

Book Review

Unterhalter, E. & Carpentier, V. ed. (2010). *Global Inequalities and Higher Education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

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This is a timely book which considers how Higher Education has exacerbated inequalities between countries and cultural groups. The chapter authors, who have a breadth of experience in Africa, Asia, the UK and USA, provide authoritative and interesting perspectives and it is to the publisher's credit that the book contains almost no typographical errors. Some initiatives within Higher Education are designed reduce these inequalities, but these are presented as exemplars. The book's clarion call is not for movement in any specific direction, but rather for élite Higher Education institutions to pay greater consideration to their global impact and the consequences that it might have to both developing countries and themselves.

The book's premise is that financial constraints in the developed world, exacerbated by the momentous economic changes in 2008, have lead élite universities to become more dependent on private funding as their assets decline in value. National trends and government policies, which operate on longer timescales than financial markets, have meant that meeting funding shortfalls from home students or research and development funding is problematic; hence overseas students are seen as an increasingly important income source. This emphasis placed on overseas students has been further fuelled by developments in communication technology and ease of travel for both staff and students. At face value this seems a reasonable approach to funding, but it does have unintended consequences which are the focus of the book. Such consequences to developing countries are that rising fees restrict entry to only the most wealthy and mobile of their citizens. Members of indigenous groups and, in some cultures, female students who might benefit from Higher Education have ever more restrictive access leading to their further marginalisation. There is also the potential for lack of alignment between "standardised" course curricula and the needs of developing countries as universities strive to deliver courses in the most cost-effective manner. At their worst overseas courses can become those which dump low quality knowledge rather than stimulating lifelong contextualised

learning and professional identities within developing countries and may become institutionalised with Education being about learning something that someone else considers important. As students leave their "territories" in order to participate, Higher Education becomes simply the production of highly skilled human resources able to operate within the paradigms of a developed country.

From the universities' perspective academic freedom attracts knowledgeable and insightful individuals to élite universities, but such freedom may further compound the situation in that it leads to academics teaching in the same way as they have always taught rather than embracing changes in delivery of their material to benefit alternative audiences of which they have limited experience. The book also considers what level of distraction is acceptable for academics from producing high quality research in order to develop globalisation. This is particularly relevant since the reputation of élite universities, and hence their attraction to international students, is based largely on their research output.

Overall, the book purports that the real benefits of the globalisation of Higher Education are being lost by this desire for financial gain. It asks how globalisation can lead to transformational changes rather than just information transfer and how such transformational changes can occur both within the universities and their "customers". It questions the straightjacket of (Ivy) league tables which judge universities using common criteria and hence forces them towards homogeneity. Indeed, is the institution the correct unit on which to judge the quality of the Higher Education provider? Should élite universities be considered élite in all disciplines? These are questions posed and considered in the latter section of this thought-provoking book. Two quotations from the text illustrate these dilemmas.

"Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted (Albert Einstein)" p117.

"As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature (UNESCO, 2001)" p206

I recommend this book as useful reading for all academics and university managers involved in teaching international students.