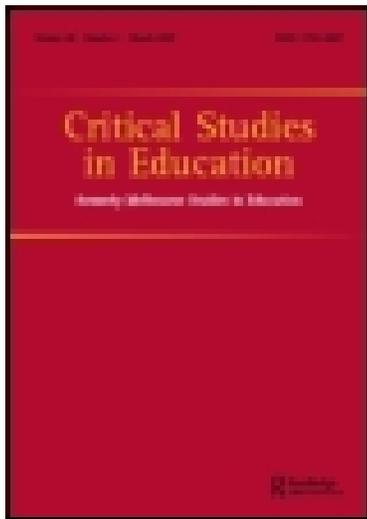


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On: 04 September 2014, At: 04:54

Publisher: Routledge

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Critical Studies in Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcse20>

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Published online: 18 Aug 2014.

To cite this article: Kathleen Lynch (2014): Control by numbers: new managerialism and ranking in higher education, *Critical Studies in Education*, DOI: [10.1080/17508487.2014.949811](https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2014.949811)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2014.949811>

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Control by numbers: new managerialism and ranking in higher education

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(Received 15 February 2014; accepted 24 July 2014)

This paper analyses the role of rankings as an instrument of new managerialism. It shows how rankings are reconstituting the purpose of universities, the role of academics and the definition of what it is to be a student. The paper opens by examining the forces that have facilitated the emergence of the ranking industry and the ideologies underpinning the so-called 'global' university rankings. It demonstrates how rankings are a part of politically inspired, performativity-led mode of governance, designed to ensure that universities are aligned with market values through systems of intensive auditing. It interrogates how the seemingly objective character of rankings, in particular the use of numbers, creates a facade of certainty that make them relatively unassailable: numerical ordering gives the impression that what is of value in education can be measured numerically, hierarchically ordered and incontrovertibly judged. The simplicity and accessibility of numerical rankings deflects attention from their arbitrariness and their political and moral objectives.

Keywords: audit; culture; ideological tool; markets; measurement; neoliberalism; new managerialism; numbers, performativity; public interests; ranking

Higher education as a tradable service

Over the past 20 years, there has been a global movement to alter the role of the university (Angus, 2004; Bullen, Robb, & Kenway, 2004; Hazelkorn, 2011; Robertson, Bonal, & Dale, 2002) and, in particular, to reduce the amount of public investment in higher education generally. There is a growing expectation that universities should be self-financing through external collaborations with business, in particular (Europa, 2011, p. 1).¹ In the United Kingdom (UK), private higher education providers are regarded by government as a mechanism for reducing the cost of higher education to the exchequer (Ball, 2012, p. 21), and university education is increasingly defined as a market commodity (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Universities have been transformed into powerful consumer-oriented corporate networks, where public-interest values are seriously challenged (Ball, 2012; Rutherford, 2005). The factors that have contributed to corporatisation and commercialisation are notable, not only in and of themselves, but also because of how they have reframed the orientation and purposes of higher education.

Multilateral agencies including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, and political institutions such as the European Union (EU), exercise increasing influence over national education policies (Dale, 2005; Lingard & Rawolle, 2011; Sellar & Lingard, 2013). Control and regulation

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is often indirect, as in the form of ‘advice’ from the World Bank or the OECD: the ‘Country Reports’ of the OECD are thinly disguised ‘surveillance’ procedures promulgating a new market instrumentalism in education under the guise of ‘independent’ expertise (Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, & Taylor, 2001). While control may be exercised as ‘soft’ power in higher education, it is real power nonetheless (Lo, 2011).

The World Bank was one of the first major bodies to promote higher education as a marketable commodity.² It heralded this development in the early 1990s in *Higher Education: The Lessons of Experience* (1994). The 1994 report promoted the idea of developing private universities, making public funding for universities subject to performance, and encouraging greater reliance on private funding for higher education. While many working in Western and Northern universities took little notice of either the 1994 Report or the 1998/99 *World Development Report: Knowledge for Development*, assuming these to apply to African and other poorer countries, they were a portent of what was to apply to all universities. Follow-up World Bank reports, *Constructing Knowledge Societies 2002* and *The Challenge of Establishing World Class Universities 2009* have consolidated the market-led view of universities globally. New mechanisms of control and regulation of universities’ productivity were developed, not only within, but between countries (Hazelkorn, 2011); rankings became an integral part of a new mode of market governance (Marginson, 2007a).

One other very important factor contributing to the marketisation of higher education lies deep within the dynamics of globalisation (Sassen, 1996)³ and the changing relationship between the services, manufacturing and agricultural sectors of the economy. The investment returns from manufacturing have declined significantly in rich capitalist economies in recent decades, for a range of complex reasons, not least of which is the emergence of a large, non-unionised labour pool for manufacturing in South East Asia. Agriculture, already a relatively minor player in employment terms in Western and Northern economics, could not provide alternative forms of employment to manufacturing. The focus shifted to trade in services, including trade in some or all of particular public services. The pressure to move education from a public service to a tradable service was also very much part of the ideology of the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) agreement, the purpose of which is to liberalise all services in all sectors of the economy globally (Robertson et al., 2002; Tomasevski, 2005). The rationale for making education a tradable service was articulated by Merrill Lynch⁴ in *The Book of Knowledge* by Moe, Bailey, and Lau (1999). It defined education as a service that presents major new opportunities for investors in profit terms (Moe et al., 1999). In 2000, UNESCO estimated that education was a \$2 trillion global ‘industry’ so there was potential for profitable returns if such a service could be traded, especially among those sectors of a society that could afford to pay for it.

Globalisation (which involves interaction across national borders unmediated by the state) also had far-reaching direct effects on higher education. When aligned with the deregulation of trade in services, globalisation enabled the convergence and integration of markets, including markets in higher education. Global technologies facilitated instant communication and the transportation of ideas, money and students across national borders with increasing ease (Hazelkorn, 2011). Distances of time and space were compressed and de-regulation facilitated trading in knowledge and university degrees as commodities. Part of the trade involved trading images and rankings of individual universities. What was national and private, was made public and global.

The rise of influential and financially endowed social movements in the United States (US) to promote for-profit higher education in particular (Covington, 2001), and the fact

that there are now several hundred for-profit colleges and Universities across the world, are indications that for-profit trading in higher education is also well established (Hill, 2005). Private higher education is worth an estimated \$400 billion globally and about one quarter of all higher education students are in private colleges (Ball, 2012, p. 20). The sale of services, including the sale of education, has gradually begun to make up the employment deficit of manufacturing (D'Agostino, Serafini, & Ward-Warmedinger, 2006), and both the EU and the US have seen a rise in a range of tradable services in recent decades.⁵

Faced with declining returns from trade in industry and agriculture, nation States began to explore what services they could sell. Services that were defined as rights under one code of ethics (notably health and education) mutated to being marketable commodities under another (Tomasevski, 2005). Higher education was increasingly defined as a potential source of revenue, and as a private rather than a public good, thereby justifying its commercialisation (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Tooley, 2000).

At an ideological level, the hegemony of liberal democracy and free market capitalism that ensued from the demise of communism, brought with it widespread allegiance to the liberalisation of trade and services (Fukuyama, 1992). Neoliberalism, which has been nascent but not global under the influence of Hayek⁶ and Friedman, was given a new lease of life, a life that was deliberately planned and orchestrated at a political level from the 1970s onwards, especially in the US (Harvey, 2005, pp. 39–63). With its explicit anti-redistributive goals and its legitimisation of same through the powerful ideologies of possessive individualism and choice, neoliberalism paved the way for reducing state expenditures on public services. The ideology of the 'small state' was popularised and the pillorying of public services on the grounds of 'efficiency' was pervasive.⁷ What followed was a declining commitment to invest in all types of public services, including housing, health and transport. The discourse around education changed from one focused on rights and needs to one focused on markets and choices. The reluctance to invest in higher education was merely part of a wider project of privatising public services.⁸ As higher education was defined as a net contributor rather than cost to the exchequer, the marketisation for higher education through trading on identities, brands and rankings was inevitable.

The response to the marketising of higher education has been immediate and dramatic. Australia increased its overall share of the world's population of cross-border students from 1% to 9% between 1990 and 2003 (Marginson, 2007b, p. 8). Education is now one of its biggest exports estimated to be valued at Aus\$17.2 billion in 2008–09, or about 1.4% of GDP (OECD, 2013). In the UK, the export of education services by universities amounted to £23.4 billion (US\$43 billion) in 2007/08. In gross output terms, this was equal to the output of the 'printing and publishing industry, and considerably larger than the pharmaceuticals industry' (Marginson, 2007b, p. 8). 'If higher education were an industry, it would be one of the world's biggest and most dynamic' (OECD, 2013).

Fed by rankings and marketing, student flows are increasing around the world. The numbers of students who are studying outside their own countries has increased by 2.7 million or 50% since 2000. 'If current trends continue, by 2025 almost 8 million students will be studying outside their home countries' (Ball, 2012, p. 20). The economies of English-speaking countries (and English-based programmes within countries) remain the principal beneficiaries of the new higher education trade. In the mid-2000s, 46% of the students who crossed borders to study moved from China, India and other Asian countries to OECD countries, mostly to English-language-based education systems (Marginson, 2007b, p. 9). Rankings played a major role in determining the new patterns of trade, a business that many regard as a form of re-colonisation in cultural terms (Deem, Mok, & Lucas, 2008).

University dynamics facilitating marketisation

The regulation of universities through rankings was also enabled by the internal dynamics of universities themselves. Although universities are public interest bodies, they have not always honoured their public interest commitments (Harkavy, 2006). Research on social class inequality in education has shown that not only has higher education done little to challenge class inequality in education over many decades (Archer et al., 2002; Clancy, 1995, 2001; Gamoran, 2001; Rumberger, 2010; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010), there is little hope of social mobility through education henceforth, even in prosperous countries like the US (Gamoran, 2001; Marsh, 2011). Moreover, universities have often been party to the perpetuation of social inequalities. While they played a key role in forming the professional classes of the post-World War II welfare states (Hanlon, 2000), they did not challenge the exclusionary practices of professional associations in the educational field. Rather, they worked with the professional elite to maintain their social class standing. A series of national studies of entrants to higher education in Ireland spanning almost 20 years, shows that students entering the professional faculties of law, medicine, dentistry, architecture and veterinary have been drawn disproportionately from the middle and upper middle classes (Clancy, 1995, 2001). Elite universities of the UK and US show a similar pattern of exclusivity (Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2010, p. 2).⁹ The universities' relative indifference to wider societal injustices in terms of access to higher education has meant that they had limited moral standing, and even less public sympathy, when their budgets were cut and they were regulated through ranking.

In their internal operations too, the history of universities shows that they have been hierarchical, patriarchal and, at times, nepotistic (Knights & Richards, 2003; Morley, 2003; O'Connor, 2012; Wennerås & Wold, 1997). They have not been models of enlightened organisational practice. While there have been critical voices in higher education critical of its pedagogy and its exclusivity (most notably influenced by the work of the renowned Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire (1972), dissenters have also been minority voices (Apple, 1979; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1995), often working against the tide even in pre-neoliberal days (Lynch, 1995). The claim of the academy that its public-interest functions are being undermined by the neo-liberal agenda can ring hollow to those who have lived for generations without the privilege of higher education, and who, with justification, regard universities as sites for the reproduction of elites, nationally and globally.

New managerialism

Neoliberalism is a value-based, normative economic and social theory. It is premised on the assumption that the citizen's relationship to the State and others is mediated via the market. New managerialism is the dominant mode of governance aligned with neoliberalism: it involves governing through enacting technical changes imbued with market values (Lynch, Grummell, & Devine, 2012).

New managerialism is not a neutral management strategy however. Its expressed purpose is to institutionalise market principles in the governance of all organisations (Clarke, Gewritz, & McLaughlin, 2000, p. 7). It involves the inculcation of market values and practices into the regulation and organisation of public services in particular (Farrell & Morris, 2003). Consequently, when implemented in the public sector, new managerialism focuses service providers on outputs measured in terms of performance indicators

and rankings (often regardless of inputs or resources); it emphasises the language of choice, competition and service users; it promotes the decentralisation of budgetary and personal authority to line managers, and project-led contractual employment arrangements rather than permanency (Chandler, Barry, & Clark, 2002; Clarke et al., 2000, p. 6; Clarke & Newman, 1997, Court, 2004; Docking, 2000; Hill, 2005). And it endorses strong market-type accountability in public sector spending. The net effect is that meeting financial and other targets is a priority, and success in meeting targets is measured through audits. The development of quasi-markets for services is also a key goal; rankings feed directly into this process exercising control through competition and surveillance (Clarke et al., 2000).

What is important about new managerialism is that it was not only exported between countries as a mode of governance (Harvey, 2005) but also within countries from the private to the public sector (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Lynch et al., 2012).

New managerialism, auditing and ranking

The intensive auditing of higher education's outputs is the cornerstone of new managerial practice. And because auditing is about inspection, control and regulation (Lingard, 2011; Power, 1994; Shore & Wright, 1999), its introduction into the education lexicon signifies the development of a whole new system of disciplinary regulation through measurable accountability, quality assurance and performance. The audit culture becomes '.....a vehicle for changing the way people relate to the workplace, to authority, to each other, and, most importantly, to themselves' (Shore & Wright, 1999, p. 559). Rankings and audits eschew all references to the self-formation processes that are the *raison d'être* of university education. Auditing is not an objective measure of what is; the audit defines what matters in higher education through counting things (Power, 1994). The measure becomes the master (*sic*) determining the worth of the university.

Rank ordering and measuring alter the internal culture of universities (Sauder & Espeland, 2009). They put universities on public display, pressurising them to change from being 'a centre of learning to being a business organisation with productivity targets' (Doring, 2002, p. 140). They are expected to transfer allegiance 'from the academic to the operational' (Doring, 2002). Treating change as a purely 'technical matter' means that market values can be encoded in the heart of the university's operations without reflection. New organisational forms are classified as technical shifts, a change in language and style but not in substance.

However, new languages signify much more than a change in terminology. Language does not simply name the world; it recreates it (Wittgenstein, 1953/2001). When students become 'customers', their relationship to teachers changes from one of education to one of market service: they mutate silently from people with rights to education, to customers with preferences (Lolich, 2011). When universities focus on 'key performance indicators' this directs attention to measured outputs rather than processes and inputs within education, including those of nurturing and caring (Lynch, 2010a).

Much of the power of ranking rests in the neutrality of nomenclature within which it is embedded. The positive connotations of 'modernising universities', introducing new 'management systems' and offering 'students choices' fail to signal the new modes of governance and moral regulation such changes entail. They do not foretell how efficiency and effectiveness can gain hegemonic status at the expense of more broadly based moral and social values related to care, autonomy, respect, trust and equality.

Focusing on measurable outputs has the ultimate impact of defining human relationships in the university in transactional terms, as the means to an end – the end being high performance and productivity that can be coded and marketed. This reduces first order social and moral values to second-order principles; trust, integrity, care and solidarity are subordinated to regulation, control and competition. When managerialist practices achieve hegemonic control, they parasitise and weaken those very values on which the university organisation depends. While few would question the value of efficiency, in terms of maximising the use of available resources, the difficulty with managerialism is that it does not just prioritise efficiency, it suppresses other organisational values so that they become incidental. The net effect of the devaluation of moral purposes is that public services, such as education, are no longer defined as capacity-building public goods.

The first order effect of performativity is to re-orient pedagogical and scholarly activities towards those which are likely to have a positive impact on measureable performance outcomes and are a deflection of attention away from aspects of social, emotional and moral development that have no immediate measureable performance value...The second order effect of performativity is in the possibilities it creates to replace commitment with contract. That is to say, to the extent that HE practices – teaching, writing and research – can be rendered into calculabilities, they can be re-written as contracts of performance that can, at some point, be put out to tender. (Ball, 2012, p. 20)

The selectivity and arbitrariness of ranking systems

Comparing universities nationally and internationally in terms of prestige and power is not a new phenomenon. The development of scientific data bases, including the Science Citation Index and the *Social Science Citation Index*, involving bibliometric measures to assess and rank academics and programmes date back to the 1960s (Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012). The US published a list of the ‘best colleges in the country’ in the *US News & World Report* in 1983 (based on the opinions of college presidents originally, but now expanded to other criteria). In these earlier periods, rankings were person and subject specific in the cases of the citation indices, and national in terms of university rankings, being confined to comparisons within nation states. When higher education was defined as a globally traded commodity, and a global market was created for higher educational services, then new modes of ranking were inevitable.

Ranking universities has become big business, not only in marketing universities but also in promoting journals and selling news reports (Lynch et al., 2012, pp. 205–224). A wide range of ranking schemes have been devised, not only within countries, but more importantly between them (Hazelkorn, 2011; Huang, 2012; Lo, 2011; Salmi, 2009).¹⁰ The power and influence of rankings is reflected in the fact that the European University Association has undertaken a series of studies of rankings and produced two major reports on their impact (Rauhvargers, 2011, 2013)¹¹ with further reports planned.

Among the best known global rankings (all of which use different criteria and rank subjects differently, and all of which are changing regularly) are the ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities, sometimes known as the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Ranking), the Times Higher Education World University (THE) rankings, and, since they separated from THE in 2010, the QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) rankings (within which there are a number of different rankings). Apart from the three major ranking systems there are also other rankings including the CWTS Leiden Ranking system (bibliometric only), the NTU (Taiwan National University Ranking (ranking of scientific papers) and the German

CHE Centrums based on multiple criteria. China, Spain, Macedonia and a range of other countries also have their own ranking system (Huang, 2012; Rauhvargers, 2013).¹²

Both the THE and QS rankings give a heavy weighting (40% in QS and 34.5% in THE in 2012)¹³ to what is called reputational ranking based on online surveys to academics.¹⁴ There are a range of problems with such ‘surveys’ as they are not based on stratified random samples of academics from across the world or across disciplines, and there is an inherent bias towards English-speaking countries in both the THE and QS surveys (Huang, 2012; Kaba, 2012; Rauhvargers, 2013).

The ARWU does not use reputational surveys to assess rank, nor does it include the humanities and most social sciences in ranking universities.¹⁵ Although some ranking schemes do include humanities and social sciences, ‘the arts and humanities, and to a large extent the social sciences remain underrepresented in rankings. The relative neglect stems from persistent biases that remain in bibliometric indicators and field-normalised citation counts. ...In the arts, humanities and the social sciences, published research output is concentrated in books’ and these are not counted effectively in the major data bases used to assess citations, namely Thompson Reuters and Elsevier (Rauhvargers, 2013, pp. 18–19). The net effect of this is that universities with strong traditions in the arts, humanities and social sciences cannot feature highly on global rankings.

Even those rankings that purport to be ‘global’ do not rate over 90% of the world’s 15,000 universities (Hazelkorn, 2011). The most influential global rankings such as the THE ranking (first published in 2004) and the ARWU (first published in 2003) rated only between 2% and 5% of the world’s universities (Hazelkorn, 2011). None of the major so-called global rankings (THE, ARWU or QS) survey the student population regarding their educational experience in a given year; as education is a major object of universities, this is a notable omission.¹⁶

There is also the problem of vested interests in rankings. The ARWU is only science-focused and relies heavily on Thompson Reuters for its data which is entirely journal-based. The THE also uses data provided by Thompson Reuters. QS uses data from Scopus, which is part of Elsevier. As both Thompson Reuters and Elsevier are major publishers of journals, each has an interest in encouraging the ranking of universities based on journals (Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012, p. 286). An indirect effect of ranking by the status of journal publications is the undermining of new disciplines and fields of scholarship (especially as these cannot have ‘elite’ journals in their developmental phase). Thus, the business of university ranking is governed by values and interests other than those of assessing the quality of research and teaching. Given this, the role that the publishing industry plays in determining and advancing university rankings needs to be further investigated.

While universities are global in their relations, those that are publicly funded (which are the majority of universities in Europe) have to serve regional and national objectives. They are not research institutes but universities and as such have an educational remit (Newman, 1852)¹⁷. As teaching institutions, they have obligations to uphold International Treaties granting people equal access to education, including higher education.¹⁸ Given that most nation States¹⁹ have ratified the International Convention on Economic and Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and that Article 13.2 (c) of the ICESCR obliges State parties to work to ensure that ‘Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education’ and that the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960, Article 4) also commits States to undertaking to ‘make higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity’, it is clear that universities should uphold the right to equal access to higher education even if this

adversely affects rankings. Unfortunately, there is evidence that this does not happen. Higher education has been the preserve of the elite in many countries and this trend is persistent over time (Duru-Bellat, Kieffer, & Reimer, 2008; McCowan, 2012; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010). Rankings are likely to exacerbate inequality of access to higher education even further (Hazelkorn, 2011).

A further issue with ranking is that the determination of being ‘world class’ is based on criteria set by the existing academic elite: being able to acquire or retain academics with Nobel prizes or Field Medals, or to determine what constitutes elite journals, or to exclude disadvantaged students, and/or operate low staff–student ratios, are measures of worth that are only available to those that have an accumulated history of privilege, power and money. Meeting the budget target to be world class is estimated to be 1.5 to 2 billion US dollars per year (or €1.3 to 1.7 billion Euro), funding that is far beyond the national higher education budgets of many nation states (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 197).

Endowments also play a crucial role in determining ranking, effectively making it impossible for excellent universities without significant endowments to compete for a high rank. Data from US universities shows that the larger the amount of an institution’s endowment, the more likely it is to be ranked in the top 200 universities in the world (Kaba, 2012, pp. 26–29): Harvard’s endowment in 2007 was US\$34.6 billion, Yale’s was US\$22.6 billion while Stanford’s was US\$17.1 billion (Kaba, 2012). As the cumulative endowments of these elite universities (over US\$74 billion) are in excess of the entire tax income of many small nation states, it is evident how elite universities can retain their ranking year-on-year while those ‘below the bar’ enter a cycle of disadvantage (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 93). The endowments allow elite universities to offer highly competitive salaries to attract highly-cited faculty members from within the global academic market, and it enables them to give attractive scholarships to young graduates thereby buying up the ‘talent’ of early stage researchers globally (Marginson & Van Der Wende, 2007).

As the ranking of universities is aligned with the ranking of individual academics, a new form of individualised academic capitalism is working out within higher education (Slaughter & Leslie, 2001). While individualised competition is not new in higher education, the practice of ranking individuals exacerbates competitiveness and contributes to undermining collegiality (Ball, 2012; Lynch, 2010a). Both individual and institutional ranking exacerbate the stratification of universities; this works to the detriment of the autonomy of universities in defining their own mission and purposes (Deem et al., 2008).

Ranking also intensifies competition between universities *within* and between nation states through branding and networking: the Ivy league in the US, the Oxbridge and the Russell groups in the UK, the Sandstones in Australia, and international alliances such as *Universitas 21*, have been developed to promote an elite identity that will help competitive advantage in the higher education market (Hazelkorn, 2011).

Rankings are a type of ‘consumer product ratings system’, a contest in which those not listed, or listed very lowly, are not in an position to establish themselves as premier institutions in any meaningful sense. When reputation is heavily weighted towards prestige, power and money, much of which is historically established, newer players cannot enter the race, or if they do, they enter and compete on terms that are not of their making and on which they cannot succeed.

Ranking and the ‘war for talent’

Despite claims to the contrary, university rankings were never about meeting ‘consumer’ (student) needs for information in making choices in the internal education markets of

higher education within nation states. Most students are allocated to universities on the basis of prior academic performance, and those who have a choice, either must have a very high performance (itself social class and racially biased) or be well enough resourced through their families to make choices (Reay, David, & Ball, 2005). Even within the US where the US ranking scheme does influence internal choices, especially at graduate level, the choices are limited for those outside a small elite (Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Karabel, 2005).

One of the core functions of university ranking therefore is to facilitate the international marketing of prestige programmes to elite students in highly selective and elite universities. Rankings facilitate the development of a global meritocracy at a time when 'talent' (however vaguely defined) is seen as the 'new oil' (Brown & Tannock, 2009) and 'knowledge' as the new capital. Rankings are a mechanism for ordering what has become known in popular parlance as the 'war for talent'. And stratification and selection of universities and programmes is strongly endorsed by global capitalist players such as McKinsey Consulting (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001), Microsoft and Dell (Brown & Tannock, 2009).

The discourses of the 'knowledge economy'²⁰ (see Peters (2001) for a review and appraisal of this concept) are not just about promoting nation state economies built on highly educated workers, they are about creating banks of highly educated workers who can and do move globally to service capital. The bonuses and salaries available to elite workers within powerful capitalist states are several multiples of comparably skilled workers in poorer and/or smaller economies; the outcome is migration of the educated elite to the rich states. Consequently poor countries experience a huge loss of highly educated workers: it is estimated that Sierra Leone has lost over 50% of its college-educated workers while some 60% of those with higher education have emigrated from Cape Verde and Gambia and over 80% from Haiti and Jamaica over recent decades (Brown & Tannock, 2009, p. 382).²¹ The net beneficiaries of inward migration of highly educated workers from elite universities are powerful capitalist states that can afford to offer globally competitive salaries and working conditions (Brown & Tannock, 2009).

Rankings: quantification, simplification, self-fulfilling prophecies

In sociological terms, rankings operate as a type of politicised technological ideology (Lingard, 2011). They are inscription devices that constitute what they appear to represent (Rose, 1999). They label and stratify a complex higher education system through simple rank ordering (Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012, p. 288). What rankings succeed in doing is providing an ostensibly 'objective' measure, a 'common cognitive space' in which the value of universities can be appraised, even if the means of achieving it is arbitrary, selective and problematic in scientific terms (Borer & Lawn, 2013, p. 49). In political and policy terms, they greatly simplify governance and control by precluding conflicts, much to the pleasure of bureaucrats, with a seemingly unassailable objectivity (Lingard, 2011, p. 363). And because numbers are internationally intelligible, they can be interpreted cross-culturally without translation. Quantification allows for communication beyond borders in a way that narrative-laden evaluations do not (Porter, 1995).

The newspaper/online reader or television viewer is allowed to 'know' the value of a university in an instant, just by reading the rank. There is no translation or effort involved; it is a simple accessible process. The net result is that ranks become naturalised, normalised and validated, through familiarity and ubiquitous citation, particularly through recitation as 'facts' in the media. Rankings, thus, attain an unwarranted truth status that makes them self-fulfilling by virtue of their persistence and existence. They create what they purport to measure: in-depth research on the impact of the US News and World

Report Rankings on the US Law schools shows, for example, that both the status of Law schools and student choices is strongly determined by their annual ranking in USN. The rank frames the schools and the school (re)defines itself in terms of the rank (Espeland & Sauder, 2007).

Rankings are, in theory, an apolitical act, yet they are profoundly political. Once enumerated, quality and value can only be challenged by new ‘numbers’ and those activities and people that cannot be enumerated cannot be included in the appraisal of quality and value (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). Whether intended or not, rankings denigrate by exclusion those activities that cannot be counted in the ordering of things.

Numbers are central to legitimating rankings and for deploying them as a mode of governance. It is numbers that facilitate the generalised acceptance of the validity of ranking and widespread political disengagement from their internal dynamics. The power of numbers rests in their unassailability to the mathematically uninitiated: truth in numbers has a higher status, and is seen as less contestable than truth expressed in narrative form. The fear that people have of mathematics (Boaler, 2008) feeds into feelings about numbers and this, in turn, feeds into the ranking industry. Fear of being ‘wrong’ in interpreting statistical data on rankings silences dissent from the general public, especially the media, not least because so many media personnel tend to be drawn from the non-mathematical fields, especially the humanities. They frequently lack the skills to examine the hidden assumptions of data and numbers hidden within the ranking systems.²²

On the surface, the simplicity of numerical ordering appears to remove any sense of arbitrariness from the process of university rankings. It creates an impression that what is of merit can be hierarchically ordered and incontrovertibly judged. Numbers have an aura of mystery and power and are assumed to be without ideological bias. Yet, numbers are derived from a standpoint, a political and intellectual position and are open to interpretation and distortion (Borer & Lawn, 2013). Moreover, what gives numbers global currency in ranking people and institutions is what makes them inappropriate as measures of appraisal. They bypass ‘deep issues’ and allow ‘dissimilar desires, needs, and expectations’ to be ‘made commensurable’ (Lingard, 2011, pp. 363–364 citing Porter (1995))

Impact of ranking on the culture of the university

There is a relatively silent colonisation of the hearts and minds of academics and students happening in universities, albeit coded in the language of accountability, progress and efficiency (Giroux, 2002). Constant appraisal leads to the internalisation of an actuarial and calculative mind set both at the individual and collective levels; relations become transactional and product led. The blandness and simplicity of rankings deflects attention from the ways in which they are changing academics and students, from the inside out (Ball, 2012).

As rankings form public perceptions of universities, senior administrators have to manage their ranking whether they wish to or not (Farrell & Van Der Werf, 2007). Thus, a range of ‘gaming strategies’ are deployed to advance university position in rankings (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). Rankings induce reactivity that, in turn, alters patterns of investment, intake and outputs from higher education. Universities can and do improve or retain their ranks by excluding risk factors that would downgrade their status. One of the most notable of these responses is the increased funding for ‘merit’ scholarships to attract elite students (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). Merit scholarships work to the advantage of the already privileged applicants for a number of reasons, mostly especially because educational attainment is, in the first instant, highly dependent on the expenditure of resources

in a competitive system. Parents can and do use private resources to advantage their own children in economically unequal societies (Marsh, 2011); merit scholarships merely reinforce privilege.

Ranking, auditing and measuring is also a recipe for self-display and the fabrication of image over substance among staff (Ball, 2003). The heavy focus on citations as a measure of individual academic worth encourages 'gaming' or the manipulating of citation indices at the personal level (Todd & Ladle, 2008). Ranking also endorses a type of Orwellian surveillance of one's everyday work that is paralleled with a reflexive surveillance of the self. One is always measuring oneself up or down, yet there is a deep alienation in constantly living the threat of the damage that a poor performance entails (Leathwood, 2005).

As trust in professional integrity and peer regulation is replaced by performance indicators, the quality of peer relations is also diminished. Relating through audits and appraisals enhances hierarchies and diminishes goodwill and collegiality. Feelings of personal inauthenticity also emerge within a culture of compliance where one is forced to live by values and norms to which one does not subscribe (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Lynch et al., 2012). Rewarding staff on a measurable-item-by-item performance basis also leads to a situation where personal career interests increasingly govern everyday academic life. As there are opportunities in the market for commercialised professionals and academics (Hanlon, 2000), internal division between staff in the universities are inevitable and open to exploitation by management. Academic capitalism brings highly individualised rewards to those who engage successfully with its norms and requirements (Slaughter & Leslie, 2001).

Focusing on measured performance also impacts on the cultural life of students as they are directed increasingly to economic self-interest and credential acquisition (Lolich, 2011). Student and staff idealism to work in the service of humanity or in public service is seriously diminished when universities operate as entrepreneurial, purely competitive business-oriented corporations. As noted by Harkavy, 'When universities openly and increasingly pursue commercialization, it powerfully legitimizes and reinforces the pursuit of economic self-interest by students and contributes to the widespread sense among them that they are in college solely to gain career skills and credentials' (2006, p. 14).

The merging of commerce and research is a further consequence of marketisation. While the university has both a need and a responsibility to work with a wide range of public and private sector interests, the interests and values of business cannot drive university research as the ethical principles and priorities of the business sector are not synonymous with those of a university (Eisenberg, 1987). If universities become too reliant on industry-funded research, or too beholden to the business-driven agenda of the government of today (even if it comes coded in the guise of advancing science), there is a danger that the interests of the university become synonymous with powerful vested interests. This will undermine the purposes of the university as a research institution serving the good of humanity in its entirety and the very independence of thought that is the trademark of university research (Lieberwitz, 2005). There is evidence that this is happening already in sensitive areas such as food production, genetics, biotechnology and environmental protection (Monbiot, 2000). University departments are increasingly reliant on research funding from commercial operations to fund posts, especially in fields like the biosciences and engineering (Bok, 2003; Washburn, 2005). Given the fact that the Bayh-Dole Act (1980) in the US allows universities and academics to benefit from patents, those academics and departments that are funded are inevitably tempted by the lure of

money to compromise on ethical standards, and to defer to industry requests to control access to, or even manipulate clinical trial data and results (Washburn, 2005).

Because managerial principles originated in a commercial context where process is subordinated to output and profit, managerialist values manifest themselves in education through the promotion of forms of governance (i.e. measurement, surveillance, control, regulation) that are often antithetical to the caring that is at the heart of good education. While the nurturing of student learning has an outcome dimension, gains are generally not measurable in a narrowly specifiable time frame. The gains and losses from having/not having care and nurture in education are only seen over time. Moreover, the caring dimensions of education are not open to measurement in terms of quality, substance and form within a metric measurement system. Even if caring could be monitored and measured through matrices, the very doing of this would force people into the calculation of other-centeredness that would undermine the very principle of relatedness and mutuality that is at the heart of teaching and learning (Lynch, 2010a).

Conclusion

Rankings have become normalised and regarded as inevitable even among those who recognise their many limitations (Hazelkorn, 2011). Even powerful multilateral agencies, such as the European Commission, have accepted rankings as a given: it initiated a project in 2008 to develop a new ranking system that would be more comprehensive than those currently in use. It planned to have ranked 500 universities on multiple criteria by 2014 (<http://www.u-multirank.eu/>). What is significant about the latter development is its ‘methodological fetishism’ (Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012, p. 292). The focus is on getting the rankings correct, even though the task of ranking incomparable institutions on multiple criteria across different countries and continents is ethically questionable, empirically challenging, and, arguably of primary value to the wealthier students who can choose which university to attend (Archer et al., 2002; Clancy, 2001; Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Karabel, 2005).

Rankings are also problematic because their seemingly objective character conceals their serious political import. What Hacking (1990, pp. 1–10) termed ‘the avalanche of numbers’ has ‘profoundly transformed what we choose to do, who we try to be, and what we think of ourselves’ in higher education. ‘Assessment measures permit the easy conflation of what *is* with what *ought to be*, of what normal is in the statistical and moral sense’. The blandness of statistical measures and their perceived neutrality ‘deflects attention from their capacity to change the places and people that use them’ (Espeland & Sauder, 2007, p. 36).

One of the most serious implications of rankings is that they direct our attention into a different cognitive and normative order when evaluating higher education. Questions regarding the value, purpose and politics of higher education and rankings get swept aside in the bid to find the best ‘method’ of ranking. Social justice debates about access, participation and outcomes from higher education are side-lined in the ‘positivist drive to make ranking technologies more and more objective’ (Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012, p. 292).

One of the unforeseen consequences of the new cognitive spaces where ranking has led academics is the undermining of their role as public intellectuals. There is no measure for this in the rankings. Once universities and academics are ranked for only communicating with other academics (now primarily via a limited range of elite journals), and are left increasingly reliant on commercially funded research, public intellectual work is inevitably devalued. There is little incentive to invest personal time with students, to be a public intellectual and/or to investigate the vested interests behind one’s own research funding. The increased elision of differences between market and public interests, and the

disincentive to be either a caring teacher or public intellectual, not only privatises knowledge to closed groups, it also forecloses the opportunity to have hypotheses tested or challenged from experiential (disinterested) standpoints outside the academy (Lynch, Crean, & Moran, 2010). It limits the opportunities for learning that occurs when there is a dialogue between experiential and theoretical knowledge.

Rather than being tyrannised by numbers and overwhelmed by the rhetoric of ranking and labelling, academics need to build a counter-hegemonic discourse to managerialism and neoliberalism in higher education, a discourse that is grounded in the principles of democracy and equal participation that are at the heart of the public education tradition. Academics need to reinvigorate the vision of the university as a place for universal learning, for challenging received orthodoxies, and for promoting social justice and equality (Lynch, 2010b). There is an urgent need to commence a debate about the public interest values of the university (Harkavy, 2006). This requires ongoing collective political reflexivity and action at institutional level across every university, unmasking power and the abuses of power (Shore & Wright, 1999). Unmasking the tyranny of numbers is central to this political reflexivity.

Notes

1. OJ 372/36, the Official Journal of the European Union, 20.12.2011 p. 1, reported that there was a 'need to reform further the governance and financing structures of universities allowing for greater autonomy and accountability, so as to facilitate a more diversified revenue stream and more effective collaboration with the business world and to equip universities to participate in the knowledge triangle on a global scale'.
2. The World Bank is the largest multilateral source of funding for education in the world and as such plays a key role in framing education policies globally. 'However, the World Bank is not bound by international law nor does it acknowledge that education is a human right' (Tomasevski, 2005, p. 6). The reason for this anomalous situation is explained in Tomasevski (2005, fn 15, p. 6).
3. New telecommunications and computing systems, combined with new technologies of travel, banking and finance, have greatly facilitated the development of a global economy in recent decades. The alignment of these new systems with the deregulation of trade, including trade in services, has greatly facilitated marketisation on a global scale, including the marketisation of higher education.
4. Merrill Lynch is a US-based Global Financial Management company with offices in 36 countries.
5. These included community, social and personal services, retail and wholesale services including hotels, restaurants, transport and communication services, financial services, including insurance and real estate much of which was highly speculative and unproductive in real service terms.
6. Hayek's influence initially was mainly in the UK under Thatcher's government; it spread to other Anglophone economies such as Australia and New Zealand in the 1980s.
7. The US Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2010) has found that the courses in for-profit colleges cost several multiples of what they cost in comparator public colleges. <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10948t.pdf>
8. Privatisation had adverse effects on poorer people as paying, even for compulsory education, became normalised in many states in Asia, South America and Africa (Tomasevski, 2005).
9. A study by the Sutton Trust (2007) of the top 13 universities in the UK as measured by press rankings found that of the 300,000 of the nation's university applicants from less affluent social backgrounds just over 1% get into one of the top 13 universities. There are similar concerns in the USA where, in the year 2000, students from families in the bottom 50% of the income distribution made up 10% of first years at Princeton and 12% at Harvard, two of the US elite universities (Karabel, 2005).
10. The ranking of universities parallels the ranking of schools most conspicuously in the Anglo-zone countries (Ball, 2003; Lingard, 2011).

- 11 Rauhvargers' (2013) report contains the most comprehensive available review of the criteria used in ranking. It is accessible at http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications_homepage_list/EUA_Global_University_Rankings_and_Their_Impact_-_Report_II.sflb.ashx
12. Hazelkorn (2011) also has an extensive comparative review.
13. As the weighting given to different criteria is changing regularly among the ranking agencies (Rauhvargers, 2013), these figures only apply to 2012.
14. QS ranking criteria and weighting: <http://www.iu.qs.com/university-rankings/rankings-indicators/> (accessed 28 April 2013). Times Higher Ranking: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/413382.article> (Times Higher Education Supplement, 7 September 2010 scheme; accessed 28 April 2013).
15. ARWU – Shanghai Jiao Tong ranking: http://www.universityrankings.ch/methodology/shanghai_jiao_tong (accessed: 28 April 2013).
16. The German CHE system does include student evaluations but this is a within-state evaluation system and does not claim to be global. CHE (Centrums für Hochschulentwicklung):<http://www.che-ranking.de/cms/?getObject=644&getLang=> (accessed 28 April 2013).
17. John Henry Newman was the founder of University College Dublin in the mid-nineteenth century. His published lectures on *The Idea of a University* had considerable influence in defining the role of the university in society.
18. Higher education is part of the general right to education under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989 and the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) (McCowan, 2012 pp. 113–114).
19. But not the US.
20. The concept of the knowledge economy implies that the generation and the exploitation of knowledge *per se* is central to the creation of wealth. 'A number of separate discourses from economics, management theory, futurology and sociology can be identified as having contributed to shaping the present policy narrative of the knowledge economy' are examined by Peters (2001, p. 4) all of which centre on the idea that knowledge and technical skills (advanced human capital) will be the drivers of economic advantage globally. Unfortunately, policy usage of the concept does not distinguish generally between knowledge and information, or between the knowledge society (which would impute rights to advanced education as essential for all) and the knowledge economy (Peters, 2001). The latter term is frequently used to refer primarily to those forms of knowledge that service multinationals. This is especially true in Ireland where the focus is on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).
21. Globally, high skilled migration increased at a rate of two and a half times faster than low skilled migration between 1990 and 2000. By 2000, the college-educated made up 34.6% of immigrants to OECD countries, up from 29.8% in 1990, and far out of proportion to the 11.3% of the world's overall labour force that they represent (Brown & Tannock, 2009 citing Docquier and Marfouk (2005, pp. 167–168)).
22. This observation was made to the author in an interview with the Editor of the Irish Times (Ireland's most prestigious newspaper) at a meeting in May 2013 and also by the Press Ombudsman for Ireland at a separate meeting in 2012.

Notes on contributor

As an academic and activist, I have been guided by the belief that the purpose of scholarship is not just to understand the world but to change it for the good of all humanity. To this end, I was involved in setting up and running the UCD Equality Studies Centre with colleagues since 1990. I also helped establish the first School of Social Justice in Ireland in 2005 (www.ucd.ie/socialjustice/).

Most of my work is co-authored including *Equality: From Theory to Action* (with J. Baker, S. Cantillon and J. Walsh) (2004, 2009) and *Affective Equality: Love, Care and Injustice* (with J. Baker and M. Lyons) (2009).

My books on equality in education, all but 2 of which are co-authored with colleagues are: *Diversity in School*. (2005); *Inside Classrooms: The Teaching and Learning of Mathematics in Social Context* (2003); *Equality and Power in Schools* (2002); *Equality in Education* (1999) *The Hidden Curriculum* (1989) *Gender and Education* (2009) EU Commission Report with Maggie

Feeley. *New Managerialism in Education: Commercialisation, Carelessness and Gender*. (with B. Grummell and D. Devine, 2012).

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