercambiar información o acuerdos básicos sobre los principales paradigmas, y conocimiento básico para garantizar unos estándares mínimos de calidad conceptual y metodológica (Goodchild et. al, 1997).

Algunos debates acerca del objeto de la investigación sobre educación superior coinciden en cuanto al exceso de "practicantes no-

reflexivos" –políticos, oficiales estatales, rectores, profesores que le dan prioridad a sus experiencias y a su conocimiento anecdótico, en lugar de a la investigación sistemática guiada por metodologías desarrolladas para esos propósitos. La investigación de corto plazo estilo consultorías por 'expertos' ha sido la manera dominante de investigación sobre educación superior en muchos países. Este es el tipo de investigaciones que favorecen los que están vinculados a la formulación de las políticas y su implantación. Las consecuencias son que se auspician investigaciones reduccionistas y hasta miopes sobre la educación superior. Primordialmente porque se pierde el contexto y se superan las dificultades de definición (y consecuentemente de interpretación) que se han ido acumulando.

No se puede negar que la investigación sobre educación superior se ha venido preocupando en el desarrollo de los sistemas, la rendición de cuentas públicas, las intervenciones del mercado, y otras manifestaciones de la "masificación" de la educación superior. Tales investigaciones con frecuencia se concentran en la llamada "vida pública" de la educación superior (asuntos de estructura y gobierno, financiamiento y gestión) a expensas de su "vida interna" del aprendizaje y la enseñanza, la ciencia y la erudición. (Scott, 2000)

Los directivos, por su parte, (como los líderes universitarios) en los Estados Unidos, han organizado unidades institucionales de investigación al interior de las instituciones. Estas unidades de investigación han tenido una sobrecarga de trabajo, debido a los requisitos de informes con gran cantidad de datos, que ha sido impuesta por las agencias del gobierno y otras entidades externas, pero también por la tendencia en las instituciones de llevar a cabo una planificación y auto evaluación más sistemática. Unidades de investigación

institucional que pueden ser ofrecer análisis sobre como la institución está usando sus fondos, qué patrones de progreso y tiempo de terminación se encuentran en diferentes grupos de estudiantes, etc. Sin embargo, estas instituciones usualmente proveen a los directivos de estadísticas gerenciales, pero no investigaciones de naturaleza profunda, y la mayoría de esas investigaciones se limitan a analizar el desempeño de la institución, sus empleados y estudiantes. En cierto sentido podría decirse que son insularistas (El-Khawass, 2000).

En el caso de los responsables de desarrollar las políticas de educación superior, estos desean respuestas rápidas a preguntas complejas y en ocasiones consideran 'privilegiadamente' las alternativas relacionadas con las políticas tanto por consideraciones políticas eleccionarias, particularmente en periodos de gran actividad política partidista o de proyección de intereses de carreras profesionales (como también se da en ocasiones en el caso de Puerto Rico).

En los estudios sobre educación superior se encuentran varios tipos de razones que se utilizan para explicar el distanciamiento entre las tres esferas que se han presentado en esta sección; relacionadas con la investigación, a las políticas y a las prácticas. Tres de las más comunes son las siguientes: 1) se considera que los investigadores sobre educación superior están atendiendo los temas y prioridades equivocadas, 2) los proyectos de investigación, se alega, tardan demasiado tiempo en completarse, por lo que pierden su efectividad con relación a la implantación de las políticas, 3) los investigadores son acusados de usar lenguajes 'interiores' dirigidos a la academia en lugar de lenguajes exteriores dirigidos a las políticas –sus informes son inaccesibles o intangibles para otras audiencias. (Scott, 2000).

No cabe duda de que es fundamental crear mecanismo y espacios de encuentro para propiciar una mejor comunicación y colaboración entre estas tres esferas o niveles. Si queremos potenciar las sinergias que sin duda pueden salir de unas relaciones más estrechas entre los tres sectores, y recuperar mucho del conocimiento tácito que tienen los directivos e investigadores institucionales, no debemos escatimar esfuerzos para crear esos espacios de encuentro y trabajo conjunto. Ese ha sido uno de los retos que hemos tenido en Puerto Rico y que, como veremos en la próxima sección, los hemos encarado con mayor o menor éxito en diferentes momentos históricos.

3.0 Investigación sobre la educación superior en Puerto Rico

3.1. El periodo que va entre 1942 y 1966

En esta sección del ensayo presentamos algún recuento de la trayectoria, tendencias y problemas de la investigación sobre educación superior. Esto en relación con las políticas en torno al sector y a la gestión que hacen las instituciones de educación superior.

Previo al periodo de 1942 al 1966 algunos de los importantes esfuerzos de investigación que se habían realizado sobre periodos la educación en el país y la educación superior de aquellos tiempos. Por sólo mencionar dos de los más conocidos haremos referencia, en primer lugar al monumental estudio que publicó Juan José Osuna en 1923, por vía de la propia Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, cuyo título es *A History of Education in Puerto Rico*. Este libro, el que estaba dividido en cuatro secciones, dedica una de ellas al estudio de la educación superior en Puerto Rico.

En segundo lugar, es importante destacar el estudio que realizara un ex rector de la UPR,

Thomas Elliot Benner, titulado *Five Years of Foundation Building. The University of Puerto Rico 1924-1929*. Como aquí no pretendemos dar cuenta de todas las investigaciones que se han realizado sobre la educación superior puertorriqueña, nos limitamos a mencionar esos dos importantes estudios que constipen una antesala obligada a consultar en la investigación del origen y la trayectoria de la educación general y superior del país.

El 7 de marzo de 1942 la asamblea legislativa de Puerto Rico aprobó una nueva ley universitaria por medio de la cual se creaba el Consejo Superior de Enseñanza (CSE), como junta de gobierno de la UPR, eliminándose así la anterior Junta de Síndicos. Esta Ley le asignaba al Consejo la función de, entre otras cosas, realizar estudios sobre la situación y problemas educativos en Puerto Rico y divulgarlos, sobre todo al Departamento de Instrucción Pública. (Sección 4).

Para cumplir a cabalidad con la mencionada encomienda el consejo creó el 1ro de enero de 1945 una división denominada, Oficina de Investigaciones Pedagógicas. Inicialmente esa Oficina dividió los problemas a estudiar en tres áreas (CSE, 1956, p. 2): 1) el analfabetismo y la educación de adultos, 2) el arte del lenguaje en la escuela elemental, y, 3) los logros escolásticos en la universidad.

Como habrá podido apreciarse las investigaciones propiamente sobre educación superior representaban sólo una parte de los trabajos de la mencionada oficina. Aún así se realizaron investigaciones de gran alcance y calidad sobre este sector. Algunos de los ejemplos que se pueden mencionar fueron los estudios sobre el aprovechamiento académico en la UPR (CSE, 1965). En la tabla que sigue, se presentan algunos de los estudios realizados durante este periodo.

Tabla 1.

Título	Año
<i>Estudio de los índices académicos de escuela superior como criterio de admisión a la Universidad</i>	1970
<i>Investigaciones sobre el aprovechamiento académico universitario</i>	1971
<i>Informe sobre varios aspectos del aprovechamiento académico en algunos colegios universitarios de 1939 a 1947</i>	1972
<i>Análisis de la matrícula universitaria y sus proyecciones en el futuro</i>	1975
<i>Recursos humanos con preparación universitaria</i>	1978
<i>Estudio del sistema educativo</i>	1961
<i>La educación universitaria: lujo o necesidad</i>	1965

Es pertinente destacar que, de los tres periodos en consideración, sólo en el primero de estos se hacen unos esfuerzos explícitos y abarcadores para recoger y evaluar el trabajo de investigación que se estaba realizando. Como parte de ese esfuerzo se publican dos libros. El primero se tituló *A Decade of Research at the Office of the Council of Higher Education (1956)* y el segundo *Dos décadas de investigaciones pedagógicas*. A estos se suma un estudio preliminar en medio de los dos volúmenes titulado *Labores de Investigación Pedagógica del Consejo Superior de Enseñanza*. Todos ellos son coordinados por su secretario permanente, Ismael Rodríguez Bou.

En estas publicaciones se analiza la trayectoria, las tendencias y los problemas de la investigación educativa que realizaba el CSE. Además se resumen las investigaciones y se apunta hacia problemas que comienzan a asomarse en la educación superior puertorriqueña. Proyecto de esta

envergadura, no se ha vuelto a realizar desde entonces.

Es importante destacar que la década del 1960 comienza con la publicación de uno de los estudios más

importantes que se han hecho en Puerto Rico sobre el sistema educativo⁴. Este estudio, en su segundo volumen, capítulo 21, presenta un exhaustivo análisis de Las Instituciones de Nivel Universitario en Puerto Rico. Cabe mencionar que dicho estudio surge de una iniciativa legislativa de la Hon. Comisión de Instrucción de la Cámara de Representantes y le fue encomendado a la División de Investigaciones Pedagógicas del CSE.

Como parte de este trabajo (de las páginas 2,083 a 2,091) se discute la necesidad de una nueva ley universitaria y se presenta un Proyecto de Ley a tales efectos. He aquí una característica importante de las primeras etapas que estamos evaluando. Como parte de los estudios se presentaban propuestas de acción legislativa, que llegaban a incluir proyectos para nuevas leyes.

Se puede apreciar, en este periodo, una estrecha relación entre los investigadores, a los que se le comisionan importantes secciones del estudio, la asamblea legislativa, consciente de su necesidad de investigaciones profundas; y la entidad que gestionaba el funcionamiento de la UPR, en este caso, el Consejo Superior de Enseñanza. Algo similar ocurre en el siguiente periodo (de 1966 a 1993), pero este ya no es el caso en el último periodo (de 1993 hasta el presente).

Para sintetizar por el momento, parece que en el primer periodo analizado aquí, se puede percibir una relativamente estrecha relación entre los investigadores –tanto independientes como los adscritos al CSE–, los que formulan las políticas de

⁴ Rodríguez Bou, I. (Dir.) (1961). *Estudio del Sistema Educativo*, 2 Vol. Barcelona: Ediciones Rumbos.

investigación y el seguimiento de estas por los directivos. Es importante destacar que muchos de los escritos más importantes de ese periodo provienen de autores que ocupan importantes puestos en la estructura administrativa de la Universidad de Puerto Rico. Bastaría con sólo mencionar, por ahora, a Jaime Benítez y Ángel Quintero Alfaro.

La tendencia parece ser que según fue pasando el tiempo, esa relación fue paulatinamente perdiendo terreno, hasta llegar a donde nos encontramos actualmente. Durante este periodo las políticas en la educación al igual que las del desarrollo económico estaban enfocadas hacia la transformación de Puerto Rico (comprehensive nation building approach) que luego se reducía a la administración del proceso durante las próximas décadas.

3.2. El periodo que va entre 1966 y 1993

No existe información integrada para este periodo, como era el caso con relación al anterior, pero se encuentran algunos cambios significativos que revelan tendencias importantes. En primer lugar, es importante destacar que, tan pronto comenzó a operar el Consejo de Educación Superior⁵ encomendó dos importantes estudios a una firma de consultores con sede en los Estados Unidos. Nos referimos a Heald, Hobson and Associates. El primero de los estudios fue publicado en 1967 y se tituló "The University of Puerto Rico. Its Present, and Future Development. El segundo fue publicado en 1968 con el título Partners for Puerto Rico. A Survey of Private Higher Education

Con lo anterior podemos comenzar a apreciar la relativa pérdida

⁵ Entidad que sustituye al Consejo Superior de Enseñanza, producto de la nueva Ley universitaria, Ley 1 del 20 de enero de 1966.

de importancia de la estructura investigativa interna del Consejo y su mayor dependencia de consultores externos⁶. En este periodo no aparecen libros o documentos que recojan y evalúen las investigaciones realizadas o auspiciadas por el CES, a diferencia de lo que se había hecho anteriormente.

Sin embargo, en este periodo se realizaron numerosas investigaciones sobre la educación superior. En la tabla 2 presentamos una muestra de ellas.

Tabla 2.

Título	Año
<i>Informe "Study of Student Financial Aid in Higher Education in PR" (Kirpatrick) Ciudad Modelo</i>	1971
<i>Higher Education Facilities Comprehensive Planning Study – Fiscal Year 1972-73</i>	1973
<i>Guías para el desarrollo de la educación superior en PR</i>	1973
<i>Informe Plan maestro educación superior en Puerto Rico, Dr. Lyman A. Glenn</i>	1969
<i>The UPR its present and future development, Heald, Hobson and Associates</i>	1967
<i>Opciones para el Desarrollo de la educación superior en Puerto Rico Instituto de Investigación de la Vice Presidencia Académica de la UIAPR</i>	1986
<i>Informe sobre el financiamiento de la educación superior</i>	1989
<i>Guías para el desarrollo de la educación</i>	1973

⁶ Como dato "curioso" se podría mencionar que para el estudio de 1967 se presupuestaron originalmente \$20,000 y se cantidad se incrementó a más del doble, \$43,500 (¡de 1967!), antes de que se completara el informe originalmente \$20,000 y se cantidad se incrementó a más del doble, \$43,500 (¡de 1967!), antes de que se completara el informe.

<i>superior</i>	su parte la Asociación de Colegios y
<i>Informe final sobre educación postsecundaria en Puerto Rico, Comisión Estatal de Educación Postsecundaria en PR</i>	1977 Universidades Privadas (ACUP) fue fundada en 1984 y la Asociación de Presidentes de Universidades de Puerto Rico hizo lo propio en 1970.
<i>Partners for PR: a Survey of Private Higher Education, Heald, Hobson and Associates</i>	1968 Sería muy valioso que se pasara juicio sobre la trayectoria y aportaciones de estas organizaciones y

De las investigaciones mencionadas en la tabla anterior, dos de estas merecen atención especial. En primer lugar las Guías para el Desarrollo de la Educación Superior en Puerto Rico, realizada por el Grupo de Trabajo de Planificación Integral del CES y publicado en marzo de 1973. En este estudio se recomienda la creación de una comisión coordinadora para la educación superior en Puerto Rico. Como parte de ese estudio se incluyen propuestas concretas de acción legislativa, incluyendo un Proyecto de Ley.

El segundo estudio es el Informe Final sobre Educación Post-secundaria en Puerto Rico, el que fuera publicado en marzo de 1977 por la Comisión Estatal de Educación Post-secundaria en Puerto Rico, como parte de los trabajos de la Comisión sobre Reforma Educativa. Esta última también parte de una iniciativa legislativa. Este excelente trabajo fue posible gracias a la relación que existía entre los que desarrollaban políticas (los legisladores), investigadores locales reconocidos y las entidades gestoras de la educación en Puerto Rico.

En la parte final de este periodo se comenzaron a hacer intentos para crear espacios de diálogo entre las tres esferas. Entre estos se puede destacar la creación de la Asociación Puertorriqueña de Educación Superior (APUES) a mediados de los 1980's, la fundación de la Asociación de Investigadores institucionales, vinculada a la Association for Institutional Research (AIR) en los Estados Unidos, allá para el 1986. Por

otros esfuerzos similares por crear una cultura de investigación y diálogo –una comunidad de aprendizaje- entre los distintos sectores preocupados por la educación superior.

En resumen, en esta etapa podemos apreciar la reducción de la capacidad investigativa interna del CES, y la creciente dependencia en consultores externos. Aún así, todavía se puede apreciar una importante relación entre las tres esferas bajo consideración en este documento. En la sección que sigue se enumeran algunos de los esfuerzos más recientes.

3.3.

La promoción del desarrollo de la educación superior a partir del 1993

Esta tercera etapa, a pesar de ser la más corta (cerca de 12 años) y la menos documentada todavía; revela importantes tendencias y esfuerzos más o menos concertados para cerrar la brecha que venía abriéndose entre las tres esferas que nos ocupan. En la tabla 3 se pueden encontrar algunas de las publicaciones más destacadas de este periodo.

Tabla 3.

Título
<i>Análisis de los Programas de Asistencia Económica para Estudios Universitarios, CESPR</i>
<i>Encuentro Intersectorial sobre las Relaciones Academia,</i>

CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS Y DOCUMENTACIÓN SOBRE LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR PUERTORRIQUEÑA

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<i>Gobierno y Empresa, CESPR</i>	publicado en el 2000. La importancia de este estudio reside en que convocó y reunió a más de 20 estudiosos, distribuidos en tres grupos: (1) Políticas,
<i>Aprendizaje con tecnología—Congreso Virtual, UPR</i>	2004
<i>La educación superior en Puerto Rico, CESPR</i>	(2) Saberes (3) Procesos Educativos. Tras meses de discusión, un Comité coordinado por representantes de cada grupo elaboró el documento final que incluye un análisis de la situación de la educación superior con recomendaciones de acción para el desarrollo de las instituciones del país.
<i>Educación superior en Puerto Rico: hacia una futuro – Documento Base, CESPR</i>	2003
<i>Sobre lo universitario y la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Rafael Aragunde</i>	1996
<i>Características seleccionadas de los bachilleratos de las instituciones de educación superior de Puerto Rico, Carmen Zoraida Claudio</i>	2000
<i>El financiamiento de la educación en Puerto Rico, Waldemiro Vélez Cardona</i>	2002
<i>La transformación de la educación superior en Puerto Rico, Comisión de Educación, Ciencia y Cultura del Senado de Puerto Rico</i>	2001

De entre éstas se destacan en primer lugar, La transformación de la educación superior en Puerto Rico, que es el informe del estudio que la R. del S. 44 le ordenara a la Comisión de Educación, Ciencia y Cultura del Senado de Puerto Rico. Este fue publicado a finales del 2001. A diferencia de los dos siguientes estudios realizados por iniciativa legislativa en los dos periodos antes estudiados, este último fue realizado en su totalidad por el personal del Comisión recogiendo los resultados de las vistas públicas que celebrara. Es decir, no se le encomiendan secciones del Informe a reputados investigadores en esta área. Además, y a diferencia también de los dos mencionados anteriormente. Cada uno en cada periodo revisado, este informe no presenta un proyecto de ley. Dicho proyecto se presentó por separado, meses más tarde. Ambas diferencias podrían ser el reflejo entre las tres esferas que veníamos apuntando anteriormente.

En segundo lugar nos parece que amerita resaltar el documento de política pública que elaborara el CESPR, con la ayuda de un nutrido grupo de estudiosos sobre la educación superior, Educación Superior en Puerto Rico: Hacia una Visión de Futuro – Documento Base,

En tercer lugar, el año pasado (2004), se publicó el informe La Educación Superior en Puerto Rico, producto de una iniciativa del Instituto Internacional para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe (IESALC). El interés del IESALC era tener informes nacionales sobre la educación superior en América Latina y el caribe. Para elaborar este informe el CESPR reclutó a un grupo de investigadores sobre la Educación Superior y les comisionó las diferentes partes que comprendía el estudio, que iba desde los actores principales de la educación superior hasta las nuevas tecnologías, incluyendo el financiamiento y la investigación.

Tal vez no se encuentre en Puerto Rico otra investigación que reúna tantas áreas de estudio. Ahora nos corresponde ampliar cada área y actualizar ese estudio por lo menos cada cinco años.

Durante este último periodo también se publicaron dos libros de investigadores particulares (Aragunde, 1996 y Vélez Cardona, 2002) que fueron discutidos con gran acogida por la comunidad de estudiosos de la educación superior en Puerto Rico. El primero estimuló los trabajos que condujeron al Documento Base, mencionado anteriormente.

También durante este último periodo se han dado pasos para tener una publicación frecuente que sirva de foro de debate en torno a los problemas de la educación superior. Con eso en mente, surge el CHES

News en 1996, el que en el 2000 se convirtió en el Boletín CES PR, publicándose periódicamente en la actualidad.

Investigadores independientes con el apoyo de la UPR en Cayey, ha creado Los Fascículos de Educación Superior, como un espacio para publicar análisis de actualidad y reseñar libros sobre educación superior. Los Fascículos llevan dos números, uno en el 2002 y el otro en el 2004.

Además de esto, la Asociación Puertorriqueña de Profesores Universitarios (APPU), ha convocado a la comunidad de estudios de la educación superior a dos Congresos de Investigación sobre la Universidad, uno en el 2001 y el otro en el 2004. La intención de la Asociación es realizar un Congreso cada dos años y publicar las memorias en forma de libro, como hizo con el Congreso de 2001, y están en proceso de publicar las memorias del Congreso del 2004.

No cabe duda que lo más significativo de este último periodo lo ha sido la creación del Centro de Estudios y Documentación para la Educación Superior Puertorriqueña, (CEDESP), al amparo de la ley 213 del 28 de agosto de 2003. Dicho Centro surge del consenso cada más amplio de la comunidad de ES de que la investigación en el proceso de obtener información y conocimientos que sean capaces de fundamentar tanto las políticas públicas como la gestión de las IES. En ese sentido resulta crucial propiciar una cultura investigativa que permita realizar diagnósticos continuamente y proponer nuevas ideas para atender los problemas y situaciones con las que se enfrenta o puede enfrentarse en el futuro, la educación superior en Puerto Rico.

La propia ley que crea el CEDESP, en su exposición de motivos, reconoce que, *es necesario ampliar esa base [de indicadores] para poder integrar plenamente a Puerto Rico a los esfuerzos de documentación e*

investigación comparativa que realizan organismos internacionales y otros centros educativos en y fuera de nuestro país. Este acopio de información estadística y desarrollo de nuevos indicadores permitirá la conducción de estudios efectivos sobre los procesos de nuestra educación superior y la formulación de una política pública vigorosa e integrada hacia este sector.

No cabe duda de que la legislación que crea el CEDESP pretende fundamentar las políticas públicas hacia el sector de la educación superior en investigaciones profundas, así como en estadísticas comparativas de los que podamos obtener referentes más amplios y experiencias de los que aprender. Este proceso está comenzando y alienta tanto esperanzas como incertidumbres. Todavía la separación entre las tres esferas es compleja y difícil de superar sin una acción concertada entre los diferentes sectores.

En Puerto Rico, los practicantes de alta jerarquía, como presidentes, síndicos, etc., parecen pensar que sus experiencias y conocimientos son suficientes a la hora de tomar decisiones. Por eso tal vez prestan poca atención a las investigaciones sobre educación superior y rara vez asisten a conferencias, charlas y conversatorios, entre otros, sobre el tema. Esto no parece ser una característica exclusiva de Puerto Rico, ya que, como afirma Teichler (1996, p. 437), el tamaño y fortaleza de la investigación sobre educación superior en un país determinado depende más fuertemente de la manera en que los administradores, ven el potencial de la investigación en educación superior en comparación con sus propios conocimientos provenientes de su práctica.

Esa parece ser una característica importante de esta última etapa que estamos analizando. Ahora los practicantes de alta

jerarquía, por la creciente complejidad de nuestras IES y por otras razones que no viene al caso discutir aquí, no tienen tiempo para investigar y escribir sobre la situación de las universidades, como fuera el caso en la primera etapa. Por eso, como hemos afirmado, se dejan llevar por sus experiencias y por su intuición a la hora de tomar decisiones. Tal vez sea muy frecuente que éstas no estén fundamentadas en investigaciones comprensivas sobre la situación de su propia institución, y mucho menos sobre la situación de la educación superior en Puerto Rico o en el ámbito regional y global. Esta situación esperamos que pueda cambiar en un futuro muy cercano.

4. Conclusiones y perspectivas futuras

En Puerto Rico, apenas estamos retomando el proceso de institucionalización de la investigación sobre educación superior. Es preciso, enfatizar en el desarrollo de sistemas de conocimiento más sistemáticos y estables para entender los procesos de cambio de las IES y su relación con la sociedad. La existencia de instituciones específicamente dedicadas a la investigación sobre educación, como es el caso del CEDESP, viene siendo un factor importante en la legitimidad y profesionalización de este tipo de investigación. (García Guadilla, 2000a, p. 118). Además, el inicio del programa doctoral en educación superior, sobre todo por que se propone como un PhD, que actualmente se está evaluando en el Recinto de Río Piedras de la UPR, será de enorme importancia para el desarrollo de investigadores y la institucionalización de la investigación misma.

Debemos ser muy conscientes, como nos alerta El-Khawas (2000b), de que la institucionalización de la investigación superior, aún siendo un paso de enorme importancia, no es

suficiente. Para que esta pueda incidir decisivamente en el desarrollo de políticas para el sector es necesario que las tres esferas (problemas, políticas (policy) y política) converjan. Según ella cuando un problema es reconocido como serio y requiere una nueva solución; cuando la comunidad de los que hacen las políticas desarrollan una solución financiera y técnicamente aceptable; y cuando los líderes políticos encuentran que les conviene aprobarlas, es cuando finalmente se aprueban las nuevas políticas para la educación superior. Los diferentes elementos e intereses deben estar juntos si es que van a emerger nuevas políticas.

Para lograr esta convergencia se le puede solicitar a los investigadores académicos, tal como sugiere Maassen (1998), posiblemente con la ayuda del CEDESP y de otras instancias públicas y privadas, que participen de foros públicos, que produzcan resúmenes anuales de la situación de la educación superior específicamente dirigidos a los legisladores. El desarrollo de estos espacios de encuentro, con carácter recurrente y con algún nivel de institucionalización, es cada vez más importante en Puerto Rico.

Para lograr lo anterior podría ser muy valioso que los investigadores sean capaces de modificar el proceso investigativo para integrar plenamente las perspectivas de los practicantes. Esto será beneficioso de varias maneras: 1) los practicantes van a estar más dispuestos a usar investigaciones en las que ellos de alguna manera han participado (más allá de grupos focales), 2) la propia investigación es más capaz de recoger las preocupaciones de los practicantes, 3) los practicantes se hacen más conscientes de las investigaciones, su participación sirve como para aumentar su conciencia, 4) envolver a los practicantes desmitifica el proceso de investigación y hace los resultados más accesibles; tiene, además, el

potencial de despertar a los practicantes a la posibilidad de que la investigación legítimamente atienda sus preocupaciones, cerrando así cualquier brecha que se halla percibido. Este proceso también sirve para educar a los investigadores proveyéndoles de un conocimiento muy valioso producto de la experiencia, de la que ellos algunas veces están bastante separados. (Kezar, 2000, pp. 445-446).

Los practicantes y los investigadores deben trabajar de manera colaborativa en "think tanks" (laboratorio de ideas). Estos pueden servir para estimular a los practicantes para que reflexionen sobre su práctica, lean investigaciones y literatura, y para que interactúen con los investigadores. Por su parte los investigadores pueden aprender acerca de los problemas en la práctica y desarrollar agendas y preguntas de investigación, así como obtener retroalimentación de su trabajo y ofrecer ideas para mejorar las prácticas. (Kezar, 2000, p. 467).

La mayor aportación que pueden hacer los investigadores, tanto a los encargados del desarrollo de las políticas, como a los propios practicantes, es elaborar estudios con los que se puedan anticipar las tendencias venideras y los cambios que se avecinan en un futuro cercano, pero que todavía no son objeto de discusión en los debates públicos. Por su visión más amplia y contextualizada los investigadores deben ser de gran ayuda para ubicar la educación superior de Puerto Rico en un contexto global, de más largo plazo. Para lograr esto más efectivamente hacen falta muchos Seminarios como éste, en donde convergen los principales estudiosos del tema al nivel mundial y podamos ubicar la situación de nuestro país en un ámbito mucho más amplio. Además, nos permitiría evaluar las estrategias que se han utilizado, con mayor o menos éxito, en otros países,

para así ubicar las estrategias que nosotros estamos utilizando.

Desde hace algún tiempo, y este Seminario es fiel testigo de esto, hemos venido propiciando el que el campo de estudios de la educación superior sea visto como una comunidad de aprendizaje en la que se integren todos los actores (investigadores, practicantes y responsables de hacer políticas). Debemos realizar cada vez más actividades (seminarios, talleres, conferencias, mesas redondas) en las que se involucre a todos los actores y se produzcan significativas sinergias. Ese fue el caso del Encuentro Universidad-Gobierno-Empresa, que auspiciara el CESPR en febrero de 2003. Debemos ser muy creativos e innovadores y buscar las maneras de que puedan converger personas que están extremadamente ocupadas en sus respectivas labores y que con frecuencia no entienden que le sacarán mucho provecho a las actividades a las que se les convoca.

No cabe duda de que la institucionalización de la investigación sobre educación superior es un paso necesario pero no suficiente. El entendimiento, la colaboración y los diálogos fecundos entre los tres sectores sigue siendo uno de los retos más importantes que encontramos en la educación superior puertorriqueña. Hacia eso hemos vuelto a dar pasos en los últimos años. Ahora lo importante es que las semillas sembradas puedan ir germinando, producto de nuestro cuidado y atenciones, para que no se pueda decir en el futuro, como se ha dicho en los Estados Unidos en varias ocasiones, que tenemos un "árbol sin frutos" (Keller, 1985).