



CONCEPTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

IMPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY TYPOLOGY

My Thesis

The typology of the SA HE system reflects particular conceptions of knowledge, ways of knowing and knowledge production. This has led to the entrenchment of institutional types and learning programmes they are deemed suitable to offer by the government. Instead of the intended unitary but differentiated system we have created a stratified and hierarchical system.

Outline of the Paper

- Assumptions underpinning my central argument.
- Distinctions between various forms of knowledge.
- (un) intended consequences of policies for university institutional types in the South African context.
- Institutional differentiation as social stratification.
- Policy-driven institutional differentiation

Underpinning Assumptions

- There can be no generalizable and transferable occupational **practice** that is not firmly grounded in **theory**.
- All curricula in all institutional types have a varying mix of conceptual (theoretical) and contextual (practical) knowledge.
- As a social justice imperative, horizontal institutional differentiation is preferable to vertical differentiation.

Theory and Practice

- Disciplinary and situated knowledge
- Conceptual and contextual knowledge
- Pure knowledge and applied knowledge
- Basic research and applied research
- Education and training.

A theoretically untenable binary system has been created between these forms of knowledge and ways of knowing.

Core Knowledge in Disciplines & Professions

“The **only** knowledge that can truly orient action is knowledge that frees itself from mere human interests and is based on Ideas – in other words, knowledge that has taken a theoretical attitude”.

Jürgen Habermas in *Knowledge and Human Interests : A General Perspective*

Aristotle on Forms of knowledge

The purpose of a theoretical discipline is the pursuit of truth through contemplation; its telos is the attainment of knowledge for its own sake.

Productive Sciences & Practical Disciplines

The purpose of the productive sciences is to make something; their telos is the production of some artifact. The practical disciplines are those sciences which deal with ethical and political life; their telos is practical wisdom and knowledge. (Carr & Kemis 1986:32)

Policies, Legislation and Frameworks

- Education White Paper 3 (1997)
- Higher Education Act 101 (1997)
- National Higher Education Plan (2001)
- National Qualifications Framework (2008)
- Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (2007 /2013)
- White Paper on Post-school Education (2013)
- Policy Framework on Differentiation in SA Post-School System (2014)

Policy Critique

- Remarkable consistency: from the ANC Yellow Book (1994) to the White Paper on Post-school Education (2013).
- Questionable formulations and inherent contradictions especially in the HEQSF (2013) & the DHET *Policy Framework on Differentiation* (July 2014).

The Diploma and the Degree

- Same duration of study
- Same credit points
- Different NQF levels
- Different admission requirements
- Different routes for upward articulation
- Questionable assumptions about the cognitive challenge of the two qualification types
- Untenable assumptions about the content covered in the two qualification types.

CONSEQUENCES

- Students from particular socio-economic backgrounds enroll at UoTs and traditional / comprehensive universities.
- Direct and predictable consequence of social stratification which is mainly class based but contains elements of race, rurality, etc.
- Dominance of the so-called traditional universities.

Analytical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis:

“It is not just descriptive, it is also **normative**. It addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them”.

Norman Fairclough (2010: 12)

Possible remedies

- Umalusi to review the Diploma and the Bachelor passes.
- DHET to encourage (through policy) horizontal differentiation as opposed to vertical differentiation or stratification.
- Conceptualize WIL as an integral part of the curriculum in all undergraduate programmes
- Institutional autonomy should take precedence over accountability.

Possible remedies

- Need to adopt a critical view of the extent to which higher education is shaped by and responds to national and international conglomerates that are euphemistically referred to as the labour market. This is evident in the following quote from the latest DHET policy framework:

Purpose of Differentiation & Diversity

"Diversified educational systems are supposed to *produce higher levels of client-orientation* (both regarding the needs of students and the labour market) *social mobility, effectiveness, flexibility, articulation, innovativeness, and stability*". (DHET 2014:10)

THANK YOU / NGIYABONGA



**CENTRE FOR
EXCELLENCE
IN LEARNING
& TEACHING**

PROF. THENGANI H NGWENYA

**Associate Professor & Director
Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching**

Durban University of Technology
P O Box 1334, Durban 4000, South Africa

Tel: + 27 31 373 2248

Fax: +27 86 674 0896

Email: ngwenyat@dut.ac.za

www.dut.ac.za