Towards a southern theory of higher education

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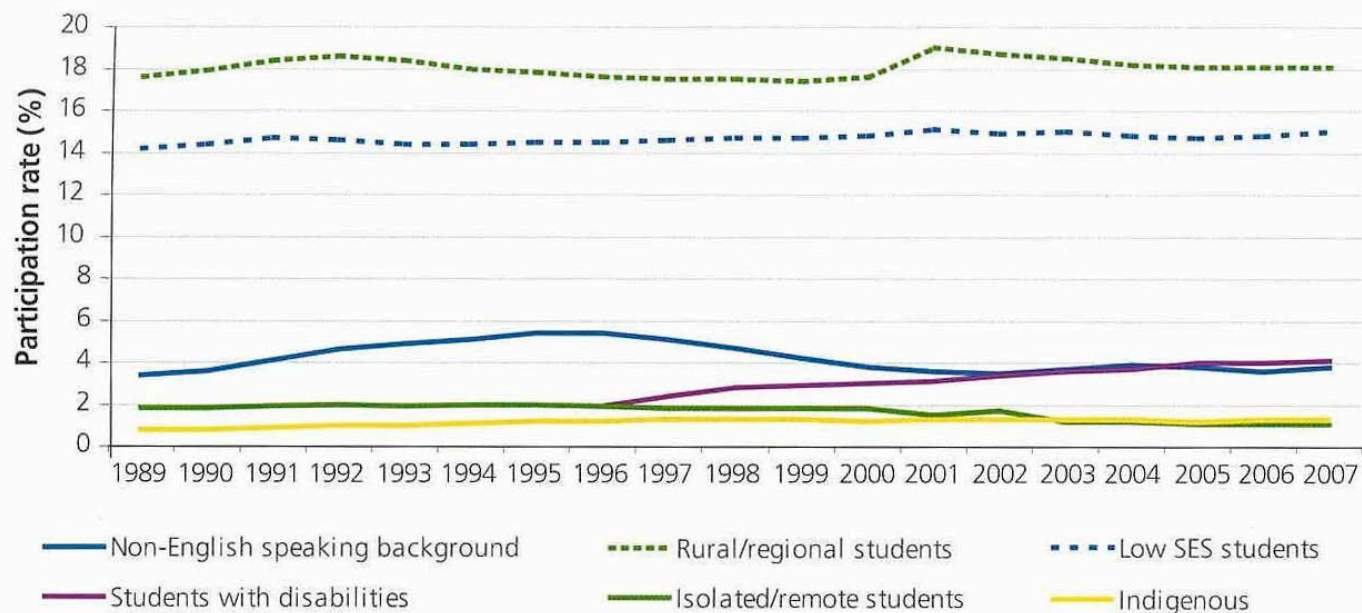# Overview

✓ Understanding equity

✓ Responding to equity targets

✓ Improving the student learning experience

✓ Knowing and ways of knowing

Southern Theory

✓ ... calls attention to the centre-periphery relations in the realm of knowledge … [Connell] use[s] the term 'Southern' not to name a sharply bounded category of states or societies, but to emphasise relations – authority, exclusion and inclusion, hegemony, partnership, sponsorship, appropriation – between intellectuals and institutions in the metropole and those in the world periphery. (Connell 2007: viii-ix)

The record so far

Figure 2: Participation rates by groups, 1989 to 2007

Legend:
— Non-English speaking background
···· Rural/regional students
- - - Low SES students
— Students with disabilities
— Isolated/remote students
— Indigenous

Note: a) Definitions for regional/rural and isolated/remote students were altered in 2001 causing a break in series, b) Post-2001 is based on 2006 Census SES postcode allocations, whereas prior years are based on earlier Census SES postcode allocations

Source: DEEWR (Equity Performance Indicators - national indicators), various years

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Bradley et al. 2008: 28

✓ How can we account for differences between equity groups?

✓ How can we, indeed should we, account for differences within equity groups?

✓ How confident can we be that we are measuring what we claim to be measuring?

Low SES we can trust

✓ Socioeconomic status is a concept that is defined by its context; we need to avoid measures that 'context-strip' individuals, effectively discounting their social and cultural contexts, which contribute to who they are;

✓ Because of the range of circumstances that constitute socioeconomic status, better statistical measures need to involve a combination rather than rely on one single measure;

✓ The combination of social, cultural and economic circumstances that define socioeconomic status means that any statistical representation needs to be treated as indicative rather than prescriptive; statistical measures of social and cultural issues are always approximations.

Success!

✓ 20% not 25%

✓ Higher education is not all the same

✓ High and Low SES are not evenly spread across the country

… the TER is an authoritative measure that rewards the cultural resources characteristic of the most economically powerful groups in society (Teese & Polesel 2003, in George et al. 2005: 144)

- ✓ **LSAY data:** "If students from a low socio-economic background get to university, *their background does not negatively affect their chances* of completing the course" (Marks 2007: 27)

- ✓ **Monash**: "students from relatively disadvantaged schools, who gain lower ENTERs in Year 12, subsequently *catch up to, and then overtake* their more privileged counterparts from other school types once at university" (Dobson & Skuja 2002: 61)

- ✓ **Monash:** "*ENTER is not a particularly good predictor of performance* in information technology, creative arts, the humanities or business courses and is a *poor predictor of performance* in the health and education areas" (Dobson & Skuja 2002: 61)

- ✓ **UniSA:** "once students gain entry they have a high rate of retention and in most **cases *perform as well or better*** than other school leavers" (Tranter et al. 2007: 14)

- ✓ **Edith Cowan:** Dobozy, E. (2008) *Alternative pathway entry students show promising start in teacher education*. AARE Conference, Brisbane.

- ✓ **UWA:** Win R. & Miller P. (2005) The effects of individual and school factors on university academic performance. *Australian Economic Review* 38(1): 1-18.

The research evidence

Despite low access rates, the success rate (or tendency to pass their year's subjects) of low socio-economic status students is 97 per cent of the pass rates of their medium and high socio-economic status peers and has been very stable over the last five years.

(Bradley et al. 2008: 30)

Chi-squared analyses found no significant differences in the outcomes of first year enrolments for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds …

(Hillman 2005: 38)

	2009-10 $m	2010-11 $m	2011-12 $m	2012-13 $m	4 yr total $m
Partnerships activities	7	21	36	44	108
Enrolment loading	21	64	108	132	325
Total funding to support low SES participation*					**$433**

Includes $394m new funds, plus existing Equity Support Program funding. An additional $4 million is being provided for departmental expenses.

Source: *(Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 13)

Low SES students need support

Once students from disadvantaged backgrounds have entered university the likelihood of them completing their course of study is broadly similar to that of the general higher education population. Often, however, *they require higher levels of support to succeed*, including financial assistance and greater academic support, mentoring and counselling services. *(Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 14)

Go8 March (2009) Newsletter

http://www.go8.edu.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=221&Itemid=180

2006 Attrition Rates (%) (Commencing domestic students, bachelor level only)

Institution	All students	Disability	Non-English speaking background	Low SES	Regional	Remote	Indigenous
The University of Melbourne	8.6	7.2	3.8	9.0	9.1	0.0	12.0
The University of Sydney	11.2	15.5	8.1	11.9	10.8	15.2	18.9
The Australian National University	11.3	12.6	13.0	6.6	11.3	0.0	15.4
The University of New South Wales	11.9	17.4	6.5	12.8	11.8	23.7	24.3
Monash University	12.3	12.6	8.5	15.1	13.0	11.6	20.0
The University of Western Australia	12.3	11.1	4.5	10.8	10.7	15.7	18.5
The University of Adelaide	15.3	16.5	8.1	18.7	14.3	16.1	35.0
The University of Queensland	17.6	19.4	8.9	17.5	14.1	9.3	40.9
Sector average	18.5	20.2	12.6	20.4	20.7	25.4	31.4

The attrition rate for year (x) is the proportion of students commencing a bachelor course in year (x) who neither complete nor return in year (x + 1).
Students who change courses within a university are not included in the attrition rate, however those who change university are included.
Source: Students, Selected Higher Education Statistics (DEEWR)

Equity groups do better at Go8s … with what support?

- ✓ Access without support is not opportunity (Tinto)
- ✓ Opportunity confined to support is not equity

Support as disciplining

✓ Low SES students are positioned as a potential threat to academic standards

✓ Student support is the mechanism for assuring that academic standards are maintained

✓ Support tends to act on students, to fix their short comings so they meet the academic standards required to participate in the mainstream of higher education

✓ Maintaining standards of quality and excellence

A southern theory of higher education

✓ First and foremost, student learning environments and experiences are such that students are appreciated for who they are and for how they identify themselves;

✓ Second, there are opportunities in these environments and experiences for all students to make contributions as well as to develop their understandings and skills;

✓ Third, all students are provided with genuine opportunities to shape how their learning environments and experiences are structured.

The international student case

… both students and faculties in British universities originate in an enormous number of countries from all over the globe, and this international richness inevitably, and rightly, affects the nature of education in these institutions. (Luxon & Peelo 2009: 52)

… it is optimistic simply to expect students from another culture, and another academic culture, to fit naturally with the prevailing activities in a department, and with student activity throughout campus. (Luxon & Peelo 2009: 55)

In-class-ive curriculum

Different understandings of knowledge

✓ Relations between pure and applied knowledge

✓ Decompartmentalisation of knowledge, through discipline(s)

✓ Unofficial sites of learning

Different ways of knowing

✓ learning through activity

✓ problem based learning

✓ practice-based learning

✓ narrative

Pure vs Applied

increasingly, knowledges and skills which could once only be acquired 'on the job,' and which had no existence outside of their use or application, are now deemed to have a formal component, which is a knowledge like any other; their practical component now presupposes a mastery of the theory of which the practical component is the application. Nursing and tourism become university subjects, knowledges which have to be learned in such a way that the students can draw upon their stock of formal knowledge and 'apply' it according to context. (Seth 2007: 38-39)

knowing and ways of knowing

✓ Funds of knowledge – value placed on a variety of knowledges

✓ Funds of pedagogy – value placed on a variety of ways of knowing / learning

✓ Fusion of funds – creating spaces in curriculum design and pedagogy for different knowledges to make contributions and for those contributions to be valued

Creating spaces in HE for students

is about

- ✓ students having opportunities to express what they know
- ✓ student understandings being respected and valued
- ✓ university knowledge complementing and challenging what students know
- ✓ students' knowledge complementing and challenging what others (including universities) know

involves

- ✓ Reposition lecturers, peers, academic literature, fieldwork, etc as resources for students' learning
- ✓ Repositioning disciplines, traditions, etc as resources to aid understanding of issues, problems, themes, etc.

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Conclusion

✓ It's about the numbers

✓ It's about the support

✓ It's about creating places *and* spaces of higher education