

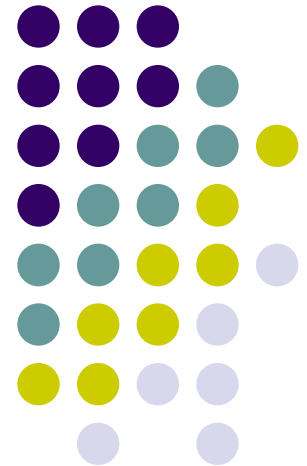
Rethinking Tertiary Education

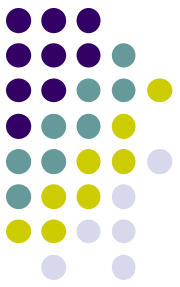
PETER ROBERTS

University of Canterbury

Herbison Lecture, NZARE conference

Hamilton, November 2012





Introduction

- Mihi
- Acknowledgements
- Jean Herbison and tertiary education in Christchurch
- Overview:
 - A short history of neoliberalism and tertiary education reform in New Zealand, 1984-2008
 - Contemporary policy: the *Tertiary Education Strategy, 2010-15*
 - A critique and an alternative

From Muldoonism to Rogernomics



- Pre-1984: Nine years under National, with Muldoon as Prime Minister. Idiosyncratic interventionism.
- The election of the fourth Labour government, 1984. Led by David Lange, with Roger Douglas as Minister of Finance
- Beginnings of a multifaceted process of neoliberal reform
- Douglas (1993) on the politics of change:
 - Quantum leaps
 - Great speed
 - Don't allow interest groups to mobilise

Economic restructuring



- Deregulation
- Abandonment of price controls
- Removal of producer subsidies
- Reduction in tariff levels
- Floating of currency
- Inflation targeting via independent Reserve Bank
- Corporatisation of public sector and government trading activities
- Beginnings of state assets sales programme
(Easton, 1994; Rosenberg, 2010)

Reforming the social sector, 1990-1999



- National returned to power
- Cemented economic reforms and turned attention to social sector: health, education and welfare
- Cuts to benefits
- Market rates for state housing rents
- Hospitals became Crown Health Enterprises
- ‘User pays’
- Consulting and contracting out
- Performance indicators
- ‘Efficiency’ and ‘accountability’

The marketisation of tertiary education



- The market as the model for tertiary education
- Students recast as consumers
- Key principles: ‘choice’ and competition
- Knowledge:
 - Conflated with skills and information
 - Came to be seen as a commodity (Lyotard, 1984)
- Gaining a tertiary qualification seen as a form of private benefit; students expected to pay an increasing proportion of the costs associated with their education
- Student loans; growth of debt mountain

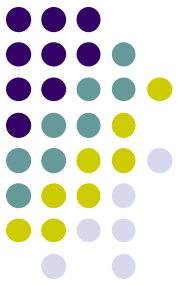


- Managerialist practices from the world of business seen as appropriate for tertiary education
- Changes in systems of governance within institutions
- Cultures of performativity and accountability
- The Tertiary Education Review: Green and White Papers (Ministry of Education, 1997, 1998)
- Incentives for the further privatisation of tertiary education
- Proliferation of tertiary education organisations and qualifications (Olssen, 2002; Peters & Roberts, 1999)

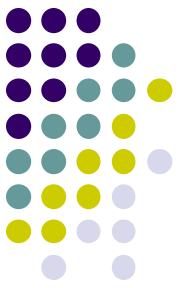
The 'Third Way' era, 1999-2008



- Formation of Labour-Alliance coalition government, 1999
- Sense of some hope
- Some significant positive signs:
 - Establishment of Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC)
 - Involved a number of senior, experienced people from the sector
 - Paid more attention to research
 - Four reports (TEAC, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c) much more thorough than anything produced under the Tertiary Education Review process
- Some of the excesses of the 'more market' 1990s reduced. Less emphasis on 'choice, choice and more choice'.



- Influenced by Blair's New Labour in the UK, developed an approach to 'Third Way' politics in the NZ context
- Key motif: Contribution of tertiary education to building a 'knowledge society and economy'
- Creation of a 'shared vision' for tertiary education. Renewed role for government in shaping and steering the system
- Stronger expressed commitment to Māori and Pacific learners
- Some moves to promote greater cooperation and collaboration in research (e.g., via Centres of Research Excellence)

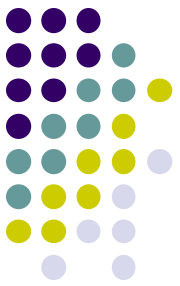


- Release of *Tertiary Education Strategy 2002/07* (Ministry of Education, 2002) and *Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-12* (Ministry of Education, 2006)
- Aspects of neoliberal reform process initiated in the 1990s pushed even further in the Third Way era
- Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) created a more competitive, instrumentalist, individualistic approach to research (Codd, 2006; Harvey, 2010; Middleton, 2005; Roberts, 2006, 2007; Smith & Jesson, 2005; Smith & Johnston, 2010)
- Emphasis on marketing and ‘branding’ continued
- Commodification of knowledge pushed in new directions



Understanding the reforms

- No *one* neoliberalism
- Neoliberalism as it evolved in NZ in the 1980s and 1990s blended aspects of:
 - Agency Theory
 - Public Choice Theory
 - Human Capital Theory
 - Transaction Cost Economics
 - Monetarism(Olssen, 2002)
- The ontological heart of neoliberalism during this period: *homo economicus* (Peters & Marshall, 1996) – the rational, self-interested, choosing individual consumer



- Corporatisation, marketisation and privatisation – an incomplete project
- The Third Way: neoliberalism with a softer, human face? (Codd, 2001; Jessop, 2006)
- From 1999 to 2008, the social element of the ‘knowledge society and economy’ ideal remained underdeveloped; economic imperatives continued to dominate (Roberts & Codd, 2010; Roberts & Peters, 2008)
- Reforms in New Zealand part of a broader set of global changes

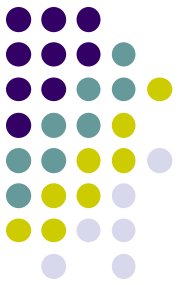
Current policy directions



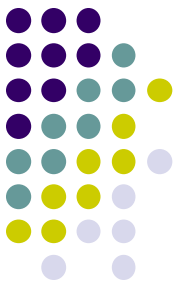
- Key policy document: *Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-15* (Ministry of Education, 2009)
- Overarching education vision:
 - The Government's vision is for a world-leading education system that equips all New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st century. A world-leading education system is an important first step toward a productive and growing economy that delivers greater prosperity, security and opportunity for all New Zealanders (p. 6).
- Tertiary education needs to be 'relevant' and 'efficient', with 'high quality' qualifications that meet the needs of students, their families and the economy (pp. 6, 13)



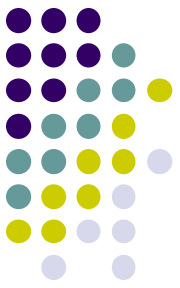
- Global economic downturn means tertiary education organisations will have to do more with less
- Government will:
 - Target priority groups
 - Seek improvements in the performance of the tertiary education system
 - Strengthen the contribution research makes to innovation and economic productivity (p. 10).
- Tertiary institutions will have to develop other revenue streams, and become more responsive to the demands of students, employers and industry (pp. 10, 13, 18)



- If the performance of the sector is to improve it will be necessary to:
 - enhance quality assurance
 - provide better incentives for providers to respond to students and market signals, by:
 - making provider-level performance information publicly available
 - linking funding more closely to performance
 - support and encourage student performance
 - strengthen collaboration and shared resources for greater efficiency
 - continue to build international linkages. (p. 14)



- Government adopting long-term view of its investment in research
- Under PBRF, improvements in the quality of research and number of research degree completions have been made (p. 16)
- Good teaching should be informed by research, in both ‘academic’ and ‘applied’ settings (p. 7)
- Research is also crucial in stimulating innovation and driving economic growth: allows knowledge to be taken up for commercial use and applied in addressing social and environmental problems (p. 7)

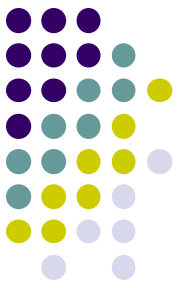


- Tertiary institutions will ‘need to work more closely with business to ensure that research meets the needs of the economy’ (p. 7)
- Government expects ‘the entire sector to supply skills that are relevant to the labour market. Tertiary providers need to make better connections with industry and ensure they are aware of the likely demand for skills’ (p. 18)
- Links between universities, firms and other research institutions (e.g., Crown research institutes) need to be enhanced. Research in universities should combine ‘excellence with impact’ (p. 16)

Troubling thoughts



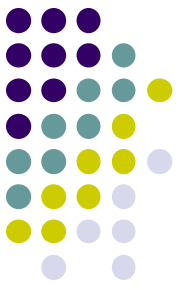
- Links with conference theme in evaluating current policy:
 - Leading? Perhaps, but in an excessively narrow way
 - Inspiring? Not for everyone, but inspiration comes in many forms
 - Innovative? References to innovation not hard to find, but arguably little that is innovative in the language and substance of the *Tertiary Education Strategy*
- Depressing sameness in policy documents of this kind (not just current *Strategy*, and not just within New Zealand)
- Attractive in a visual sense but ‘lifeless’ in other respects
- The ‘human’ element of policy seems to have largely disappeared



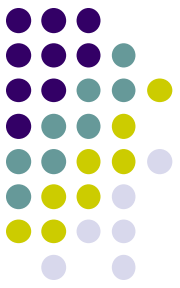
- Need it be this way? Perhaps expecting too much, or making a kind of genre mistake. And perhaps what really matters is not the text but the way policy is enacted in tertiary education settings by teachers, students and administrators.
- But there are examples of policy thinking that offer an alternative approach: e.g., the *Māori Tertiary Education Framework* (Māori Tertiary Reference Group, 2003) – talk of advancement, yes, but in a broader sense and with an explicit grounding in a distinctive worldview



- Policy does not determine practice in precise detail but it does set parameters within which decisions can be made and actions taken
- Emphasis in recent policy is very much on the economic dimensions of tertiary education, in at least three senses:
 - Costs of funding the system are stressed
 - Wider context for reform conceived principally in economic terms
 - Primary goals for, and benefits of, tertiary education seen as economic in nature
- Views in *Strategy* reinforced by subsequent government statements and by decisions made and actions taken by ministers and officials

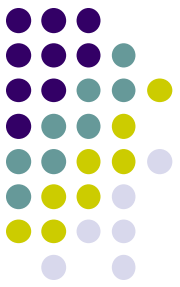


- First and main claim of Tertiary Education Commission in its briefing to incoming Minister in December 2011: ‘tertiary education is a key contributor to our economic future’. Realising this vision ‘will require ambition and stronger steering’ (TEC, pp. 1, 3)
- Government appears to have needed little convincing on this point – consider, for example, Minister Steven Joyce’s recent call for the University of Auckland to increase the number of engineering students:
 - ‘If they want us to be more directive, I’m more than willing ... I’m watching them really closely to make sure they do respond to what the market wants, and if they don’t, I can go and tell them how many they should enrol for each department.’ (cited by the Tertiary Education Union, 2012).

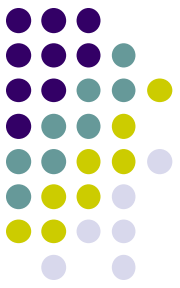


- Emphasis on economic advancement now so marked that policy makers and politicians appear to run out of words when trying to say anything else meaningful about tertiary education
- In the *Strategy* comments on the wider benefits of tertiary education largely confined to one section of an Appendix on ‘Context and Trends’
- Locked into a language of ‘performance’, ‘relevance’, ‘efficiency’, and ‘accountability’
- Not merely words at stake here but also structures, practices, and modes of thought and being

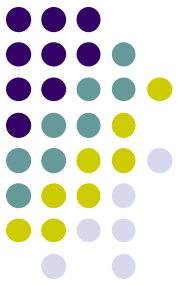
Teaching, learning and critical citizenship



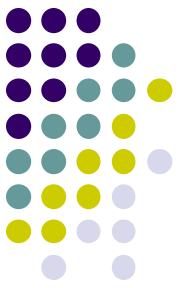
- Economic perspective important but not enough on its own; also need to examine the role tertiary education plays in shaping us as citizens
- Questions of an ontological, epistemological, ethical, and political kind are significant:
 - What does it mean to be a human being?
 - How can we understand the nature of reality?
 - What is 'knowledge' and how do we come to know?
 - What ought we to do? How should we live? How should we structure our society?
 - What are the impediments to the realisation of our ideals?
 - How can tertiary education contribute to the formation of the human being, the development of knowledge and knowers, and the pursuit of social ideals?



- These questions find implied answers in contemporary policy but they are seldom addressed overtly or at length
- Is there a model of the ideal citizen in contemporary tertiary education policy?
- Adopting a more holistic, humanising approach
- Changing the language of tertiary education, in policy discourse and as lived
- A process of contestation and struggle; no one best way to resist (or to comply)
- The difficulty of analysing changes while swept up in them
- Settling in for the long haul



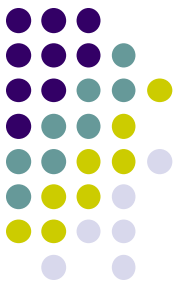
- Tertiary education and the development of questioning citizens as a fundamental feature of democracy
- Respecting knowledge and experience
- The disappearance of critique in policy thinking; often reduced to ‘critical thinking’ of a skills-based kind and in the service of innovation as a tool of economic advancement
- Sociological imagination revisited: taking alternatives seriously (cf. Mills, 1970)
- Valuing the ‘critic and conscience’ role in universities



- Inherent risks in tertiary education – not just of an economic kind, but existentially
- The development of reflective consciousness and the possibility of despair – as well as hope (Kierkegaard, 1989; Dostoevsky, 2004; Unamuno, 1972; Weil, 1997; and others)
- Tertiary education: an uncomfortable process
- No ‘reverse gear’ – and what this means for tertiary teachers
- Appreciating our unfinishedness as human beings (Freire, 1998)



- More than systems; more than methods
- Glorious immeasurability
- Becoming less certain of our certainties (cf. Freire, 1997)
- Educating citizens who are responsible and not merely accountable
- Beyond self-interested individualism: collectivity as a radical reinvention of tertiary education (Smith, 2012)
- More than outputs: rethinking research
- Beyond relentless consumption and performativity – ‘slow’ tertiary education? (cf. Nietzsche, 1997)



- Spheres of influence: the distinctive role of teacher education as a form of tertiary activity
- ‘Market pressures’, the tyranny of time, and priorities: struggles over the teacher education curriculum
- Understanding education, understanding ourselves: teacher education and the investigation of ontological, epistemological, ethical, and political questions
- ‘Evidence based teaching’, yes – but evidence of what kind, as defined by whom, for what purpose(s), under what circumstances?
- Teaching, transformation and citizenship