The Marketization of English Higher Education and the Sustainability Agenda: contradictions, synergies and the future of Education for Sustainability

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Doctoral Research

- Critically examines the development of sustainability and ESD agendas in English HE over the last 10 years, specifically in relation to the backdrop of increasing marketisation, managerialism and competition within the sector

- Ideological/Theoretical relationship + Practical/‘On the ground’ relationship
- Challenges/Contradictions + Synergies/Opportunities
- Whole sector view of sustainability and ESD

- How has this relationship influenced the pursuit, practise and development of sustainability and ESD agendas?
The Marketisation of English Higher Education

**Neoliberalism** and **New Public Management**

- **Neoliberalism**: economic liberalization (fewer government restrictions on economy), free trade, open markets, decentralization, non-interventionist state, privatization of public services, decrease in the welfare role played by the state.

- **New Public Management (NPM)**: discourses of management derived from the private for-profit sector, used in public services, in the quest to modernize, reduce spending costs, and improve efficiency, effectiveness and excellence.
Characteristics of Neoliberalism and NPM in English HE

- More competitive, fiscally-focused, business-like
- Focus on outputs, efficiency, value for money, strategic planning
- Proliferation of accountability, quality assurance, audit processes, league tables
- Competition between HEIs for governmental research funds (RAE/REF)
- Competition for students between HEIs
- Increases in student fees
- Vice-Chancellors like CEOs from the business world
- Competitive, individualistic environments, less genuine collegiality
Critique of Neoliberal Transformation

- Antithetical to the purpose and responsibilities of higher education
- Changing purpose, values and mission of HE
- HE criticised for upholding neoliberal ethos
- Private vs. public service
- Trade offs with social, environmental, ethical, democratic and anti-corporate values
- Necessary to survive in current climate?
- Do institutions have the choice to opt out?
Education for the sustainability ‘good’ within the neoliberal university - paradox or possibility?

“There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world”

Shaull 2000, Foreword in Paulo Freire’s, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 30th Anniversary Edition

**Critical Pedagogy**
- Strongly champion seeking alternatives to the neoliberalizing university
- Overtly political and critical of the status quo
- Challenge us to rethink universities as radically democratic social and political institutions

**Sustainability Education**
- Transformative ESD requires radical and fundamental educational change
- Beyond ‘integrating’, ‘embedding’, ‘mainstreaming’ or ‘institutionalising’ ESD
- Whole systems, paradigm changing responses
Research Thoughts/Questions...

- Is sustainability education within the neoliberal university a paradox?
- Is ESD fundamentally entrenched in neoliberal discourse?
- By working within the neoliberal system, are we unwittingly continuing to support it?
- Do we need to re-think universities as radically democratic, social and political institutions?
- What about all of the positive and innovative ESD progress being made within the neoliberal system?
- Are we contradicting ourselves if we say that nothing meaningful can be achieved within our existing system?
- Are we failing to celebrate all of the great work going on?
- Are we being overly ideological and not practical and rational enough about the nature of educational change?
1) Tuition fee increases, student number controls, student consumers, employability, students as the new ‘champions’ of sustainability

2) Managerialist quality assurance and ESD

3) The impact of quality-related research funding (RAE/REF) on interdisciplinary sustainability and ESD research

4) League tables, the Green League, the NSS

How do we best progress ESD agendas over the next 10 years given the increasing marketisation of HE in England?
Thank You
Questions?

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