Using 'reflexive modernisation' to understand cross-sectoral collaboration in Britain and Australia:

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Abstract
This paper applies John Field's analysis of the learning society, lifelong learning, reflexive modernisation and 'permanently learning subjects' to an analysis of the relationship between the sectors of tertiary education in Australia and the UK. It suggests this will provide new insights into understanding sectoral relations, which go beyond analyses that focus on entrenched sectoral differences, and may suggest new research agendas that seek to build inclusive lifelong learning frameworks.

Introduction

This paper is an exploratory attempt to apply John Field's analysis of the learning society, lifelong learning, reflexive modernisation and 'permanently learning subjects' to an analysis of the relationship between the sectors of tertiary education in Australia and the UK (vocational education and training and higher education in Australia, and further education and higher education in the UK respectively).

This paper cannot, in the limits available, comprehensively explore the relationships between the sectors, and much of this work has been undertaken elsewhere (see Sommerlad *et al.*, 1998; Schoemaker, *et al.*, 2000; Wheelahan, 2000; Osborne *et al.*, 2002; Parry and Thompson, 2002). I take it as a given that the historical evolution of the sectors and the way each positions itself in relation to the other in responding to the challenge of lifelong learning and near universal levels of participation in tertiary education is fundamental to shaping their approach to collaboration and the development of partnerships.

However, the concept of reflexive modernisation has not, to my knowledge, been applied to an analysis of the relationship between the sectors of tertiary education. I think that this can provide some useful insights into many of the challenges that the sectors in the UK and Australia confront in navigating new partnerships to meet the changing needs of learners, and their communities. Through the dialogue that hopefully ensues, I hope that we can identify a collaborative research framework to explore these issues further.

The significance of this issue is that partnerships between the FE and HE sectors in the UK and the VET and HE sectors in Australia are seen by government, policy makers and researchers as a key enabling mechanism for lifelong learning policy. The problem is that the learning society and lifelong learning are contested concepts (Tight, 1998; Coffield, 1999; Field, 2002), with the consequence that conflict arising from historically derived sectoral turf wars are confounded by, and in large measure a surrogate for, broader conflicts over the nature and purpose of lifelong learning, the extent to which this is subordinated to economic imperatives, and the broader role of education and training in citizenship formation.

This paper first contextualises the relationship between the sectors within the broad policy objectives sought by government. I then consider the way in which learning has been transformed in response to globalisation, the learning society and 'reflexive modernisation'. This is followed by an analysis of the consequence of deregulatory market reform in the UK and Australia, and the implications of this analysis for the relationship between the sectors is then discussed.

Pathways as the key to lifelong learning

The historical division between the sectors based on a separation between academic and vocational education and training is under pressure as a consequence of the cultural, economic and social transformations driven by globalisation, and underpinned by 'the knowledge economy, and reflexive individualism,' or the need for individuals to become 'permanently learning subjects' (Field, 2002: 33). While the learning society and lifelong learning are contested concepts, lifelong learning is enshrined in government policy frameworks, and is the rationale driving reforms to qualifications frameworks (Young, 2001). The aims of these reforms are:

- 'To encourage people to see qualifying as a process that starts in initial education and training and continues throughout their adult lives;
- To improve opportunities for mobility and progression between different types of qualifications (especially general and vocational) and between qualifications for different occupational sectors; and
- To encourage formal learning, to promote links between it and informal learning and to improve opportunities for people to use their informal learning to gain recognised qualifications' (Young, 2001: 4).

Government policy has focussed on developing pathways between and within sectors, particularly to and from general (or academic) to vocational education and training (Raffe, 1998). The relationship between the sectors is crucial to the success or failure of these policies, because cross-sectoral partnerships and institutions contribute to *mediating* (more or less successfully) access to pathways and to lifelong learning. Yet the relationship between the sectors is fraught, and the sectoral boundaries firmly entrenched and resistant to government policy which seeks to build bridges between them.

The transformation of learning and the implications for cross-sectoral collaboration

The transformation of education and training from elite systems to mass and near universal systems has been driven by globalisation, the knowledge economy, and the accelerating pace of technological, social, economic and cultural change (Field, 2002). The now common arguments for this proposition include: fluid markets and the rapid pace of technological change means that individuals will change jobs and occupations throughout their working lives; and, this means that individuals need to engage with learning throughout their life, and to develop process oriented problem solving and learning to learn skills rather than task-focussed skills. Less often, arguments are made that individuals need to engage in engage in tertiary education to acquire the attributes needed to participate effectively as citizens (Wheelahan, 2002).

These changes reflect the fact that the 'economic and social divisions of labour on which tracked systems' were based are being undermined and that post-compulsory education and training systems 'must meet a wider and more complex range of demands, which cannot be met by tracks which serve distinctive purposes and clienteles' (Raffe and Howieson, 1998). As well as blurring the traditional distinctions between the sectors, mass participation in tertiary education also implies a profound and far-reaching transformation of *all* aspects of education: how students enter tertiary education; learning modes (full-time, part-time, on-campus, off-campus, e-learning, etc); the experiences students have while studying; the outcomes they achieve; and, how they engage with lifelong learning.

The range of students in tertiary education is now much wider. Their levels of preparation for study differ, as does their expertise in achieving learning outcomes. Their learning styles and their cultural

frames of reference differ. The outcomes they seek are equally diverse. Student-centred and inclusive approaches to recruiting students and structuring learning must now underpin tertiary education if their learning needs are to be met. The implications of this analysis are that students should be able to craft learning pathways drawing on offerings from both sectors that reflect their learning needs, and personal and vocational aspirations. In turn, this has implications for the nature of provision and qualifications: 'Rather than identifying the institutional context and programme in which teaching has taken place, there is a need for qualifications that reflect the learning gain that has taken place' (Field, 2002). In other words, the *institution* in which the learning occurred is less significant than hitherto, which is a difficult proposition to implement, as most formal learning still occurs within an institutional framework, with all the concomitant institutional (and sectoral) interests at stake.

The convergence of general (or academic) and vocational education, mass and near universal levels of participation in tertiary education, the expectation that learners will participate in formal and informal learning for the rest of their lives, and the diversity of learners and the outcomes they seek have all contributed to blurring the divide between the tertiary education sectors in the UK and in Australia. In part, the resistance to developing frameworks that merge the sectors and what they do is a response of the need for each to position themselves in relation to the other, and to mark and defend territory.

However, I argue that this only tells part of the story, as education and training has been transformed in more fundamental ways than that suggested by the above. Two related processes have also placed pressure on the divide between FE and HE in the UK and between VET and HE in Australia, and on the curriculum models in each: reflexive modernisation (Field, 2002) and consumer sovereign models of citizenship – or the market model of citizenship (Macpherson, 1962).

Reflexive modernisation
Field (2002: 35) suggests that a society characterised by reflexive modernisation is also a learning society, and that this describes the society in which we live. Reflexive modernisation refers to a society in which all areas of life 'from the most public of interactions and formal of institutions to the most intimate and informal, tradition and habit are less and less reliable as guides to what we face tomorrow' (Field, 2001: 100). However, there is nothing intrinsic about this that necessarily implies a utopia *or* a dystopia:

> A learning society is not necessarily either a pleasant, an efficient nor an egalitarian place; on the contrary, it may well generate even more deeply-rooted inequalities than we have yet seen….Its key features are surely that the majority of its citizens have become 'permanently learning subjects', and that their performance as adult learners is at least in part responsible for determining their life chances. (Field, 2002: 38)

Indeed, one of the features of reflexive modernisation (and potential benefits and drawbacks that ensue) is the uneven impact of these processes on the population, affecting different social classes and groups of learners in ways that empower some, and disempower others (Field, 2002: 63-64).

Field (2002) argues that late modernity is characterised by individualising tendencies which are both the result and cause of:
- the decline of tradition and authority associated with it;
- the responsibility on the part of the individual to invest 'wisely' in their own skill development and the social approbation accorded those who do not; and,
- the 'growing fluidity [of] adult identities' which is 'accompanied by an increasing tendency for certainties to be replaced by provisional knowledge' (Field, 2002: 65).

I argue that the processes of institutionalised reflexivity and individualising tendencies are linked with, though not reducible to, deregulatory market reforms in, and the ensuing reasassertion of consumer sovereign models of citizenship in, developed nations, but particularly Anglophone nations. While globalisation and market reforms are often regarded as synonmous, they are not the same, as

'…many of the phenomena that are often seen as aspects of globalisation are in fact the result of deliberate policies aimed at deregulating markets' (Field, 2002: 19). This means that the form in which reflexive modernisation is expressed is in part shaped by government policy, and is consequently, not immune from reforms to policy frameworks.

The consumer sovereign model of citizenship

The neo-liberal discourse which has underpinned government reforms in the Anglophone nations since the 1970s (Priestley, 2002) has transformed the relationship of individuals to the state, and hence the role played by education and training in citizenship formation (Wheelahan, 2002). Social provision, defined as those rights previously regarded as the social rights of citizenship including much education and training, has been privatised, and market-like mechanisms introduced. The relation between the individual and education and training is now a market-like relation, as is the relationships between providers and between sectors. Moreover, the individualising tendencies of globalisation combined with deregulatory market reforms means that access to and participation in education and training has replaced welfare as the insurance against social risk. Increasingly access to welfare is contingent on willingness to work, and willingness to undertake formal education and training to acquire the skills needed for work (Mounier, 2001). Mounier (2001: 27) explains that 'At the end of the day education by itself has replaced all other provisions of social protection.'

While market based reforms have been applied to universities as well as to the vocational education and training sectors in both the UK and Australia, these reforms have been driven furtherest in the FE and VET sectors in each country respectively, in part as a consequence of the autonomy afforded universities historically in both countries. In the FE and VET sectors reforms have created an education and training market, but also a model of curriculum (competency-based training) which was designed to 'maximise the transparency and portability of credentials and skills, facilitating market development' (Marginson, 1997: 211). Market behaviours were to be instilled in individuals through the curriculum, which was reshaped to be aligned with employer requirements, not just in terms of specific skills, but in shaping world view of its 'products' (students) (Marginson, 1997; Wheelahan, 2002).

The impact on sectoral collaboration

This is the context then that shapes the relationship between the sectors in both countries: globalising and individualising tendencies have been invested with particular content as a consequence of deregulatory market reforms. The result is that participation in education and training takes on an element of compulsion and an instrumentalist focus, both of which place pressure on the nature of provision in tertiary education, and ensuing debates within and between sectors about the purpose of lifelong learning.

This results in contradictory pressures on collaboration between the sectors. The pressure of reflexivity requires systems and institutions of education and training to create and develop pathways within sectors and across sectors to create tailored 'products' for 'clients', while the logic of markets means they are competitors. This is evident when institutions in both sectors are competing for students in the context of low demand – competition for students puts a brake on collaboration (Wheelahan, 2000; Parry and Thompson, 2002).

The pathways framework is pursued by government, but little attention is paid to the competing discourses that this produces. Much is expected of these pathways – they are required to be coherent and relevant, meet individual needs and employer needs, be chunked (or modularised) in discrete curriculum components which are countable and stackable, and act as a ladder for progression.

Yet researchers in both countries report that articulation from sector to another is problematic (Osborne *et al.,* 2000; Watt and Paterson, 2000; Wheelahan, 2001). In part this is to do with established sectoral interests: the powerful, elite universities are subject to less pressure at the sectoral interface, and less inclined as a consequence to participate in facilitating movement of

students between the sectors. The newer universities which have higher percentages of mature age students are most likely to engage in partnerships with the FE/VET sectors in each country.

The newer universities are subject to similar pressures as are the FE and VET sectors in each country, as both overlap in the types of learners they attract, the needs they are trying to meet, and the challenges they face. The curriculum tensions of education for citizenship versus education for work, breadth versus depth, just-in-time learning versus deep learning, competency-based versus curriculum driven frameworks, and multiple credentialled entry and exits versus sequenced and integrated courses without punctuated exits are all indicative of the challenge of pervasive institutional reflexivity, and the pressure on institutions to reform their offerings and curriculum and to develop appropriate partnerships to underpin these arrangements. These issues do not necessarily arise from the sectoral divide; rather they are given *expression* in the sectoral divide, but derive from the broader pressures associated with reflexive modernisation, and the particular content with which this has been invested as a consequence of the reassertion of market models of citizenship as the goal of education and training systems. It is for this reason why I think the approach outlined by Field has value in understanding the challenges and dilemmas which arise from the sectoral divide in our two countries.

Conclusion

The similarities between the UK and Australia are extensive. Australia has, owing to its origins as a Commonwealth nation, historically drawn much from the UK, and both countries have (as have the other Anglophone countries) in the last 30 years followed similar processes of neo-liberal market reform (Priestley, 2002). Our systems make sense to each other. Other key similarities are also evident: the systems of tertiary education in both countries are diverse, reflecting the differences among the four nations in the UK, and among the states in Australia's federated structure of government. There are, however, important differences, reflecting the different historical evolution of tertiary education, and we can learn much from each other as both countries attempt to build open, diverse systems of tertiary education that are able to sustain learning societies predicated on reflexive modernisation. The FE sector provides a substantial level of short-cycle HE provision, while in Australia the focus has been on creating institutional links between the sectors. Both countries seem to be embarking on greater integration between the sectors in *both* provision and in institutional arrangements. I suggest that Field's analysis of the learning society and reflexive modernisation will help us to research and understand those tensions that oare inherent in the separate historical development of the sectors in each country, and those that arise from the competing, diverse, and often contradictory consequences of reflexive modernisation as the sectors in both countries engage with this and with each other.

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