Derailing transformative education

Sandra Grey, NZTEU
David Kenkel, Unitec
(David Cooke and Wei Loo)
Overview

The direction
• Massification, marketisation, and managerialism
• Globalisation and imperialism
• Attacks on the academic profession

The impact
• Alienation, mission drift, alienation
Massification

Gross enrollment ratio in tertiary education

Total enrollment in tertiary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the total population of the five-year age group following on from secondary school leaving.

Source: World Bank
Marketisation

I AM A GAME CHANGER
I AM THE NEW NEW ZEALAND
Managerialism

The opportunities you have to influence decisions in your department or work unit

- **Wananga n=22**
  - Worse
  - About the same
  - Better

- **Universities n=588**
  - Worse
  - About the same
  - Better

- **Polytechnics n=279**
  - Worse
  - About the same
  - Better

% of respondents
The opportunities you have to influence decisions with regard to changes to the curriculum or courses

- **Wananga n=19**
  - Worse:
  - About the same:
  - Better:

- **Universities n=436**
  - Worse:
  - About the same:
  - Better:

- **Polytechnics n=258**
  - Worse:
  - About the same:
  - Better:
# Reported Attacks on Higher Education

For date range: November 11, 2017 - November 11, 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<td>Killings, Violence, Disappearances</td>
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<td>Imprisonment</td>
<td>78</td>
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<td>Prosecution</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>Loss of Position</td>
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<td>Travel Restrictions</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>221</strong></td>
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Changing the sector

- Institutions – businesses
- CEs/VCs – managers
- Staff – resources to be used efficiently
- Students – consumers
- Business – drivers of direction
- Community – invisible
Scientific publications using English
• Around 60% in 1980
• 96% in 2000
Alienation

Increasingly managers are taking a more directive role and as a result I am less effective in changing courses to keep up with knowledge internationally. There is too much focus on counting things that do not count rather than engaging in learning processes that do count (Education under pressure, NZ)
Indebtedness

AS I LOOK TO THE FUTURE...
Less of a journey of transformation, more of a “forced march with a policy of shooting stragglers”  (Cooke, 2018. P,15.)

The neoliberal experiment at Unitec.
Thoughts on the Neo-Liberal paradigm


Coming from remarkably different theoretical approaches all three authors make the very good point that:

The unregulated application of the market model devastates the very fields it claims to serve.

Kuttner makes the additional claim that education in particular is what he would call a second-best market. That is, a market better served by metrics measuring social good rather than fiscal gain.

We also know that the intention to create education as primarily market commodity rather than primarily serving a public good is not a new one (Lyotard, 1984; Marshall, 1995).
Unitec’s awful experience is what can (and did) happen when a small group of politically well-supported acolytes of a neoliberal ideology were allowed unfettered access to the control levers of public education.

Hopefully, the experience will operate as a ‘how-not-to’ learning experience for broader education in New Zealand. Thankfully the new management have stepped away from the thinking and ideology that underpinned the transformation.
What happened at Unitec reflects perhaps one of the more extreme examples of the saying: That Neoliberalism tends to operate as relating to the market metaphor as a revealed truth rather than a contestable logic (Myers, 2004).

Or as Kuttner puts it:

“There is at the core of the celebration of markets relentless tautology. If we begin by assuming that nearly everything can be understood as a market and that markets optimize outcomes, then everything leads back to the same conclusion—marketize! If, in the event, a particular market doesn't optimize, there is only one possible conclusion—it must be insufficiently market-like. This is a no-fail system for guaranteeing that theory trumps evidence. Should some human activity not, in fact, behave like an efficient market, it must logically be the result of some interference that should be removed. It does not occur that the theory mis-specifies human behavior (1997. P, 1.).”
Long histories

Before turning more to the Unitec experience I’d like to make the point that what happened to us at Unitec cannot really be separated from the broader decades old neo-liberal project. This project was not in essence simply economic. The project aim was also to redefine human nature as essentially individualistic, choice able, tightly boundary and inherently self-interested operating within a world construed as a competitive field. (Apple, 1991; Fitzsimons, 2002; Kenkel, 2005; Phoenix, 2003; Marshall, 1995; Mulderrig, 2003; Rose 1999).

Within that schemata and despite all evidence to the contrary, the competitive market becomes the perfect device for maximising human well-being. Solidarity and collectivism become the enemy of the market and hence the enemy of human well-being (Mayer 2016).
The new normal

In 2015 Paul Prestige and I examined the colonisation of the community sector by neo-liberal norms over a 30 period – (Kenkel and Prestige (2015)).

What we found extraordinary was the extent to which neoliberal norms of functioning and being have (over time) become the common norms of functioning and being to the extent that other possibilities become squeezed out of sight.

Collectivity and solidarity become faintly embarrassing concepts and the so-called efficiency gains of a neoliberally informed managerialism became hegemonic in their ascendance. The same seems to have become true for education.
So what typically happens? – logics of action under neo-liberalism

Increasingly ruthless exclusion of information that doesn’t support the success story of marketisation.

Replacement of existing management by new managers expressly picked because of their allegiance to a market model. (Tellingly - at Unitec few were from education).

Bizarre Nomenclature to support the ‘vision’ – (business realisation managers!)

Persistence with ideologically inspired projects even when it becomes apparent they are failing massively.

Inefficient efficiency gains. The sorts of changes that look good when viewed from a distance via spreadsheet but produce disaster at the ground.

Clumping of authority and power into smaller groups, with success measured by loyalty to the ideological vision, and failure determined by expression of dissent. Classic Cuban missile crisis material, often accompanied by vicious games of musical chairs to exclude / silence dissenters. Unchecked vanity projects by the in-group proliferate because dissent using real-world metrics becomes effectively impossible.
And – declaring victory before the results are in – creating a hardening of position and making backtracking almost impossible
I told you so is a miserable business.

Don’t play with matches! Don’t play with matches! Don’t play with matches!

Now look what you did the house is on fire!

Sadly, Unitec was my house, Happily it hasn’t completely burnt down – albeit we are all rather singed.
2013-2017

• The philosophy that informed Unitec’s transformation (i.e. restructure) can be summed up: *Public vocational education should prioritize and focus wholly on the needs of business.*

• Education to be *business* focussed, *not* student focussed
Unitec’s ‘transformation’ began in earnest in late 2013, with the restructure of the design school, with staffing being reduced from 53 to 17 permanent positions.

Half of the teaching hours were to be filled by industry ‘experts’

An emphasis on online learning, with intended dramatic reductions in face-to-face teaching, was promulgated throughout the institute

(Loo, W. 2018)
Unitec’s transformation

• “It's fair to say we are fundamentally repositioning the role of an academic in this space…We see the need for quite different jobs in this mix - they are academic jobs but a different balance of things we are asking them to do. That is quite confronting for the Tertiary Education Union.” Rick Ede, former Unitec CE

• In 2014, traditional academic faculties and departments were disestablished and replaced with so called ‘Networks’ and ‘Practice Pathways’

• ‘Networks’ and ‘practice pathways’ would supposedly facilitate vastly increased employer input into course and programme content, and thus streamline students into work.

(Loo, W. 2018)
Unitec’s transformation

• **Culture of fear and bullying** put into place. The former deputy CE (now head of another major polytechnic) would, in the wake of disestablishing positions, revel in describing himself to staff as ‘the Terminator’, ‘Dr Death’. Such an attitude spread throughout the management structure at Unitec.

• Four years of transformation has devastated staff morale, with **only 9% of staff then recommending Unitec as a place of employment** (i.e. detractors, see below)

• Net Promoter Score, a measure of staff morale is an appalling -57 (Loo, W. 2018)
Unitec’s transformation

- The excellent Unitec Environmental Scan report of March 2017 states that of all the Metro Group of ITPs, and using 2009 as a base, Unitec is the *worst performer in terms of domestic enrolments*.
- Since the transformation really gathered steam in 2012/13, Unitec’s is significantly *underperforming relative to the rest of the ITP sector by 7 times* in terms of all enrolments (Domestic + International) (Loo, W. 2018)
Enrolments as % of 2012 enrolments

2.14% decline since 2012

15.2% decline since 2012

% of 2012 EFTS


Unitec

Rest of the ITP sector
Unitec’s transformation

- In late 2015, Dr Rick Ede, former Unitec CE, announced 55 job losses in relation to the centralization and **outsourcing of student services and the application to enrolment process** - to the multinational business services company **Concentrix**.

- Unitec promised Concentrix “**would provide students with faster, personalised help using technology and a world-class customer care environment to identify their needs and guide them to the services they need.**”

- Dr Ede said: “**We also want to offer the best possible customer service to our students. Concentrix are specialists in customer-centric service provision, and this partnership will ensure we achieve this….”**

- Management seemed to have extraordinary confidence in Concentrix’s ability to do the job – in spite of Concentrix having **no previous experience** in providing tertiary services. (Loo, W. 2018)
The business model was essentially about **outsourcing and centralizing** the jobs of in-house staff who provided student services, support, applications and enrolments, to a **call centre**.

Low paid student workers to become a **centralized** one-stop-shop of knowledge and services. Admin staff with years of **discipline specific** and institutional knowledge to be replaced by students working part time.

Even a properly functioning phone system was deemed **unimportant**—competent in-house telephonists were disestablished, to be replaced by a confusing hierarchy of automated voice responses, run by Concentrix. (Loo, W. 2018)
CONCENTRIX: Impact on enrolments

- 2015 to 2017 (2 year decline): 20% overall decline and 23% decline in domestic students.

- To provide some context, the University of Canterbury experienced a similar decline in overall EFTS – but over a period of 4 years after the Christchurch earthquakes.

- 2017 (Sem 1 + Sem 2) EFTS, lowest since 2002. (Loo, W. 2018)

- In particular, younger students appear to have been the worst affected:
Domestic EFTS (Level 3 programmes and above)

- 25 and over (2 year decline of 16.6%)
- 20 to 25 (2 year decline of 20%)
- under 20 (2 year decline of 30%)
List of problems in consequence of the transformation:

• The restructuring of the design and visual arts school such that at present EFTS are only 11% of what they were five years ago, (in terms of new enrolments for semester 1 2018).

• The creation of common semester courses with a strong on-line component. These were of such poor quality that they drew significant negative attention from at least two professional registration bodies.

• The removal of required quality assurance processes such as program management committees that under new management have now been replaced.
Impacts

- The large drop in EFTS, which in comparison to the EFTS status of other ITPs cannot be explained by simple changes in the economy and labour market.
- Very poor student survey results over more than one year.
- The downsizing of specific support services for Maori and Pacific students and their amalgamation into mainstream services.
- Staff survey results that over four successive years offer a powerful and pointed criticism of the negative effects of the reforms.
Impacts

• As described - The outsourcing of enrolments to the multinational company Concentrix which had no previous experience in this area of work. There was a corresponding 20% drop in domestic students in just two years (from 2015 to 2017) and a plethora of complaints.

• The drop from NZQA category one to category two after the 2016 EER. While impossible to quantify, a drop in our reputation seems to have accompanied this.

• A profound alienation between management and staff
A trio of problems

The difficulties that Unitec has faced over the last four to five years might be characterised as falling under three broad and often overlapping categories.

First problem:

inherent structural problems in the new approaches of what was called the transformation. Many of these followed a failure to follow principles of subsidiarity with a tendency for efficiency drives involving centralisation of decision-making with a corresponding loss of expert input into decisions affecting the coalface.
Incompetent and ill planned implementation. Many of these seemed driven by the ‘shiny-new-toy-syndrome’ rather than research – or; driven as vanity projects by senior executive leadership team members.
Third problem:

A failure to listen to advice or take account of evidence-based feedback on the part of the previous executive leadership team and Council. There was consistent feedback from staff that the ELT - (executive leadership team) - under Dr Rick Ede - (and by extension the Unitec Council) - refused and ignored offers of advice and feedback from staff and continued to proceed with initiatives that clear evidence-based information showed to be pathways to disaster.
Solutions seem reasonably simple and will take time. New management seem on-board.

Use ‘close-to-the-coalface’ quality assurance mechanisms such as program management committees with sufficient discipline-based admin support that they can function well. Ensure that these follow a consistent format / mandate. **Follow the principle of subsidiarity at all levels**

Decentralise admin and make it possible / easy for potential applicants and students to speak to discipline knowledgeable admin staff and lecturers. This would mean removing the assumption that generic student services staff can know everything about everything sufficiently as to address the complexities of discipline specific studies.
Introduce mechanisms that operate to ‘brake’ ill thought through ‘shiny-new-toy-projects’ / vanity project approaches. Typically, this might involve experienced teaching staff having considerable input into decision-making rather than allowing authority capture by a small group.

Respect the integrity of disciplines by promoting management who have experience in those disciplines into positions of authority.

Judicious and targeted use of e-learning across the arc of study rather than its wholesale blunt application.
Conclusion

Ensure there are well-resourced specific Maori and Pasifika support services.

Move away from language such as ‘customer’ and ‘pathways’ back to more commonly understood terms such as ‘student’ and faculty.

Cap the introduction of new management staff and consultants rather than capping teaching staff.

Adopt a staged ‘bed-in’ approach to change that does not court change fatigue and hostility from staff.

Value, listen to and support teaching staff.
What do we do as a scholarly community to stop a repeat of Unitec?
WE SAID REFORM PUBLIC TERTIARY EDUCATION FOR US ALL
6 MONTHS LATER HOW IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING?

Policy must recognise tertiary education as a vital public institution that benefits us all

Funding model must change to support accessible & equitable access to quality lifelong learning

Students and staff must have a strong voice in workplace and sector decisions

Policy must recognise staff conditions of work are students' conditions of learning

TŪ KOTahi | TŪ Kaha
TEU.AC.NZ
TEU@TEU.AC.NZ


