

Perspectives on higher education after a quarter of a century

Perspectives on Higher Education: Eight Disciplinary and Comparative Views, by Burton R. Clark, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984

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Higher education is a field of study. It does not have an integral cognate discipline that defines its extent and borders. Contributions to understanding higher education come from, among others, sociologists, historians, political theorists, economists and students of science policy and cultural studies. These were the disciplines whose exponents were assembled by Burton Clark in UCLA to summarise for a wider audience the contributions their disciplines were making to scholarship and research into higher education in the early 1980s. This paper reviews these disciplinary approaches and Clark's reactions to them in the light of later developments in higher education and its study. It concludes by claiming that the contributors showed remarkable prescience in identifying many of the main developments in higher education studies over the following quarter of a century. It also asserts that although there has been a huge expansion in higher education studies since then, and they now have all the attributes of an academically respectable field of study throughout the world, they remain dependent on their foundation disciplines for their intellectual rigour.

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Education is a disparate field of study. As well as a plethora of journals with the word 'Education' somewhere in the title, substantial articles on education have appeared in the specialist literature of most other academic disciplines. Psychology may be at the heart of educational practice but there are a philosophy of education, sociology of education, an economics of education and a history of education. In addition, each individual subject or discipline has its own education subset, often with its own academic journals: physics education, history education, art education, mathematical education and so on. Higher education is one sect in this very broad church and in several ways is even broader. It has close links with areas of scholarship such as science policy and cultural studies.

In broad terms there are two distinct branches of the study of education. One is concerned with pedagogical practice, the substance of the core activities of learning and teaching. Its basic questions are concerned with understanding the way knowledge is transmitted and how people learn; these are rooted in psychology. The other branch of enquiry is concerned with education's relations with the rest of social activity, how it impacts on society, how it came to be organised in the way it is, and how it is paid for. This has come to be the domain of sociologists, economists, political scientists and historians. Philosophers, of course span both.

Higher education studies have a similar cleavage. One branch is concerned with the teaching and learning of adults: there have been attempts to popularise the term andragogy but it rarely appears in the literature these days. The other is concerned with analysing higher education as

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institutions and networks of institutions, their organisational behaviour and their costs and benefits to the rest of society. Although both use the term 'higher education research' or 'higher education studies', there is in practice little in common between them. Any conference of the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) or the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER) which attempts to bring the two branches of study together nearly always has distinct 'streams' or 'themes' which enable adherents of the two camps to follow their separate paths.

These thoughts were inspired by a rereading of Burton Clark's *Perspectives on Higher Education: Eight Disciplinary and Comparative Views* (Clark 1984) which appeared a year after his masterpiece, *The Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-National Perspective* (Clark 1983). The earlier book was clearly the work of an outstanding sociologist of organisations but it is also clear that Clark did not believe that sociology held all the answers to an understanding of how higher education was organised or how it was governed and managed.

... the disciplinary approach is compellingly necessary, since it is in the power of approaches and ideas developed by specialists that we find the cutting edge. And so it is in the study of higher education. If we did not have at hand different analytical visions for that study, the ways of looking provided by history and political science and economics and organizational theory, and so on, we would have to invent them. (2)¹

He obtained support from the Exxon Education Foundation for a week-long seminar in Los Angeles in which leading international scholars in several disciplines gave their interpretations of how higher education could best be understood. The book that emerged was an edited volume, but it has Clark's imprint firmly upon it. Not only did he organise the seminar and select its members, he was a very active editor of the resulting papers and contributor of substantial introductory and concluding chapters as well as an important chapter in which he developed ideas from the earlier volume.

Perspectives can plausibly be claimed as the climax of a decade, beginning with his 1973 article on 'Development of the sociology of higher education' (Clark 1973) in which he evolved from a sociologist whose main work was in higher education into one of the first major scholars specialising in higher education as a subject of study in its own right, incorporating historical, political science, economic, science policy and cultural studies approaches as well as those of sociology. From the early 1980s onwards his academic affiliations and his intellectual loyalties were to higher education rather than to sociology. In his generation this was a normal move. Most of the major contributors to the study of higher education in the twentieth century arrived via earlier work in other disciplines and their careers evolved towards higher education. There were many people whose doctoral theses dealt with higher education issues, but their home departments were in sociology, or politics, or philosophy or history or economics. Since that time, due in no small part to the massive influence of Clark and his research students in the United States, higher education has become a subject of study in its own right, with a large number of specialist journals, conferences, university departments and research centres; but it is still an open question whether the best early preparation is specialisation in the subject or via one of the longer established disciplines such as those represented in this book.

In his concluding remarks Clark states that:

One reason for the writing of this volume was to reduce eight perspectives to chapter length essays, each one clarifying an approach and showing its advantages. The volume... offers a definite economy of effort for those... furthest from scholarship, because they are the closest to action. (268)

Clark was not uninterested in influencing higher education policy and management, but for him the research and understanding came first. We have heard much about evidence-based policy in the past two decades, but to be useful the evidence must be based on sound research and scholarship.

The book itself is not based original research although most of its contributors had made, and continued to make for many years, significant contributions to the empirical study of higher education. It is primarily concerned with the contribution that different theoretical approaches can make to an understanding of higher education. Since this paper is concerned with a book that was published over a quarter a century ago, just before possibly the most rapid changes in the history of higher education, my main aim is to examine how well the ideas, claims, and sometimes forecasts in it have stood the test of time.

The disciplinary perspectives covered in the book are history, political science, economics, sociology, cultural studies and science policy. In his introduction Clark regrets his failure to include social psychology, which he justified on the grounds that although this is 'a perspective centred on properties of individuals which has led to extensive research on student characteristics', his concern has been mainly an American preoccupation, one little developed in other countries (15).

This was an interesting reflection that certainly could not be made today. It reflects the fact that the United States was the first country to reach Trow's idea of mass higher education and, therefore had to contend with a very wide diversity of students and institutions. This is not the case in the twenty-first century. Nearly all OECD countries can now claim to have reached at least something approaching mass higher education and therefore their universities and colleges, and their higher education researchers, have to respond to a wide variety of student needs, abilities and interests.

Another large related area of study that Clark omitted was students learning and in this case I suspect it was the case that European work on understanding and evaluating different approaches to learning in higher education may well have been ahead of that in the United States. Work such as that of Marton, Housell, and Entwistle (1983) come to mind and this work has had an enormous influence on both research into higher education and on higher education practice during the past 25 years.

These omissions illustrate is the gap between the study of higher education as an activity of learners and teaches as individuals and groups of individuals, and the study of higher education organisations in their economic and social context.

The perspectives

History is represented by Harold Perkin, a social historian who wrote on higher education but it was not his central concern. Perkin reminds us that there have been many big changes in western universities since their original appearance in thirteenth century Bologna and Paris. Present crises are not so unique as we like to think they are. As we struggle through the latest period of financial stringency it is worth reminding ourselves that the early 1980s was a period in which UK universities suffered their first real term fall in income for nearly forty years and that before that there had been substantial falls in income and student numbers in the early 1930s. There were also two world wars in the twentieth century.

In his review of Perkins' paper Clark comments that: 'higher education is capable of both enormous change and deadening inertia. Particularly impressive is the stubbornness of certain underlying forms, notably faculty members' ways of organizing themselves which are guild like in nature' (7).

In his conclusions Clark stresses the importance of knowing and understanding historical development in analysing and policymaking in higher education:

All important phenomena within the higher education system are shaped by their developmental flow. Structures and processes laid down at any time tend to perpetuate themselves. In a sector with much diffusion of authority and a rich symbolic life, forms become deeply institutionalised in various

parts of the system. ... *They also shape what comes after them, since they occupy the domain of work and embody the common understanding of what higher education is and how it should proceed.* (272)

The quarter century that has passed since those words were written have been the period of probably the most rapid change that universities have experienced during their eight hundred years of existence. The global shift to mass higher education accompanying a prodigious growth of information technology and dazzling new insights into life itself and in the nature of cognition, have subjected higher education institutions to unprecedented pressures for change. In European countries especially, technological change based on the rapid exploitation of new discoveries in the research laboratories of universities have become an important arm of state economic and foreign policies. The 'tension between freedom and control which has characterized this sector from the very beginning' (7) has never been more acute. And yet the stability of incremental organic change continues. The invention of global league tables enables us to observe this. With only a few exceptions the universities at the top of the league table at the beginning of the twenty-first century are much the same as those that would have been there fifty and even a hundred years ago.

Clark concluded: 'A finely honed sense of historical development is extremely useful for those who practice, in politics and administration, the art of the possible'.

There were two contributions from a policy studies perspective, one by Maurice Kogan, who came to occupy a position in higher education studies in Europe as distinguished as Clark himself, and the other by Lada Cerych whose specialism was policy implementation.

Kogan takes up the theme of tension between freedom and control. His point of departure is that higher education more than any other sector of society highlights the tensions between the rights and freedoms of individuals and the legitimate claims of society as a whole:

In no other area is there so powerful a tension between institutions that are internationally visible and are expected to respond to the highest norms of moral accountability while at the same time being deeply grounded in the rights of individuals to pursue personal and small group action. (56)

Clark, draws attention to Kogan's distinction between the micro- and the macro-politics of universities, the internal politics of departmental and individual rivalries that are acted out within national systems where personal rivalries and ambitions are still prominent but where ideologies and competing views about the nature of the good society become more salient. He considers that there are qualitative differences in the nature of the analysis required as the researcher moves from one level to another.

When we tackle the university and its internal operations we must understand collegial forms of authority as well as portray departments as contending interest groups. When we turn directly to the bearing of state-level politics on higher education, we need to go armed with ideas about emerging corporatist relations in which major external interest groups – the organized arms of big labor and big business for example – become systematically involved in the control of higher education. (7–8)

Commenting on Kogan's analysis of the situation in Britain Clark remarks that the 'collegial mode (of governance and management) is placed under heavy strain; more management seems inevitable' (8). The fact that this prediction has been borne out, in spades, should not lead British academics of the present century to consider that they are particularly hard done by. Although much has changed in the past 25 years Clark's remarks that 'The British university remains decidedly less managerial than the American, less influenced by the government than the Swedish' (8) is worth remembering.

Clark concludes his comments on Kogan's contribution with the prediction that 'the coming decade should see a larger contribution by political analysis to our understanding of

higher education'. But has it? Certainly in the past 25 years there has been an enormous increase in what may be called political analyses of higher education. Yet it is legitimate to ask the question whether most of them have amounted to more than first drafts of the history of higher education in the late twentieth century and whether they have really enhanced understanding of the operation of higher education institutions and systems to the extent that Clark's own work on higher education as organisations was able to do. Possibly the most important work has been the analysis of the nature of authority in higher education, the power of reputation and scientific achievement for example as opposed to making money, exemplified in Kogan's own book on *Process and Structure in Higher Education* (Becher and Kogan 1981, 1991) which distinguishes between operational and 'normative' modes of authority. However, it is worth noting that while in the first edition of that book 'normative' forms of authority, based on reputation and achievement were deemed to be at the indestructible core, the second edition ten years later accepted that financial stringency had given much more power to 'operational' modes of control.

From a pragmatic starting point Cerych's analysis of the implementation of reforms identifies rather similar issues. Essentially his claim is that major national reforms of higher education are more likely to be successfully implemented if they are consonant with power structures in the sector. Cerych asks the fundamental question whether in the analysis of policy formulation and implementation higher education is really any different from other sectors or society all of which believe that they are in some ways special. He argues that some of the special problems for the higher education policy analyst are:

... set primarily by the inordinate complexity of the system: in particular, the large number of relatively autonomous actors and the diffusion of authority throughout the structure and in the various forms and types. Even in a centralized state, higher education is... 'bottom heavy'... Policy implementation becomes interactive, and implementation analysis becomes a study of the respective interactions. (237)

Clark endorses this analysis and agrees that would be reformers must 'identify the support or resistance of powerful groups, especially those within the system, such as senior professors, who occupy the key sites through which implementation must flow' (14).

It is difficult not to speculate that the intervening quarter century gives rise to the hypothesis that it was the articulacy of the academic class that gave them this power to thwart politicians and reformers when their interests were threatened. In the past three decades, however, the media and especially television and more recently the interactive internet have filched much of the authority that comes from knowledge and expertise. One has only to look at the enormous expansion of press and public relations officers in the universities themselves to realise that there is at least a hypothesis worth exploring.

However, Clark's comments on the Cerych contribution do point to one area that has attracted attention, though not for the most part by higher education specialists, and that is the study of leadership in higher education. Under what conditions do one or two individuals make a difference in effecting a policy? I am not convinced that we yet have satisfactory answers to this question. In practice the criteria for choosing vice-chancellors for example have veered between bringing in successful leaders from public service, the professions and business to appointing extremely successful scholars. A recent book (Goodall 2009) that has received a good deal of attention outside the academy shows that the most successful universities are those led by successful scholars though there remain many questions about cause and effect.

From politics to economics and here I must declare an interest since I contributed the chapter on the economic approach. The chapter distinguishes between two separate higher education concerns of economists up to that time. The dominant one which I claimed had been taken

as far as was possible in the 1960s and 1970s was human capital theory and the graduate labour market. The second was just beginning to attract the attention of serious economists, issues in the finance of higher education.

Clark's comments on this chapter show a careful respect for economists' contributions to the study of higher education:

Economists have been more concerned than political scientists in the study of higher education and have come with more theory and method. The concept of human capital has been a major contribution by economists to general thought about education. (8)

The idea of human capital has proved to be very popular but the theory has not been developed much further by economists. Certainly there have been many thousands of empirical studies relating individual earnings to education received which have been reviewed periodically by George Psacharopoulos (for the latest see Psacharopoulos 2004) but the idea itself has not been much developed. In particular there are still no definitive answers to the basic question of whether higher education makes people more productive or whether more potentially productive people tend to do more education. The concept was taken up by sociologists who have identified additional dimensions of human capital: social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, with which the name of Bourdieu is most often associated (Bourdieu 1986).

Human capital has been popular outside academia. It has appealed to many educationists as a justification for increased public funds and some policy-makers have found that it provides apparently reliable criteria for allocating public funds.

Clark also recognised the growing importance of understanding finance as a major driver of higher education. Well before Slaughter and Leslie introduced higher education researchers to resource dependency theory (Slaughter and Leslie 1997), he saw that 'The old saying that he who plays the piper calls the tune needs a discriminating revision, because it is the way payment is made which determines how the tune is played' (9).

He goes on to refer to the centrality and specificity of financing mechanisms 'Since these mechanisms are also relatively manipulable, analysis of the way they operate moves scholarly analysis close to the interests of those who shape educational policies' (Clark 1984, 9).

Higher education finance has certainly moved to the centre of higher education research and policy interest since the early 1980s.

In his conclusions Clark pleads for more cross fertilisation between the ideas of economics and political theory in the study of higher education. He considered that political economy would have a major role to play in the future. In a useful short essay on politics and markets he suggests that a higher education system, along with many other sectors of society can be seen as lying somewhere on a spectrum that 'extends from tight to loose linkage in the parts of a social system. The tight end is a unitary context in which all units are part of an integrated formal structure and have common goals' (258).

Remember that this was a period in which the planned economies still seemed to be strong and had many admirers in the academic world. Clark then worked his way through a federative context in which some autonomy of institutions is permissible, to a 'coalitional setting' down to 'The loose end of the continuum... in which there are no inclusive goals and decisions are made independently by autonomous segments [which] may still be thought of as a system' (Clark 1984, 258).

Clearly one of the most marked shifts in the past quarter century has been from the tightly regulated formal structure to the very loosely coupled system. However, at least from a British perspective there are, I think, two ways in which this scenario has proved to be flawed. First the growth and diversification of the system from a relatively homogeneous cluster of universities

to one with a wide variety of fragmented institutions has been accompanied by more, not less state interference and secondly serious doubts are beginning to emerge about whether higher education in the UK can realistically be considered a system. Teaching, research and third stream work are increasingly being drawn apart, separate consortia of universities, Russell Group, 1994 group, Million + Group, etc. are forming to represent the special concerns of particular categories of universities, and alliances to protect the interests of particular subject groups are becoming much more visible.

However, Clark also made another interesting prognosis. 'At the one extreme, the co-ordinating of many parts is accompanied by state machinery, with the parts then dependent on "authority". At the other extreme, co-ordinating is effected by market transactions, with subunits the dependent on "exchange"' (Clark 1984, 258).

He sees a dynamic process in which state control failures and market failures succeed each other leading to long-term oscillations between the two. His prediction was certainly borne out by the collapse of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe and its extreme loosening in China, which was followed by a huge expansion of the private sector in higher education (see Altbach Reisberg, and Rumbley 2004) and radical changes in forms of control in public higher education. It remains to be seen whether the market failures of recent years will result in to some swing back towards tighter state control. There are certainly some indications that this is happening in Europe with the growing state interest in quality assurance spearheaded by the Bologna agreements to which more and more countries are subscribing. In the UK, which was the first European country to embrace market oriented higher education in the 1980s, there are many examples of increasing state regulation.

Sociology is represented by Clark, himself on 'The organizational conception' and by Martin Trow on 'The analysis of status'. In his chapter Clark develops further some of the ideas in his earlier masterpiece (Clark 1983) and puts forward the idea of a 'underlying matrix of authority' in which academics can be seen as recognising two dimensions of authority, what he calls 'an intersecting of disciplines with enterprises which affiliates academics with two quite different forms of organization and places them under dual authority' (10).

It is not difficult to link this conception to earlier ideas of 'cosmopolitan' and 'local' in earlier studies of academic organisation (see Gouldner 1958; Halsey and Trow 1971). However, in earlier work this was seen mainly as a way of describing the orientation of academics concentrating on particular parts of the university business. Researchers were mostly considered to be the cosmopolitans with their loyalties mainly towards their disciplines and invisible colleges around the world, while teachers were 'locals' owing their loyalty mainly to their own institution. Clark linked this idea to the analysis of universities as organisations and noted that all academic staff were subject to these two forms of authority. Even this was not entirely new. Similar ideas had been developed by Tony Becher and Maurice Kogan (1980) with their notion of the 'normative' and 'operational' modes in university decision-making. Later in the 1990s the idea of 'matrix management' which claimed to recognise the dual loyalties of academic staff became a widely used organisational form in British universities, though in general it is not now considered to have been a very successful form of formal management structure.

In developing the idea Clark made another perceptive prediction of the forthcoming effects of market oriented mass higher education.

At bottom higher education needs disciplines to concentrate on research and scholarship and it needs universities and colleges to concentrate on teaching and dissemination. If teaching were not necessary higher education could, and probably would dismantle its enterprises and concentrate each discipline in a lesser number of clusters... It is teaching that insists on wider dispersal of specialists, moving the disciplinarians to where the students are. (114)

Later he continues:

Since the discipline and the enterprise commingle in the operating units of universities and colleges, a department or chair is simultaneously an arm of a discipline and a part of an enterprise and draws strength from the combination. Thus there is an organic base for the impressive primacy of these units... (115)

Looking back from a UK perspective over the quarter century which has elapsed since *Perspectives* was published it is possible to both agree and disagree with this analysis. On the positive side there are certainly differences in the organisation of research intensive and teaching focussed universities. In the former, discipline based departments remain at the core – though financial pressures are resulting in a good number being closed. Helped by the Research Assessment Exercises many universities have taken decisions to cease to provide certain disciplines and where necessary have retained them only to provide service teaching to students in other departments. Teaching intensive universities tend to have much weaker disciplinary departmental structures with staff being clustered round teaching programmes rather than disciplinary cultures.

Another development since the early 1980s, however, has been the growth of so-called mode 2 knowledge production which has proved to be particularly useful to policy makers concerned with the encouragement of research that has an immediate economic impact (Gibbons et al. 1984). This has encouraged some shift of resources towards areas of research areas that appear likely to have immediate impact through interdisciplinary research teams and individuals specialising in knowledge transfer. Clark himself went some way towards abandoning his belief in the strength of specialist discipline based departments in his much later books on Entrepreneurial universities (Clark 1998, 2004).

Sociology was also the basis of Martin Trow's contribution on 'The analysis of status'. He was concerned with the study of 'stratification of higher education'. Trow starts by claiming that it is a perspective on higher education 'By which all disciplines may address the universal phenomenon of the ordering or ranking of institutions and sectors of higher education by prestige, wealth, power, or some combination of these or other measures of status' (132).

In 1982 this must have seemed like a peculiarly American obsession. In the UK it was widely recognised that some universities did have more prestige than others, but it was not quite respectable for researchers to study the phenomenon partly, I suspect because it would have legitimated the idea that some universities were more elite than others. In many other European countries it was simply denied that there were significant differences between universities – though many did accept the existence of binary systems of academic and vocationally oriented post secondary institutions. Trow claims that status concerns did underlie many of the policy debates in many countries other than the United States.

Commenting on Trow's paper Clark remarks that 'status plays an unusually strong role in academic systems, replacing money as the primary coin of exchange'.

One cannot help asking whether it is status or money that results in Harvard University coming top in almost every league table that has yet been devised. At the very least there has always been a close correlation between the two. Status brings money and money brings status. However, Clark's subsequent claim that institutional status has a decided bearing on the unintended and undesired effects of policies and reforms and was a central topic much in need of more research has proved to be another that was remarkably prescient, though I have not yet seen any work that deals really convincingly with the question of *why* the academic has almost invariably had higher status than the vocational.

Becher's analysis of 'The cultural view' of higher education presents what is essentially a trial run of his later magnum opus on *Academic Tribes and Territories* (Becher 1989). Clark considered this 'the newest of the eight approaches' and considered that Becher's work on disciplinary cultures was path breaking.

Dominant thought in the sociology of science has portrayed academic culture as socially determined. Becher builds into that conception the argument that the respective bodies of knowledge of the different fields make a difference in the disciplinary cultures. ... Disciplines are thought groups that have individual thought styles. (12)

Clark thought that Becher's paper shows that 'researchers and observers were becoming more sensitive to the symbolic side of academic life'. He considered that 'the cultural approach is highly promising, not least for those who must make decisions next Monday morning' (13). In fact Becher's approach has not been widely followed but there has been a useful development of the closely related area of academic identities (see, for example, Henkel 2000).

The final contributor was Simon Schwartzman on science policy. He drew attention to the gap between those who study science policy and those who study higher education. As Clark puts it:

The propensity of analytical specialties to run on different tracks is well illustrated in the odd separation between those who study 'higher education' and those who study 'science'... Schwartzman points to the almost unbelievable fact that two recent major volumes in the sociology of science and the study of science, technology and society refer to universities on seven out of 600 pages and on 20 out of 600 respectively; neither makes any mention of systems of higher education in a broader sense. (13)

The chasm between science policy research remains as wide today. There remains little overlap between the two. They do come together in the widely held, but largely unverified, belief amongst higher education researchers and apologists that there is a close symbiotic link between the teaching and research activities of universities. However, as Joseph Ben-David claimed out 33 years ago 'Far from being a natural match, research and teaching can be organized within a single framework only under specific circumstances' (Ben-David 1977, 94).

Schwartzman deduces from Ben-David's study that:

Historically, the unification of science and the university found its best example in Germany, specifically in the University of Berlin in the nineteenth century; today it is best represented by the leading universities in the United States. The vitality of these systems of higher education made them models to be followed and imitated internationally; and the notion that universities are the natural settings for research follows naturally. (200)

In Schwartzman's view there is a lopsided relationship between science and higher education.

From the standpoint of science, systems of higher education are not necessarily very important... What is paramount is the absence of social and political pressures that might challenge the scientist's commitment to the norms of the scientific ethos. The university can provide a favourable environment for scientist, but it can also threaten them with the imposition of external criteria and demands on their work. For those who think of science and technology as a integrated component of modern industrial societies, the emphasis is much more on the linkages between science and the economy than on those between science and the educational system. (206)

This was written in 1982!

In brief it appears that universities as high level teaching institutions have needed research to ensure that their teaching remains at the highest level but it is not nearly so evident that research at the highest level needs to be linked to teaching, except perhaps at the higher post-graduate levels. This remains a challenge for higher education researchers.

Conclusions

This article has shown that the contributors to *Perspectives*, and in particular its mastermind, showed remarkable prescience in identifying many of the main developments in higher education studies over the following quarter of a century. Finance and resource dependency, issues

of institutional status, tensions between academic freedom and control, leadership, changing organisational forms and the relationship between science policy studies and higher education, have all been recurring themes. Of course some developments, even more important, escaped their notice. The collapse of Soviet communism and the subsequent dominance of market ideology, the explosive expansion and consequences of electronic means of creating storing and exchanging knowledge were not even hinted at. University organisations have been subjected to unprecedented pressures that have cast much doubt on the notion of some essential idea of a university.

The book does make a strong case to show that the higher education researcher needs to have a good grasp of, or at least respect for, sociology, economics, history, politics and culture. And, although I have not dealt with it here, it is worth reminding ourselves that the book's title refers to 'disciplinary and comparative' view. Awareness of different ways of solving core problems different countries was also a key part of Clark's armoury. But the book also shows that much of what happens in higher education is caused by events and ideological changes from outside the sector. The higher education researcher who is not aware of what is happening in other parts of society and the economy risks being surprised by unexpected occurrences.

Clark, was a sociologist who turned his attention to higher education and right to the end in his work on university entrepreneurialism he viewed higher education processes mainly through those spectacles. He respected serious practitioners of other disciplines and among the most noteworthy features of this book are his interpretations of the work of the disciplinary specialist contributors. In that sense he demonstrates that higher education is a genuine inter-disciplinary field of study. But it leaves open the question of whether the best higher education researchers are like Clark, disciplinary specialists who turn their attention to higher education or whether new generations of higher education researchers gain by being deeply schooled in that area of study.

Writing from the perspective of someone near to Clark's generation I cannot help but be gratified by the huge growth in higher education research over the past half century. But I wonder whether it has really found its feet as an academic subject of study. Concentration on higher education as a specialist field of study in its own right runs a serious risk of its work becoming isolated from the study of other social and economic fields from which much can be learned. The economics of higher education about which I am best informed, needs to be closely linked with labour economics on the one side and public and corporate finance on the other. Sociological studies of higher education and class need to be embedded in more general understandings of the nature of class differences, organisational theorists have much to learn from studies of other types of organisation. And most certainly there needs to be deeper understanding of relationship between research and teaching in other contexts.

My impression is that much of the path breaking work on higher education over the past quarter century was still being done by individuals and teams with a firm grounding in other social science disciplines. It would be illuminating to see the compilation of a similar compendium of a number of disciplinary perspectives on higher education 30 years later.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise stated all page references are to Clark (1984).

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