

# Diversity and Widening Participation in Higher Education

Miriam E. David, AcSS, FRSA

ESRC TLRP

Institute of Education London

[m.david@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:m.david@ioe.ac.uk)

[www.tlrp.org](http://www.tlrp.org)



# Summary of UCAS presentation

- A critique of higher education policies and practices:
    - concepts and theories about global higher education
    - widening access or participation in higher education
  - Social diversity intersecting with gender as critical to expansion of global higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but the question is how?
  - Research evidence from the UK government's ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme
  - Changing policy contexts have had contradictory and inequitable effects on individuals and institutions.
  - Challenge of the creative potential of inclusive, connectionist or new social diversity pedagogies and practices for (higher) education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
-

# Introduction

- Personal approach (second wave feminist) sociologist (David 2003)
- Given socio-economic global transformations, including in women's lives, changing methodologies in global higher education (Morley & David 2009; Weiler & David 2008)
- Theoretical *diversity* but commitment to collaborative and democratic action for gender and social justice based upon robust theories and evidence-informed practices (Leathwood & Read 2008)
- TLRP role as Associate Director to synthesise research on diversity, with 15 projects on post-compulsory and higher education (HE), including widening participation (WP) and lifelong learning.
  - 7 projects on WP in HE commissioned 3 years ago in context of constantly changing policy debates about UK higher education in David ed. *Improving Learning by Widening Participation in Higher Education* (Routledge 2009 in press) and talk about findings from chapters 6 and 7

# Conceptual considerations

- Given global socio-economic transformations, and the social sciences, there are now **contested** meanings of:
- **contexts** of globalization, market economy, marketization as neo-liberalism and/or 'academic capitalism'
- **concepts** of post-compulsory or post-secondary further, tertiary or higher education versus universities and:
  - access to or 'participation' in higher education
  - teaching and learning, 'pedagogies' and/or academic practices or educational development
- **Diversity, equity and inclusion**: from ethnicity/race (EU/nonEU) to
  - age (young versus mature students),
  - social class or disadvantages
  - dis/abilities
  - *gender or women*

# International research debates on transformations of global HE

- Contested debates about mass or global higher education and diversity versus equity
  - Comparative international social studies of expansions of HE in changing economic and global contexts (Shavit, Arum & Gamoran eds 2007; Rhoads & Torres eds 2006) focus on social inequalities
  - Specific question about the role gender has played in the social transformations and pedagogies of global HE: *a feminized or feminist future?*
  - Leathwood & Read 2008 versus my work eg Clegg & David 2006; David 2009; David & Clegg 2008; Langa Rosado & David 2006;; Mirza 2008; Morley 2003; Morley & David, 2009; Reay, David & Ball 2005; Sagaria 2007; Weiler 2008; Weiler & David 2008
-

# Diverse Feminist Perspectives and Methodologies

‘whilst second wave feminism emerged at a particular historical moment in the development of twentieth century education, its influences live on in the transformed practices in global higher education in the twenty-first century. .. there have been major transformations in higher education as individualized and market oriented ideas have come to dominate educational policy. Given the growing social diversity among students in terms of social class, ethnicity, race, and gender, feminist ideas challenge us to think more deeply about pedagogies and practices and to develop new theories which critique essentialist notions of classed, racialised and gendered subjectivities and at the same time retain the original political vision of the women’s movement.’ (Weiler and David, 2008, *Discourse*, 29 (4) December)

# Theories about intersections of Diversity, Gender and Equity

- ‘*Closing the Gender Gap*’ (Arnot, David and Weiner 1999)
  - HEFCE (2005) points to *closed gender gap* in higher education ‘enrolments’ and raises policy issue about the reverse ‘gender gap’: how to involve *young and disadvantaged men* in further and higher learning by changing institutional policies and practices
  - Leathwood & Read (2008) argue this concern is about a feminised rather than feminist future and so what is the evidence?
  - Complexity of the evidence about intersections of diversity and gender in *types of involvement and participation*
    - *as learners or students*
    - *as gendered or feminist teachers or pedagogues.*
  - Use evidence from the 7 WPinHE projects about diversity and equity in access and participation in higher education.
-

# Research Evidence from TLRP about equity and diversity

- The 7 interdisciplinary project teams, commissioned by HEFCE, on the UK government's policies, collaborated to produce robust and comprehensive findings in the edited book.
- The research evidence is about the policies, institutional practices and pedagogies of widening access to, and participation in, *English* higher education, with a focus on diversity.
- It contributes to policy debates about equality or the (more diluted) notion of equity and diversity including gender in student access, successes and outcomes or reasons for non-participation
- It also has implications for teaching and learning or pedagogies and institutional practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global higher education, and in schools, lifelong learning or learning across the life course.

# Concepts and approaches

- UK public policy concerns about ‘working class’ entry to elite universities (defined in terms of international HE League Tables) and competing ‘official’ ideologies of access and participation
  - Conceptual focus on *social class* or *social and economic disadvantage*, linked to gender, ethnicity/race, dis/abilities and age.
  - Did not cover newly emerging issues about international students, from Africa, Asia, Europe or the other nations of the UK.
  - Ideas about social stratification, social mobility and equal opportunities in the labour market around wage premia influenced approaches to individual opportunities for education and mobility.
  - Institutional practices, inclusive pedagogies in and across subjects within different universities, educational outcomes and participation of different age cohorts within university and across the life course.
-

# Gendering the 7 TLRP projects

- Given the nature of the research funding, none of the researchers took an explicitly feminist or even a gender focus.
- The research teams comprised a significant number of feminist and critical researchers, with four of the main grant-holders being senior women researchers, and each of the teams including several well-known women and feminist researchers. This represents a significant shift in the demography of research grant holders in the UK over the past decade.
- The teams used a range of methods from qualitative, ethnographic studies to quantitative datasets, in which gender was highlighted.
- The evidence that has been produced provides a significant picture of how gender is *embedded not highlighted* in the processes and practices and intersected with other diversity and equity variables.

# Highlights from chapter 2 about the research findings

- **Policy contexts: differentiation, competition and policies for widening participation – by Gareth Parry**
  - *Distinctive features of policy enterprise, including genesis and politics*
  - *Universal Access and Dual Regimes of Further Higher Education:*
    - systemic differences between universities and colleges esp. future size, structure and shape on funding and through deregulation
    - Use of differentiation and stratification theories
    - Democratisation of access and reinforces diversion

# Highlights from chapter 3 about the research findings

- **Individual access, participation and diversity and institutional practices in different types of HE:**
  - *Quantitative Analysis of Students' Access and Participation in HE:* prior school experiences esp. class and ethnicity; based on analysis of UCAS/HESA data; gender differences assumed
  - *Socio-cultural & Learning Experiences of Working Class Students in Higher Education:* learner and institutional different expectations but working class female students' resilience
  - *Learners' transitions from Vocational Education and Training:* male students predominate in VET and VET students attend lower status HEI; choice for social rather than economic reasons
  - *Seamlessness or separation:* negotiating further and higher education boundaries in dual sector institutions

# Highlights from chapter 4 on pedagogies for social diversity

- **Pedagogies for diverse subjects within HE, especially for science and technology (STEM)**
  - *Learning and Teaching for Social Diversity & Difference in HE*: use of theories of academic engagement within context of increasing student diversity: teaching socially diverse students in 4 subjects – *IT, science, health and social policy; business* – 2 universities (old versus new) – importance of inclusive pedagogies for ways of thinking for socially diverse students
  - *Mathematically Demanding Subjects for HE: a cultural model of value*: importance of gendered identities at A level and, using CHAT, connectionist not ‘teaching to the test’ pedagogies for maths education in FE colleges

# Highlights from chapter 5 on age-based participation

- **Diversity of experiences in HE:**
  - *Statistical mapping of progress through HE as a prelude to the labour market – administrative evidence about retention, ‘drop out’ or ‘staying on’ in diverse HEI. Focus on socio-economic disadvantaged students*
- **Educational decision-making, social networks and the new WP**
  - *Networks of Intimacy: routes to participation or non-participation? why some qualified adults especially women do not participate: Relevance of HE to social as well as economic life and family networks*

# Highlights from part 3 chapter 6

## evidence-informed policies

- **Implications for policy and research, problematics**
  - Dynamic and changing field
  - Global contexts
- **Methodological problems re data collection: 2 gaps**
  - Need for open research agenda from UCAS and HESA
  - No single agency with responsibility for increasing and widening participation in HE across the life course
- **Implications of policies on fair access and WP**
  - Question of conceptualisation of ‘fair’ access or diversity
  - Contribution to people’s economic lives or involvement in the labour market whether graduate or professional

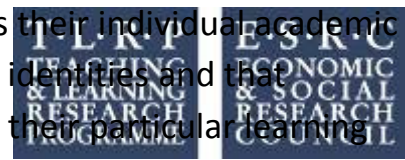
# Highlights from part 3 chapter 6

## evidence-informed policies



- Systematic and systemic forms of inequality for individuals and institutions across subjects and levels of education
- A greater diversity of students (classed, gendered and raced) is now participating in some form of post-compulsory or higher education.
- Equitable or fair access is not achieved at the point of entry or transition to HE
- Target population for policies and practices remains complexly linked to government, institutional or individual practices, identities and perspectives
- Findings in relation to *policy (9)*, *practices (11)* and *pedagogies (7)*
- Implications in relation to *policy (12)*, *practices (11)* and *pedagogies (4)*

**TABLE 6.1a Summary of the findings (tabulated from the 7 Research Briefings)**

POLICY	PRACTICE (INSTITUTIONAL)	PEDAGOGY
No single agency has the widening of participation in HE across the life course as its core mission. (F 1)	Poorer and richer students who achieve similarly in secondary school have similar HE participation rates. We need to improve the achievement of poorer children in secondary school to widen their participation in HE.(V2)	The dominant notion of traditional and non-traditional students creates oversimplistic understandings which limit the development of inclusive, engaging teaching.(CH2)
There is an appetite for high quality, work-related and employer-supported provision, and for recognised qualifications that offer recipients tangible returns (F4)	Students' learner identities are influenced by previous experiences of school, their current university experience and their social circumstances.(C4)	Many HE lecturers have limited awareness of the diverse qualification backgrounds of their students and their possible impact. (GH4)
Policy development for dual-sector education is uneven and unstable, and is led by the sector bodies for higher education. (P2)	HE experiences within social networks critically shape the perceptions of 'potentially recruitable' adults across and within generations (F3)	programmes can make significant differences to drop out rates and to the value of mathematics for students (W1)'
Separate funding and quality regimes for further and higher education have evolved despite the lack of a developed rationale for a two-sector system. (P1)	Structural inequalities between institutions can enhance or undermine students' learner identities and their dispositions towards learning at university (C1)	'connectionist' teaching practices can make a significant difference to students' dispositions and understanding, especially for students with lower GCSE grades (W2)'.
State school children from poor backgrounds remain far less likely to go to university than more advantaged children. (V1)	VET students are overrepresented in less selective institutions.(GH3)	Students value teaching that recognises their individual academic and social identities and that addresses their particular learning needs. (CH1)



**TABLE 6.1b Summary of the findings (tabulated from the 7 Research Briefings)**

POLICY	PRACTICE (INSTITUTIONAL)	PEDAGOGY
Ethnic minority students are generally more likely to go to university than White British students once account is taken of their prior achievement.(V3)	the ‘potentially recruitable’ in [our] research are living comfortable, stable lives and usually see little need to participate in HE. (F2)	experiences are frequently disjunctive and marked by tension and competing demands (C2)’.
The primary target groups for widening participation are over-represented in HE applicants with a VET background (GH1)	The working class students in our study demonstrated great resilience and commitment to their studies, often in the face of adverse structural discrimination and oppression. (C3)	‘the students deconstruct and reconstruct their social and class identities creating hybrid identities. (C5)
Combinations of vocational and academic qualifications significantly increase the probability of access to HE compared to VET qualifications (GH2)	A culture of ‘performativity’ in Colleges reinforces teaching to the test that can be damaging to learners.(W3)	
The working class students ...demonstrated great resilience and commitment to their studies, often in the face of adverse structural discrimination and oppression. (C3)	‘university systems designed to assure quality and maximise the economic efficiency of teaching constrain teachers’ capacity to create inclusive pedagogies CH3)’	
	‘The primary attachment of an institution is to a sector, and relationships with another sector differ in kind and intensity. (P3)	
	Decisions to combine further and higher education are only partially informed by widening participation strategies (P4).’	
	The interfaces between further and higher education are configured in different ways and do not necessarily enhance internal progression. (P5)	 

**TABLE 6.2a Summary of the findings (tabulated from the 7 Research Briefings)**

<b>POLICY</b>	<b>PRACTICE (Institutional and individual)</b>	<b>PEDAGOGY</b>
Further and higher education need to be regarded as parts of a common enterprise, with mechanisms to recognise and support this. (P1)	Further education colleges have still to be widely accepted as normal and necessary locations for higher education. (P2)	Programmes should be designed to engage students in meaningful uses of mathematics, e.g. via modelling coursework.(W1)
Equity and skills agendas are not easily aligned, but require strong and strategic coordination. (P4)	Dual-sector organisations do not have a specific mission, and a dual-sector identity is less evident than in some other systems. (P3)	If we value inclusion, and outcomes such as understanding and disposition, more connectionist teaching should be encouraged (W2)
An expansion of work-focused higher education will place new demands on the access and transfer functions of dual sector institutions. (P 5)	Universities need to be mindful of the diversity of needs, cultures and ways of being amongst their students, maintain high expectations of their students, and enable them to maximise as broadening an experience as possible. (C5)	University teachers need to develop inclusive pedagogic practices and curricula that take account of the diverse interests and needs of students in each class. (CH1)
Policy makers need to address the unequal funding streams and the drift back towards a binary division between the different universities. (C1)	more work needs to be done in primary schools to enable children to understand how to realise their aspirations (C4)	More appropriate approaches to teaching and learning in HE require better understanding of students' VET backgrounds (GH4)
Students need more financial support so that they do not have to take paid employment whilst studying. (C2)	Working class students should not be seen as high risk and problematic (C3)	
Policy attention needs to continue to focus on narrowing the socio-economic gap in HE participation. (V1).	We need to improve the achievement of poorer children in secondary school to widen their participation in HE. (V3)	

**TABLE 6.2b Summary of the findings (tabulated from the 7 Research Briefings)**

POLICY	PRACTICE (Institutional and individual)	PEDAGOGY
Policy should reduce the pressure to teach to the test by giving value to learning outcomes of deep understanding, and dispositions (W3)	Academic developers should help create a more sophisticated understanding of diversity that reflects students' range of social, cultural and educational backgrounds.(CH2)	
The educational achievement of ethnic minority students has improved and policy attention needs to shift to the type of HE accessed by these students. (V3)	University leaders need to ensure that systems do not limit the learning of students from diverse cultural, social and educational backgrounds. (CH3)	
Increasing the share of those from a VET background within the student body would contribute to wider access to HE. (GH1)	Processes which support combining academic and vocational qualifications need to be strengthened and developed. (GH2)	
Parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications remains a myth. This has potentially serious implications for the introduction of Diplomas. (GH3)	The potential benefits of HE need to be made more apparent to this group. (F2)	
There is untapped need for professional information, advice and guidance for adults across the life course. (F1)	Identification with entrants to HE who are 'people like me' in terms of education, social and employment background influences decision-making across and within generations (F3)	
If more employers were to make this sort of provision available, the latent employee demand that our research is uncovering could be released. (F4)		

# Highlights from part 3 chapter 7 on improving learning by WP

- Transforming institutional practices
- Developing sustainable pedagogies for social diversity and learning across the life course, including schools
  - Pedagogy in university preparation (Williams et al)
  - Perceptions and expectations of university (Crozier)
  - Perceptions and practices of HE lecturers about VET
  - Pedagogies for social diversity – inclusive learning environments, student centred strategies, connecting with students' lives, cultural differences, teacher developments

# Highlights from part 3 chapter 7 on improving learning by WP

- Go beyond 'reducing achievement gaps'
- Opportunities, outcomes and obstacles to their achievement
- Inequitable pathways for diverse and mainly women students into highly stratified systems of HE
- Pedagogies and practices can lead to meaningful educational engagements across the life course
- Critical, connectionist and inclusive pedagogies can reverse patterns of differential participation

# Evidence-informed principles for effective pedagogies

- **Demands consistent policy frameworks with support for learning for diverse students as their main focus.** System, institutional and organisational-level policies need to recognise the fundamental importance of learning for individual, team, organisational and system success: designed to create effective and equitable learning environments for all learners to benefit socially and economically.
- **Recognises the importance of prior experience and learning.** Pedagogy should take account of what the learner knows already to plan strategies for the future. This includes building on prior learning but also taking account of the personal and cultural experiences of different groups of learners.
- **Equips learners for life in its broadest sense.** Learning should help individuals develop the intellectual, personal and social resources that will enable them to participate as active citizens, contribute to economic and social or community development and flourish as individuals in a diverse and changing society: equity and social justice for all, across social, economic, ethnic and gender differences.

# Conclusions about policy and practices in HE 1

- The findings emphasize the inequity and diversity of student participation in a diverse higher education system and question a 'league table' approach to higher learning.
- They also emphasize the importance of prior educational experiences, in schools, FE colleges, and through family networks to participation in diverse higher education institutions and subjects
- The findings also address the question of the appropriate national and international policy contexts and changes for post-compulsory education to ensure a more equitable system across a diversity of subjects and institutions in 21<sup>st</sup> century global capitalism.
- A strong knowledge-base for improving learning through pedagogies for diverse students from disadvantaged socio-economic, ethnic/racial and gender backgrounds across the life course.

# Conclusions about policies and practices in HE 2

- National and international policy frameworks need to be adjusted to take account of our research evidence about
  - both prior and current educational experiences (and the need to adjust schooling as well as post-compulsory education),
  - the relevance of policy at institutional and individual levels, pedagogies and practices that are meaningful to participants (as students and teachers)
  - the inequalities in systemic, systematic and classed, raced and gendered provisions across the life course and internationally.
- Whilst the perspectives and evidence are contested, gender is deeply embedded and entwined with diversity in the processes of knowledge production and the findings themselves.

# Conclusions about gender and the global academy

- Although gender is often implicit, rather than explicit, it is intertwined with other social, cultural perspectives and processes.
  - The WP policies on have included gender and feminist scholarship at some institutions, including in new practices and pedagogies.
  - The evidence suggests that women as students and as academics or teachers are now important in producing this knowledge and the evidence-base for developing new policies and practices for higher education.
- The academic labour market has been transformed around gender but this is rarely acknowledged in policy and institutional practices.
- It is clear that women are taking an increasingly active role as
  - students within higher education,
  - teachers, developing creative and inclusive pedagogies

# Visions for pedagogies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global academy

- A vision for the global academy would not only entail the production of knowledge for policy but collaborative approaches and would surely incorporate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century:
  - maintaining high expectations of all students as learners, whilst recognising the diversity of their needs, cultures and identities.
  - diverse perspectives on pedagogies, institutional and cultural practices.
  - inclusive, collaborative or collective or connectionist, and personal - pedagogies, to ensure that diverse people's lives across the life course were enhanced.