

oration was needed between philosophy of science and moral philosophy, political philosophy and philosophy of education. Maxwell says very little about education, though what he does say is enough to show that the revolution he calls for would affect education as well as research.

Though there is room for some reservations about the way Maxwell presents his message, it is one that merits wide attention. The little-known publisher Pentire Press has taken a step in the right direction in producing this thick paperback at a remarkably reasonable price.

Graham Haydon

Institute of Education University of London

g.haydon@ioe.ac.uk

© 2008, Graham Haydon

Stratification in higher education: a comparative study, edited by Yossi Shavit, Richard Arum and Adam Gamoran, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2007, 484 pp., £42.50 (hardback), ISBN 0-80-475462-0

This collection brings together work in 15 countries to report changes in inequalities of access to higher education over a period of expansion, of restructuring and of privatisation. It uses a collaborative, comparative methodology, where chapter authors met to agree commonalities of approaches to data collection and analysis of country case studies. The claim is that

The chapters provide a detailed description of how variation in expansion, differentiation and privatization shape access to higher education in advanced countries. It is only through understanding these institutional effects that effective education policy and social theory can be developed. (35)

An initial overview chapter is followed by the 15 country case studies, of varying quality, categorised under three labels – diversified, binary and unitary – with Australia as the ‘other’. Those are not all accurate in summarising the structures and systems. The German writers claim a tri-partite system; Sweden is more of a binary than diversified; the ‘Great Britain’ label as a binary is valid only because the analysis is 10 years out of date and residual binary characteristics were even stronger than in today’s diversified provision; ‘diversified’ turns out to be a euphemism for ‘stratified’.

The conclusions will not surprise anybody. Inequalities persist, relating to social and economic capital – father’s qualification and occupation are dominant conditioning factors. In South Korea their impact has increased substantially – from children of graduates being twice as likely to enter university as those of fathers with only secondary-level qualification, to being five times as likely in more recent cohorts (109). There has been an increased impact in Italy, too, though of lower magnitude.

Unitary systems – Italy and the Czech Republic – are elitist, because of the influence of the academic professionals. Italy has had one of the lowest changes in inequality, and in the Czech Republic, inequality has not just persisted, as it did under the former regime, but has increased since the collapse of Communism, reflecting greater social and economic inequalities under capitalism. Levels of participation in both are low, and Italy also has a low retention rate. Within other systems, the tendency is for elite elements to become more unequal and exclusionary – the Ivy League in the USA, Grandes Ecoles in France – on both class and gender factors, and, for the USA, race (not considered in other case studies).

So, in systems other than unitary, where they may not get in at all, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are ‘diverted’ to less prestigious strata of provision, though the editors claim four systems where that was not so. Privatised systems, such as Japan, are more diverse and

have higher participation levels because supply drives demand, and entry requirements are lower, but, again students are stratified by ability to pay. So, there is expansion of opportunity to enter an unequal provision, and, as in the USA, there may be high drop-out (though the USA case study cannot relate this factor to gender, race or socio-economic status).

Can policy do anything? Few of the case studies make any link to policy initiatives. Exceptions are the USA and Sweden. In both, there has been expansion, but in Sweden the 'analyses provide little support for tertiary expansion as an effective means of educational equalization' and 'other social forces are more efficient in reducing social inequalities in educational attainment' (138). The USA authors' results

suggest that educational expansion, coupled with specific educational policies, can improve outcomes for some disadvantaged groups. African Americans and women, who have mobilised and gained recognition as 'protected groups' in US political discourse, have made substantial gains in access ... the poor and working class, who have not mobilized and gained legitimacy, remain disadvantaged. (190)

The editors are more optimistic, reflecting a general disposition to interpretation of the data. Relative inequalities persist, at least until demand from privileged groups is saturated. Expansion therefore 'is an equalizing force and diversification is not inconsistent with inclusion' (30). But that inclusion comes only after satisfying the groups with political leverage and sophistication in system manipulation.

There are two general weaknesses in the collection. The national studies spend a lot of words and tabulations on justifying their data sets and methodologies. Only a small (?) subset of readers will pore over page after page of logistic regressions. That, in turn, squeezes the space for commentary and critique. I would have welcomed more linking of the time series data, or the contrast between cohorts, to policy initiatives and wider societal or political trends. The case studies tend to be descriptive, eschewing exploration of cause and effect. Readers can adopt a 'top and tail' approach, moving from the description of the system and its history of development to the summary and conclusions drawn from the statistical data.

Second, the data, in some cases, are very dated. The Swedish and 'Great Britain' studies are the worst in this respect. The latter also has many historical inaccuracies, as well as a focus almost exclusively on England. The Australian study is the most contemporary, and adds to the English case by some comparative analysis between the two systems.

The strength of the study is in its use of a common framework to explore different systems, and the evidence of considerable commonalities of trends. The degree of influence of different structural characteristics is either evidence to inform decisions about a preferred approach, or a warning of the inevitable (?) consequences of policy drift towards the stratified, privatised provision dominant in the neo-conservative discourse that many governments currently employ.

Ian McNay
University of Greenwich
i.mcnay@gre.ac.uk
© 2008, Ian McNay