

## The dirty work of higher education

**The Open Door College: A Case Study**, by Burton R. Clark, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960

Gareth Parry\*

University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

Through his early studies of the character of adult schools and community colleges in California, Burton Clark launched a set of ideas, sociological and educational, that served as baseline concepts in the study and practice of American higher education. His book *The Open Door College* ranks among the classic accounts of a type of organisation – the public two-year college – which came to prominence throughout the United States in the post-war period. Its consideration of the roles played by such institutions in the larger education structure and society has been at the centre of international, theoretical and empirical debates for half a century. Foremost among its arguments was the cooling-out function, a conception that enjoyed wide circulation over many decades. Rather less attention has been paid to its analysis of organisational determinacy and the special problems of institutions that straddle secondary and higher education. These are the mass enterprises that do much of the dirty work of higher education. Unlike in the Clark corpus, they do not always receive the seriousness of scholarly treatment accorded to other kinds of educational organisation.

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A sociological sensibility, an organisational approach and a case study methodology were hallmarks of the early scholarly career of Burton Clark. They were the ingredients of ‘a personal analytical style’ (Clark 2008) that developed out of three successive research studies dating from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. Each was based on intensive field investigation of established or emerging types of educational organisation in the United States: the adult school (Clark 1956a); the private liberal arts college (Clark 1970); and, the focus of this article, the public junior college (Clark 1960b).

Published in 1960, *The Open Door College: A Case Study* was a study of the first four years of existence of San Jose Junior College, a newly established institution in the city of San Jose in California. For scholars of American junior and community colleges, it ranks among the classic accounts of a type of institution that came to prominence in California and throughout the United States in the quarter-century following the end of the Second World War. On a broader front, the book launched a set of ideas, sociological and educational, that served as baseline concepts in the study and practice of higher education. Of the books that distinguished the Clark corpus, it is among the least well-known outside his country of origin.

In addition to highlighting its contribution to organisational studies of American higher education and the sociology of higher education, the core constructs in the book – open-door and cooling-out – are reviewed here to consider their influence on subsequent writing and thinking. Two decades after publication, Clark himself revisited the central argument of the monograph (Clark 1980). Half a century later, the reach and relevance of *The Open Door College* is not limited to the United States. Rather, an argument is made for its power and purchase in

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\*Email: [g.w.parry@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:g.w.parry@sheffield.ac.uk)

understanding the role of further, technical and community colleges in other systems of mass and near-universal higher education. Like American two-year colleges, these are also institutions that undertake much of 'the dirty work' of higher education. Before that, the context for the original study is sketched, including its place alongside the other research and writing produced by Clark during the early part of his academic career.

### California, sociology and the study of higher education

*The Open Door College* was his second book, completed at the age of 39. It followed publication in 1956 of his doctoral dissertation by the University of California Press under the title *Adult Education in Transition: A Study of Organizational Insecurity* (Clark 1956b). Clark had served in the army in World War Two and, with financial assistance from the GI Bill, began his study of sociology at the University of California Los Angeles, where he received a BA in 1949. He remained at UCLA to gain his PhD in 1954. After *The Open Door College* there followed a general study in the sociology of education *Educating the Expert Society* (Clark 1962) and then a fourth book *The Distinctive College: Antioch, Reid and Swarthmore* (Clark 1970), an account of three highly selective, private liberal arts colleges in the United States.

The imprint of California on these books is readily apparent, not just because this is where he learnt his sociology and brought its perspectives to bear on educational questions. The state of California was itself a laboratory of reform and change in education, its junior and community colleges leading an extensive democratisation of higher education and effecting a reorganisation of the whole post-secondary system. California provided Clark with examples of modern educational organisations in the making and fertile material for the analysis of institutional change. California was therefore the location for his early fieldwork: the Los Angeles adult school in the case of his PhD; and the new junior college in San Jose which was within commuter distance of Stanford where Clark held his first academic appointment. The later stages of the research for *The Open Door College*, as well as its analysis and final writing, were undertaken at the University of California Berkeley.

Except for a short spell at Harvard and prior to his move to Yale in 1966, it was at three of the leading research universities in California – UCLA, Stanford and UC Berkeley – that Clark trained and worked as a sociologist and launched his career as a scholar of higher education. These were his formative years as a student, teacher and researcher in sociology and, more specifically, an analyst of formal organisations. Unlike other academics of his generation who pursued an organisational approach, Clark chose to concentrate his effort on educational establishments, a group of institutions which had hitherto received minor attention. These institutional studies – on the adult school, the junior college and the liberal arts college – were much influenced by the work of Philip Selznick who, along with Leonard Bloom, assembled his doctoral committee at UCLA. As editors of book series and collections of readings, both men were important sponsors of his other writing in the sociology of education (see, for example, Broom and Selznick 1973).

It was by way of the earliest studies that Clark settled on 'a useful research style': one based on institutional case studies, qualitative modes of inquiry and clarifying concepts derived inductively from detailed fieldwork. Such an approach: 'insists on reasoning inductively from observed practice rather than deductively from prior theorising that prejudices reality' (Clark 2008, 1). Not to do so took researchers and students: 'precisely in the wrong direction – at least when they tackle the character of such complicated social systems as universities and colleges' (Clark 2008, 1).

Out of field research on adult education in the school district came the concepts of 'organisational marginality' and 'precarious values'. From the case study of San Jose College came the twin constructs of 'open-door colleges' and 'the cooling-out function'. Outside California, the first-hand study over five years of Antioch, Reid and Swarthmore led to the notion of 'organisational saga'. In each case, these concepts were the subject of separate journal articles written in association with a book that incorporated in full the findings of the fieldwork (Clark 1956b, 1960a, 1972).

Soon after his departure to Yale, these sociological and institutional investigations gave way to multidisciplinary and system-level perspectives, and then to cross-national interests in the 1980s and 1990s. Nevertheless, there was a return to this style of research four decades later in case study narratives of entrepreneurial universities: five such accounts in *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities* (Clark 1998) and 14 case studies in *Sustaining Change in Universities* (Clark 2004).

Apart from their contributions to mainstream sociology, the three books on educational institutions were among the foundation texts that populated the nascent field of higher education studies and its disciplinary component, the sociology of higher education (Gumport 2007). Shortly after its establishment, Clark moved in 1958 to a full-time research post at the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Berkeley. This was the first research institute in the United States devoted to the study of systems, institutions and processes of higher education. Significantly, the center owed its beginning to a grant from the Carnegie Corporation which stipulated that it was to study the diversification of higher education, with particular attention to the role of the community college in allowing a differentiated higher education that would preserve the position of selective universities. This function was a core concern of *The Open Door College*.

### **Open-door, cooling-out and the dirty work of higher education**

When the research for this study was concluded in 1957, San Jose Junior College was one of 60-odd two-year colleges in the California system of public higher education. The other components of this 'three-segment system' were the eight branches of the University of California and the 10 four-year state colleges, each governed by state-wide boards. In contrast, the junior colleges (or community colleges as they increasingly became known) were a part of local government.

The consequences of this administrative setting for the character of the college, and the dilemmas it posed, are the main subject of the book. Although a case study of a single California college, the research had more than local significance. Not only was California a leader in the junior and community college movement (Fields 1962), but its form of junior college government was also found in other states (Medsker 1960). Local control was likely to feature strongly in the next phase of development of community colleges, so securing for the book a national relevance and future importance.

It is safe to predict that the junior college will assume a larger place in American education during the next half century. As it does so, forms of local control promise to be nationally decisive. At least, control by the local public schools will be the major alternative to control by the university or the state. (Clark 1960b, 7)

The administrative location of the college, argued Clark, rendered it a 'dependent organisation'. In key policy, financial, personnel and basic operational matters, it was subordinate to a unified or school district. At a second remove, it was dependent on certain fundamental provisions of the state public school system. Central among these was state policy on the purposes of junior colleges and, most important of all, on admissions.

In California, the state education code set down three responsibilities for two-year colleges: lower-division education in preparation for transfer to a four-year institution; vocational and technical education of a 'terminal' sort; and adult education. The junior college was expected to be a 'comprehensive' institution and, following from this, it was expected to admit all applicants, without regard to ability, the type of curriculum completed in high school, or any other aspect of background. It was to have 'an open door'.

Membership in the student body is completely open to the general public. Once within the doors, students choose courses and majors within wide ranges, although the college attempts to exercise some control through counseling and guidance. But overall the college is directly shaped by virtually unlimited student choice of admission and participation. As a result, the size and composition of the study body and the shape of the college's programmes are not in an important sense controlled or consciously determined by anyone. (Clark 1960b, 138)

No matter what purposes the San Jose school authorities might have wanted to emphasise, the preferences of incoming students at San Jose Junior College were mainly for the transfer curriculum, not a terminal programme. Consistent with the differentiation of functions and different degrees of selectivity in the California system, the students of the junior college were unselected, transfer-oriented and generally 'less able' (in terms of scholastic aptitude and achievement) than students in the state colleges and the university. At San Jose Junior College the majority of entrants – including intending transfer students – came from blue collar backgrounds. Of all its entering students, about one-quarter transferred to a four-year institution (most of them to the nearby state college) and another quarter were enrolled in terminal (occupational) programmes. For the junior college, the remaining half posed 'special problems of student participation and destiny'.

If the open door was a primary attribute of the American junior college, its basic educational problem was the 'processing' of the student who fell between the transfer and terminal categories. This was the 'latent terminal student' or the 'overintender': the person 'destined to be a terminal student but who does not know it or refuses to recognise this likelihood at the time of entry'. Such students were not prevented from attempting a transfer programme but, in the operation of the college, several successive devices were used to disabuse them of transfer aspirations and to induce acceptance of structured alternatives. The sequence of procedures ranged from pre-entry tests, counseling interviews and a mandatory orientation course through to the issuing of need for improvement notices and the placing of students on probation.

Borrowing a formulation from Goffman (1952), Clark called this specific process 'cooling-out'. The performance this entailed for the open-door college within the larger education structure and society, he termed 'the cooling-out function'. The situation that made this function necessary was a societal one: the wide gap between culturally encouraged aspirations and institutionally provided means of realisation, leading to disappointment, denial and failure for many individuals.

The problem of blocked opportunity had been approached sociologically by Merton (1957) and others through a means-end analysis. Clark extended this analysis to the most prevalent type of disjuncture in education, that between open-door admissions and the maintenance of standards of performance and graduation. This was 'a situation of structured failure'. In those states where the strength of social pressure for college entry and the concern for standards were both high, there existed 'a potentially explosive situation'. In drawing attention to the ameliorative processes that lessened the strains of dissociation, he highlighted a role that, because of its latency, had not been previously identified.

A dilemma of the cooling-out role was that it needed to remain reasonably hidden, not clearly perceived or understood by students or their families. Should it become obvious, the ability of the organisation to perform it would be impaired.

If high-school seniors and their families were to define the junior college as a place which diverts college-bound students, a probable consequence would be a turning-away from the junior college and increased pressure for admission to the four-year colleges and universities that are otherwise protected to some degree. This would, of course, render superfluous the part now played by the junior college in the division of labor among colleges. (Clark 1960a, 575)

It also involved actions that 'no matter how helpful, would be felt by many involved to be the dirty work of the organization' (Clark 1980, 16).

### **Core concepts, changing conditions, common questions**

In addition to grounded concepts that illuminated the handling and screening of students, *The Open Door College* and its accompanying article provided researchers on social and institutional stratification with a set of propositions and conjectures for empirical testing and theoretical elaboration. The cooling-out argument has been at the heart of a debate about whether community colleges enhanced the education of those who might not have proceeded beyond high school (the thesis of 'educational advancement') or whether instead they discouraged and diverted individuals who might otherwise have earned a baccalaureate degree.

A variety of research, writing and reporting on these matters has continued over five decades (Cohen and Brawer 2003). Along the way, there has been recognition that throughout their history junior colleges have always faced contradictory tasks (Brint and Karabel, 1989); that democratisation and tendencies to diversion are both in play (Dougherty 1994); and that, on the whole, community colleges have served to advance the educational opportunities of non-traditional students (Grubb 2004).

Although the populations attending community colleges have changed considerably since the 1950s and 1960s, the cooling-out thesis figured routinely in national longitudinal studies in the 1980s and 1990s. In the altered conditions under which diversion had now to be judged, there was evidence of raised rather than lowered educational expectations among traditional-age entrants. Where diversion had occurred was within the history of students who were occupationally oriented (Adelman 2005). Cohort studies also featured in cross-national investigations of similar questions, although the attending complexities – methodological, definitional and contextual – have been formidable (Shavit, Arum, and Gamoran 2007).

Such was the widespread engagement with the cooling-out construct that Clark reviewed the original idea 20 years later, including a reflection on the generalisations offered in the book.

The book covered the emergence and development of the college. I attended to unique features, but emphasised characteristics that, on the basis of available comparative data, a few side glances, and some reasoning, seemed to be shared with most other public two-year institutions and hence could be generalised – something to put on the table that could be checked by others elsewhere and might, in explanatory power, be worth their time and effort. (Clark 1980, 67)

In his view, crucial features of the concept of cooling-out had often been overlooked, and, outside the serious research literature, the most common abuse of the idea was its confusion with 'casting out'. On the other hand, there had been useful efforts to extend or revise the notion, including the construction of counter or reverse concepts, such as 'warming up'. Clark acknowledged that a clearer distinction between effort and effectiveness in the cooling-out process should have been made at the outset of the study, so avoiding some later misunderstanding: 'Since I was doing an organisational analysis, I concentrated on the effort side' and 'I had a less clear grasp of the effects, since I was not doing an "impact" analysis'.

The change in approach he emphatically would not make was to extrapolate from internal analysis of the community college to grand theories about the role of education in society.

This is too easy as armchair sociology and too lacking in detailed analysis of connecting links. We especially lack the information and the capacity in the state of the art to compare situations in which the cooling out process operates and those in which it does not... The trouble with the leap to grand theory is that, poorly grounded in empirical research, it is particularly vulnerable to ideology of various persuasions. (Clark 1980, 77)

### **Organisational character and the special problems of the mass college**

Reorienting the over-aspiring student, acting as a screening agent for other institutions and keeping these processes away from public scrutiny were not the only problems that derived from an open-door policy and outlook. As already noted, the junior college was a dependent organisation. Its administrative location meant that the controls, orientations and pressures of the local school system would 'inescapably shape its character'. The principal determinants of this 'organisation character' were those that stemmed directly from the administrative context of the local school district, or else as having been brought to bear by it, as in the case of state admission requirements.

While other major aspects of context were left aside, this was not a study that focused on the internal processes and tendencies of the institution, as then current in American organisational analysis. Nor did Clark follow one of his mentors in embracing a theory of organisational commitment (Selznick 1949). This view, centred on the Weberian notion of bureaucracy, assumed 'too great a degree of initial innocence' on the part of the organisation.

A clean slate at the start may be too readily assumed if the context provided for an organization is not brought into view. Organizational theory needs to be accommodated to the fact that large classes of organizations start with their hands tied to a considerable degree, with the tying done by others who are part of the administrative context. In such cases, the primary commitments do not arise from processes internal to the suborganization itself or by decision of its own administrators. (Clark 1960b, 191–2)

His kind of contextual analysis required no appeal to influences completely external to the organisation, or to commitments that accumulated through important decisions made from within. By choosing to study a newly established junior college, Clark was able to demonstrate that the early days of an organisation were not necessarily freer or more open to self-determination than later years. If true for public schools and colleges in general, which Clark believed it was, then 'analysis of administrative settings, as a form of contextual analysis, may be instrumental in adding new dimensions to organisational theory'.

Out of this approach came an interpretation of the junior college in terms of a secondary orientation and 'diffuse commitment'. The two-fold dependency of the college on the local district and the student clientele shaped an outlook more akin to the high school than to four-year colleges and universities. Whereas the importance of research and scholarship was generally accepted in the state university and debated in the state colleges, it was little if ever considered in the two-year college. Rather, its primary investment was in teaching and counseling: 'The work with students tends to be a total work performance for the teacher'.

Without the particular history and special constituency of a private college, the commitments of the junior college were diffuse rather than selective. As a public school, the college was expected to provide many kinds of services for many kinds of people, particularly tailoring its curricula to the needs of diverse students.

It rapidly became part of its character to think in broad comprehensive terms about multiple functions. Some of its operations, such as terminal vocational education and part-time adult education, are undefined in limit, expandable according to demand, and hence especially subject to diffusion. (Clark 1960b, 143)

Dependency and diffusion were characteristics that suggested a general organisational type, 'the mass enterprise'. However, what the junior college could do that other schools could not – its 'operational specialty' – was the management of the latent terminal student. This was, Clark contended, the most important feature of the college. The more so because the effect of this operation was to permit a system of higher education to be both democratic and selective: 'The junior college makes this fully possible'.

Of relevance to present and past institutions that straddle secondary and higher education, Clark highlighted 'a central dilemma of character' faced by all public junior colleges. Legally they were usually defined as a part of secondary education but educationally they were a part of higher education. This ambiguity and indeterminacy, and the problems which flowed from them, have received rather less attention from researchers and commentators. In straddling this divide, the junior college 'meets contradictions that are not readily resolved' and which make organisational unity and distinctiveness difficult to attain.

The first of these problems is status. An unselective college that attempts to parallel, in part, the work of the university and the four-year institution cannot escape comparison with these establishments. In so doing, 'the images and standards of higher education are not kind to the junior college'. A second problem is identity. Not only is there an overlap with better-known types of institution; but this is further complicated by the interplay of conflicting needs and orientations.

The need of the junior college for status in the academic world pulls orientation toward transfer work; but the need for a unique function, to be able to do something that no other organization does, pulls toward the terminal, as does the noncollege nature of the majority of the study body. (Clark 1960b, 171–2)

In an organization with numerous broad purposes it is much more difficult to know specifically what the enterprise is about than in specialized agencies. (Clark 1960b, 173)

Finally, there is the problem of autonomy. Apart from its administrative dependence, the public junior college is vulnerable to 'unorganised influences' which derive from its inability to select a student body. These influences make the college 'easily reached and affected by trends of interest in the local community'. In California, this feature was in effect decreed for the junior college by state law.

Once established, it has come to be interpreted as a virtue in conceptions of service to the local community. But as an operational fact, this condition sharply limits the extent to which an organization can consciously determine itself. (Clark 1960b, 175)

Like the state colleges and the state university, junior colleges can somewhat diminish their vulnerability by internal devices, such as by establishing criteria for admission to various programmes. This might gain some self-direction but the basic source of the problem of autonomy is unaltered.

### **American exceptionalism and the reach of the early works**

As the first state to pass legislation allowing the creation of public junior colleges and then, from the 1920s, to promote the growth of these institutions within a tripartite structure of higher education, California was an audience ready for *The Open Door College*. Not only was California the largest and most coherent system of higher education in the United States, it boasted the biggest network of public junior colleges as well. More than that, it launched in 1960 a 'master plan' which, in the words of a leading historian of Californian higher education, 'was and continues to be arguably the single most influential effort to plan the future of a system of higher education in annals of American higher education' (Douglass 2010).

### ***Made in California, fit for America***

This was the same year that the Clark monograph was published and it was into this context that the arguments of the book informed a new wave of debates about the role of junior colleges in mass systems of higher education. Junior colleges, state colleges and the campuses of the University of California were the three segments of a publicly funded tripartite system of higher education that the master plan sought to strengthen. With junior colleges at the base of the structure, the aim was to expand access, maintain quality, preserve mission differentiation and contain the costs to the state. The master plan did not invent the tripartite system. Rather, the plan represented a further stage in the evolution of 'the California idea' of higher education which had its roots in political and administrative reforms at the beginning of the twentieth century (Douglass 2000).

In the same way, *The Open Door College* did not discover the mass college. Nor were administrators and analysts innocent of the screening functions of junior colleges and the pressures placed on these institutions in providing preparatory (transfer) and terminal (technical) education, and much else. Nor was Clark the first to observe how the establishment of the junior college allowed the University of California to assume the status and function of a research university. It was the University of California itself which had been active in conceptualising and supporting the idea of a junior college, one that protected the mission of the university and which provided a relatively low-cost mechanism to increase access to higher education. Where some other American states had responded to populist demands for greater access by making accommodations between the requirements of a research university and the educational responsibilities and admission standards of a junior college, California explicitly rejected this path.

For Clark, the advance of the mass college might be protective of the mission of the selective institution but much more was at stake:

The mass enterprise in higher education contributes to a vast democratization, but also entails a lowering of standards of admission and attainment. Its existence may be essential to the welfare of 'non-mass' colleges, but at the same time it may change the nature of higher education by blurring its meaning and encouraging a sovereignty of the poorly qualified. Value judgements on the 'worth' of the public junior college need to be made on complex grounds, weighing the pros and cons, for much more than money and administrative convenience are at issue. (Clark 1960b, 155)

His study was a contribution to the 'extensive exploration' which the immensity of these issues demanded. The history and background to these questions was something which Clark assumed his American readers would know, even those outside the state of California. There is no account here of the problems and struggles that marked the career of the California tripartite system, especially the turf wars over segmental functions and the turmoil occasioned by the rapid expansion of enrolments and programmes in the immediate post-war years. Neither do alternatives to the California model of two-year colleges, such as the extension centres of large state universities, require any introduction.

While the unfolding of the California idea coincided with the 'long prenatal existence' of the newly established junior college in San Jose (from 1921 when it was the junior college department of San Jose high school), the contextual analysis pursued by Clark was mainly in terms of the administrative environment in which the college had 'to make its way'. *The Open Door College* is first and foremost a study in the sociology of organisations, albeit with a concept of cooling-out that proved highly influential and controversial, especially in the fierce arguments that later broke out between critics and defenders of the community college.

This focus on the administrative setting (the local school district) and a reluctance to examine the larger scene are among the reasons why the book was unlikely to reach a wide readership beyond the United States. Along with other examples of American exceptionalism,



the two-year junior college – like the four-year liberal arts college – was a unique institution ‘found nowhere else in the world’ and with no other type of organization expected to: ‘serve such a diversity of purposes, to provide such a variety of educational instruments, or to distribute students among so many types of educational programs’ (Medsker 1960, 4).

On the other hand, all countries looking to expand their elite or extended elite systems had a direct interest in learning from the experience of the first American state to achieve mass levels of participation; and from the performance of the junior and community colleges that were expected to absorb a large part of the explosive increase in college attendance.

### **Home and abroad, then and now**

Within and beyond the United States, California was seen as a leader in policy-making on higher education. The master plan proclaimed modernist ideals of rationality and efficiency, championed democracy and inclusion, and promised to meet the needs of tomorrow. A highly differentiated system of public tertiary institutions, with a special and strategic mission accorded to junior colleges, struck a highly sought balance of access, quality and affordability. The scheme immediately received the commendation of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 1963) and even attracted a visit from members of the Robbins committee on higher education in Great Britain (Committee on Higher Education 1963).

The master plan and its admissions and transfer policies helped to bring the Clark monograph to the notice of policy, university and college leaders in the United States. The book has remained a standard point reference ever since. Despite the renewed international interest in California-style mass higher education, the book enjoyed a largely domestic circulation and reputation. Apart from there being no real counterpart to the American two-year open-access institution and no organisational and administrative system to compare with that in California, there are additional reasons why *The Open Door College* did not travel and translate into other national and regional systems. In systems with early selection for the academic and vocational tracks of upper secondary there was less pressure on post-secondary institutions to perform remedial and preparatory functions.

Except for the OECD and a handful of individual scholars with an interest in the academic study of higher education, there was at this time no community of researchers and body of literature into which the early works of Clark might find a non-American home (Fulton 1992). That had to wait until the 1970s and 1980s, and even then there was uneven development and interest in organisational and sociological perspectives within the new small field of higher education studies.

Furthermore, the title of the book, and especially its sub-title, ‘a case study’ suggested perhaps – quite wrongly – a text without generalising statements, clarifying concepts and resources for cross-national comparison. Theoretically, its brand of American structural-functionalism, no matter how sophisticated and nuanced, was also unlikely to endear the book to proponents of other traditions in the paradigm wars that came to dominate American and European sociology. On the other hand, *The Open Door College* was:

... among the respected achievements of educational research, and the attention given by functionalist analysis to the selective functions of educational institutions led to the accumulation of data that have proved extremely useful to researchers whether or not they adhere to a functionalist paradigm. (Karabel and Halsey 1979, 11)

As with his other early works, Clark chose to complement a book-length study with an article published in a leading academic journal. In the case of *The Open Door College* this was a paper in the *American Journal of Sociology* which identified him as a sociologist first and a student of higher education second. It was the journal article rather than the book that moved the concept

of cooling-out into the international literature and into the mainstream of sociology and the sociology of education (Halsey, Floud, and Anderson 1960).

Care of these sources, the cooling-out construct was applied or adapted to a range of settings, not just in education and not always in the United States. The setting-up of the Open University in the United Kingdom in the late 1960s, then the only higher education institution offering open access to adults and a modular-credit curriculum, was a case in point. A concern that an open door might be a revolving door stimulated an investigation and discussion that owed much to the original argument developed by Clark (McIntosh 1976).

Nevertheless, it was in the field of American higher education that the open-door concept was soon absorbed into everyday language and the cooling-out function became a short-hand for analysing the twin processes of democratisation and diversion in the community college system. Twenty years on, it was not without significance that Clark revisited the cooling-out thesis in a publication devoted to the study of community colleges (Clark 1980). In the intervening period, the number of public two-year institutions in the United States had doubled and their enrolments had soared, so ensuring a continuing dialogue and critical engagement with the core concept.

Fifty years on, versions and models of the community college were recognisable in other parts of the world (Elsner, Boggs, and Irwin 2008; Raby and Valeau 2009). This was not only where the American influence was greatest. In some systems, the shift to mass and near-universal access, brought colleges of further, technical and vocational education into higher education, often as providers of short-cycle and work-focused programmes (Garrod 2008). In some jurisdictions, such as England, this was a rediscovery and reinvention of an earlier role (Parry 2003). In systems with a strong division between higher and vocational education, such as Australia, the location of associate and baccalaureate degrees in technical and further education institutes was at an early stage of development and based on privately funded enrolments (Moodie and Wheelahan 2009).

In most cases, these were lower-tier tertiary institutions that performed access and transfer functions on behalf of large, differentiated and distributed systems of higher education. Like their nearest-equivalents in North America, they were potentially implicated in the dirty work of higher education: the processes that steered many working class and non-traditional students into low-cost and low-status settings for higher level education and training. Here also were institutions that confronted dilemmas of comprehensiveness and problems of role and identity.

They were among the least researched parts of the post-secondary system and, as in the Clark collection, they merited the same serious scholarly treatment as accorded to other kinds of educational organisation. At the centre of theoretical and empirical debates for half a century, *The Open Door College* is a foundation text for the study of a new generation of mass colleges. As much for its methodology as its sociology, a contemporary and critical reading is warranted.

### Notes on contributor

Gareth Parry is Professor of Education at the University of Sheffield. His research interests include system change and policy history in higher education. He was Director of the ESRC-funded study of *Universal Access and Dual Regimes of Further and Higher Education*.

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