

The future of student equity and higher education:
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what does the international picture tell us?

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equality of respect is a core value of all modern societies

'The average person needs to do very little thinking about the bases of universal respect, because just about everyone accepts this as an axiom today... Even racist regimes, like the [former] one in South Africa, present their programmes in the language of separate but unequal development...

'To talk of universal, natural or human rights is to connect respect for human life and integrity with the notion of autonomy. It is to conceive people as active cooperators in establishing and ensuring the respect which is due to them'.

~ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The making of modern identity*,
Harvard UP, 1988, p. 9 & p. 12



equality of respect is in conflict with
pre-modern hierarchies in some
societies

and is also in tension with the idea of
education as a private good whose
benefits are captured by the individual

i.e. education as a tool for creating inequality of respect



how do we reconcile the consensus on
equality of respect with

- the instrumentalism so strong in our culture?
- the idea of tertiary education in a competitive market?
- scarce funding for public goods such as social equity?
- unequal amounts of 'academic merit' at entry?
- unequal levels of preparation at school (and schools and school systems with unequal respect)?
- unequal pay/respect for different qualifications?
- differences of institutional mission, which often play out as hierarchy of institutional status/ selectivity?
- the need for globally excellent research concentrations, when institutions gain status from their research performance?

different nations have varying solutions to these problems.

Finland combines an egalitarian school system with relatively uniform high achievement, with uniformly good tertiary institutions in two different sectors, and a stellar research university (U Helsinki) on top



at the same time social equity is not the
only fish in the policy sea

problems arise when we use an abstract
'equality' or 'equity' as measuring stick
for everything else



the OECD experience 1

'Equity in education has two dimensions. The first is fairness, which implies ensuring that personal and social circumstances – for example gender, socioeconomic status or ethnic origin – should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential. The second is inclusion, which implies ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all – for example that everyone should be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic. The two dimensions are closely intertwined: tackling school failure helps to overcome the effects of social deprivation which often causes school failure'.

~ OECD, *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society*, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 13.



the OECD experience 2

'Expansion is accompanied by differentiation of tertiary systems which, in turn, leads to a change of the nature of inequities. In most countries, the expansion of tertiary education has been accomplished mostly by expanding places in new, lower-status TEIs (leading to a stratification of the tertiary system by quality tiers); the creation of new subsystems, often more vocationally-oriented; the expansion of the private sector; and, sometimes, discriminatory fee policies whereby some students are fully publicly subsidised while others pay the full cost of tuition for the same education programmes. The implication is that disadvantaged students may gain access predominantly to lower status TEIs or be disproportionately among those required to pay tuition fees (either in the private or public sectors). Inequities in tertiary education become subtler and more difficult to analyse, as a result'.

~ OECD, *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society*, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 19.



the OECD experience 3

'There is evidence that highly segmented or —tracked systems of secondary education — *i.e.* those that separate students into distinct tracks of preparation at an early age, as distinct from those that are comprehensive — have the effect of widening inequalities in entry to tertiary education. Systems with high levels of segmentation show a stronger relationship between family background and student achievement (with consequences for tertiary enrolment) than those that do not. This is because systems of education that sort and segment students allow inequalities in family circumstances to combine with peer and instructional inequalities to produce wider variation in secondary achievement, and more unequal opportunities for entry into tertiary education'.

~ OECD, *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society*, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 37.



thank you and have an equal day!

http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/people/staff_pages/Marginson/Marginson.html



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