

The Bradley challenge: A sea change for Australian universities?

Thomas Putnam and Judith Gill

University of South Australia

This paper begins with a focus on the problematic nature of one key term in the Bradley Report. *Socioeconomic status*, or SES as commonly used, lacks clear definition leading to ongoing debates about its measurement. A working consensus on SES and its measurement is necessary for the report's recommendations to proceed effectively. Next we analyse research on university culture and practice relating to non-traditional students in order to develop the case for cultural transformation at the same time as broader recruitment if the new enrolment strategies are to deliver real change. We conclude with comments on the likely success of the Bradley recommendations in terms of the future of Australian universities and the broader culture.

Introduction

The recent Bradley report (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008) issued a serious challenge to Australian Universities with the recommendation that they make a conscious effort to broaden the social spectrum from which they draw students. At one level this recommendation came as no surprise. The social exclusivity of student enrolment in higher education had been consistently raised as a concern in Australian educational research since the 1980s (Anderson, Boven, Fensham & Powell, 1980). The report's recommendations offer a pragmatic and indeed timely response to a persistent problem that has long been recognised. Implementation may be difficult however, given the careful theorisation of the ways in which educational structures and experience typically reinforce existing class divisions (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In this paper we chart some of the potential sticking points of the proposed changes to University student population and we identify some potential for transformative action.

Australian tertiary education sector: Growth and access

By the end of the 20th century much had changed in the tertiary system in Australia, in particular the accelerated expansion, sometimes known as the Dawkins Revolution^[1], which took place in the closing decades. Prior to 1980, university attendance had been associated with privilege, being traditionally limited to the small proportion of young people who completed rigorous and highly competitive secondary school examinations (McCalman, 1993). In 1909 there were just four universities (Knibbs, 1911, p.904), compared to nine universities and two university colleges in 1960 (Carver, 1960, p.599). Today there are thirty nine universities, the majority of which have appeared since 1980, as well as around one hundred and fifty other providers of higher education (Bradley et al, 2008, p.xi). The total enrolment in higher education in 1909 accounted for less than 1% of the total population (Knibbs, 1911, p. 904), compared to 3.2% in

1958 (28% female) (Carver, 1960, p. 605), and 4.8% in 2006 (55% female) (Pink, 2008c, p. 388).

Over the last one hundred years, not only has Australian higher education participation significantly increased, but it now consists of a more diverse student population (Bradley et al, 2008, p. xii). Women, once a minority among the privileged, now form the majority of students, although their enrolments are not evenly spread throughout course and award offerings. Other increases involve higher participation rates of mature-age students, international students and students with disabilities (Bradley et al, 2008). However, despite these developments, the higher education sector still remains inequitable in terms of socioeconomic background. Research consistently shows significantly lower proportions of low SES students attend university as compared with their higher SES peers (Considine & Zappala, 2002; Ramsay, Tranter, Charlton & Sumner, 1998). Moreover, universities are not equal institutions: the older ones maintain their establishment status in terms of capital city location, quality of students at entry (as measured by TER scores) and a curriculum more closely tied to traditional disciplines. The Bradley report's recommendations would appear to apply to all universities and thus would likely require more significant change in older established institutions compared with more recent ones.

In 1990, researchers identified six disadvantaged groups in terms of access to higher education, namely: people from low socioeconomic backgrounds; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; women in non-traditional areas; people from non-English speaking backgrounds; people with disabilities; and people from rural and isolated areas (DEET, 1990). This classification enabled researchers to address the problem in terms of specific features of inequity, a development leading to the determinations of the Bradley report. Recent years have seen significant improvements in tertiary access for women in non-traditional areas, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, and people with a disability, however 'the participation rate of people from rural, isolated, and low SES backgrounds had in fact decreased slightly over the time period being considered' (DETYA, 1999, p. vii, cited in Young, 2004, pp. 429-430). The low representation of students from low SES groups had remained 'virtually unchanged for the past decade despite the expansion in the total number of domestic students in higher education' (James, 2008, p. 23). Hence the low SES group was proving a more intransigent problem than the other equity groups.

Nor is the problem limited to Australian universities. A British study showed around 80% of higher education entrants came from the most affluent areas compared to just 3% from the most disadvantaged areas (Forsyth & Furlong, 2001, p. 205). In Australia high SES accounts for 37% (with a population reference of 25%) of the higher education population, compared to 46% (50%) of medium SES, and 16% (25%) for the low SES category (James, 2008, p. 23). Thus the low SES are significantly under-represented within the higher education system.

Furthermore the under-representation of low SES students is most marked in particular courses and universities, specifically in the established 'Group of Eight' (Go8) universities and in high status courses such as medicine, dentistry and economics (Bradley et al, 2008, p. 30). This feature, the differential enrolment patterns of certain

groups, is particularly striking in an analysis of the benefits of tertiary education and its equitable processes. Gender differences in course enrolment provide another indication of this internal stratification. Women, now a majority of first year tertiary enrolments, are clustered in two very traditional areas, nursing and teaching (Carrington & Pratt, 2003). While women do comprise roughly 50% of entering students in the traditionally prestigious faculties of Law and Medicine, these areas are the least likely to have a significant enrolment from any of the equity groups. The question becomes one of inter-sectionality with middle class women benefitting from the increased access to higher education, while low SES women and men are largely invisible in these high status fields. This profile of tertiary course and student SES is a striking example of the ways in which educational systems can be seen to reproduce and maintain social divisions, a key theoretical insight from Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Moreover the choice of course is governed by TER achieved in senior school, a competition in which the non-government fee paying schools dominate, further establishing the relation between high SES and high status educational attainment.

The Bradley report sets out a strong business case for widening participation, casting its pitch in terms of the knowledge economy and the global competition for skills:

Work by Access Economics predicts that from 2010 the supply of people with undergraduate qualifications will not keep up with demand. To increase the numbers participating we must also look to members of groups currently under-represented within the system, that is, those disadvantaged by the circumstances of their birth: Indigenous people, people with low socio-economic status, and those from regional and remote areas (Bradley et al, 2008, p. xi).

Consequently the report recommends a higher education target level of 40% of 25 to 34 year olds attaining at least a bachelor level qualification by 2020 (currently 29%). Furthermore, by 2020, it stipulates that 20% of undergraduate enrolments in higher education should be students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (currently 15%) (Bradley et al, 2008, p. xiv). While the solution proffered here appears admirably neat, concerns about the implementation remain.

Even though widening participation appears to be an effective way of ‘closing the gap’, some universities will likely be resistant to altering their practices. Not surprisingly the response from the elite Group of Eight universities advises caution, citing the need for a clearer definition of the problem (Gallagher, 2010). For some universities, widening participation may threaten prestige built up over generations of patronage by the social and professional elite. For other newer universities, widening participation may represent a lifeline for their continuance, given that regional universities often already exceed the government’s target of twenty per cent of enrolments coming from lower socioeconomic status students (Withers, 2009). However the further danger of creating a two tier higher education system must also be recognised. Bourdieu, commenting on a similar situation in France, notes ‘after an extended school career, which often entails considerable sacrifice, the most culturally disadvantaged run the risk of ending up with a devalued degree’ (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 423). It would appear most important to strive

to maintain parity in graduate quality and esteem – concepts not immediately evident in the report – at the same time as a broader social mix of tertiary students. But first, the discussion turns to the complexities of defining socioeconomic status or, more commonly, SES.

What is socioeconomic status?

The Bradley review uses the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) *Index of Education and Occupation* to measure SES as a key feature of its recommendations. However SES resists clear definition and is 'one of the most difficult of the six equity groups to define' (Martin, 1996, Western et al, 1998, cited in Young, 2004, p. 430). The ABS defines socioeconomic status as the level of 'people's access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society' (Pink, 2008b, p. 5); while the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) defines SES status as determined by 'social, cultural and economic resources, the extent to which individuals and groups have access to these resources and the relative value ascribed to the resources held by different individuals and groups' (DEEWR, 2009, p. ii). There is a loose consensus around the idea of SES as being tied to access to resources or material, social and cultural goods, along with capacities for civic participation. However 'access' is itself a complex amalgam of location, affordability and desire, all of which derive from different socio-cultural worlds. The question of desire in particular has implications for subjective positioning as discussed below. While no one presumes people are equally positioned around wealth or that they are equally able to use their resources and to participate fully in society, there remains the problem of identifying the dimensions of difference between people in this respect which lend themselves to measurement.

How is SES currently measured?

In 2006, the Australian Bureau of Statistics produced four indices called Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), designed to rank locations by associated socioeconomic characteristics, including education, occupation and economic resources (Pink, 2008a). However the approach has been challenged as not providing the most accurate or useful way of classifying people and the search for a better means of measuring SES continues.

'Socioeconomic status is a complex and relative concept' (DEEWR, 2009, p. ii). The ABS acknowledges that the measure is not perfect, and emphasises that disadvantage is subjective (Pink, 2008a, p. 2). But disadvantage is not merely subjective – there are clear indicators of lack of material goods, whereby some are significantly worse off than others – a difference that does not reduce to being describable as 'subjective'.

In Australia the current geographic (postcode) measurement of SES is a broad measurement as it bundles people together based upon a geographic area and does not account for individual circumstances (DEEWR, 2009). Hence it is not 'an appropriate way to identify individual socioeconomic status or educational disadvantage' (James, 2007, p. 12). While some proposals urge a smaller geographic unit as a potentially

more accurate reflection of the people who live there, the debate continues. Other suggestions propose parental educational levels and occupation as being better indicators of SES than address. James claims that parental educational levels constitute 'the best predictor of the likelihood of higher education participation' (James, 2008, p. 7).

In mainstream sociology the standard approach for determining SES has been by occupation and to the degree that occupation subsumes an educational level this seems a useful approach (McMillan, Beavis, & Jones, 2009). The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) prefers a 'multi-dimensional measure' combining individual circumstances with area, in order to account for the range of factors involved (Gale & Sellar, 2010). And, as an individual measure, the NCSEHE favours the use of occupation as 'the best single indicator of socioeconomic status' (Gale & Sellar, 2010, p. 1), a view supported by Marks, McMillan and Hillman (2001). But the problem remains for tertiary student classification. Occupational ranking may be a good indicator for established households and families, but the situation of students, who are often mobile, usually engage in part time work in low level occupations for low wages remains very complex. Are they to be measured in terms of their parents' occupation or their own? Under the current student assistance scheme they can achieve 'independence' if they have been in paid work for 18 months, but is this independence classifiable in terms of SES? More research is needed about the situation of current students if these questions are to be answered.

At a recent Sydney symposium on the development of new indicators for the socioeconomic status of higher education students, presenters cited the 'inadequacy of using area-based measures in isolation, and the need for more precise individual data' (Sellar & MacMullin, 2010). Although no decision emerged, the most likely outcome appears to be a combination of indicators. But with all such combinations there remains the problem of weighting – how much does parental occupation/education account for SES and how much is explained by geography? At the time of writing it seems that there is no easy solution to this issue. It may be that the most practicable solution will arise from modelling different weightings and looking at the results in terms of reasonable approximations.

As SES is currently measured by geographic location based upon census data, the percentage of low, medium, and high SES may change if SES was reclassified to parents' level of education or occupation. There is some suggestion that the use of the postcode index 'under-estimates the social stratification in Australian higher education' (James, 2007, p. 13). Given that all the current estimates show the higher education area to be highly stratified by SES, this comment signals the possibility of an even greater problem than is currently seen.

Why is SES important for higher education?

The recurrent research based connection between SES and university attendance indicates its importance to the continued growth of the sector. Its effects are not reducible to material goods and affordability but also include the finding that children

from low SES backgrounds are unlikely to see higher education as a desirable aspiration (Tranter, 2010). In 2002 socioeconomic background had been identified as 'the major factor in the variation in student perspectives on the value and attainability of higher education' (James, 2002, p. ix), suggesting that aspirations derive from SES location and operate to preclude some students more powerfully than simple economics or geographic location.

These perceptions resonate with Bourdieu's concept of people being, through class location, drawn to 'refusing what they are already refused' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471), by which he means the idea of deciding not to apply develops from an inbuilt sense (Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*) that such things are 'not for the likes of us'. The sense of a group ethic around tertiary entrance has much potential for explaining the persistence of low SES student participation. Some programs that have addressed the issue have been built around individual success and are thus unlikely to change the systemic condition except for a few meritorious cases. The Bradley report proposes a group solution and therefore must involve group strategies.

Such perceptions have led to the setting up of projects involving education about post school possibilities, including higher education in low SES schools in the hope of lifting student aspirations and transforming the social divisions linked to educational outcomes. It is too early to comment on the success of these projects. The matter is a cause for educational concern in terms of maximising student potential as well as building a just and democratic society. Access to higher education is important for all socioeconomic groups because of the personal benefits it can offer, the marginalisation that can occur without qualifications, and the advantages it brings to the Australian economy.

The Bradley report put forward its argument on two fronts: firstly that the need for more highly skilled people to help grow the Australian economy; and secondly the acknowledgement of the demands of social justice and student equity to be derived from any publicly funded education. Having shown that SES as currently measured and, presumably, with the ongoing refinement of its measures, functions as a key indicator of social inequality in terms of entry to tertiary education, we now turn to issues within the university. The question concerns the degree to which current universities are prepared to take more non-traditional students.

Issues for the higher education system for this new intake of students

The Bradley report gives little detail about the preparedness of current universities for the expanded intake, apparently leaving the issues of implementation to the universities. Research into higher education and the experiences of non-traditional or low SES students identifies some areas that will need attention.

Firstly, the recommendations will involve increasingly higher proportions of first generation university students, people whose parents have not achieved this level of education. As early as 2001, the Federal Department of Education recognised that these

students present particular issues which the universities need to address in their teaching.

Universities have found that first generation university students are often educationally disadvantaged and are at greater risk of attrition due to factors such as their distance from family and community support systems, financial hardship, or academic under-preparedness and, therefore, need additional support (DEST, 2001).

Research in the US identifies a number of factors associated with being a first generation higher education student. For example, first generation students are more likely to be enrolled part time, be older, have lower incomes, be married, and have dependents (Nunez, Cuccaro-Alamin, & Carroll, 1998).

To date there has been little research into first generation students at Australian universities (despite the current inclusion of this category in the forthcoming DEEWR statistics). And yet the significant expansion of the sector would seem to indicate there have been increasing numbers of first generation students for nearly three decades. American research had shown that first generation students require extra support in order to raise academic persistence and rate of success. But US research also revealed that once first generation students successfully completed university 'they earned comparable salaries and were employed in similar occupations as their non-first generation peers' (Nunez et al, 1998, p. iv). Some Australian work (Dobson & Skuja, 2005; Win & Miller, 2005) indicated that although low SES special entry students may get lower grades in their first year studies, by the end of the course there was little difference.

It appears that low SES participation in Australian higher education is an issue of access rather than success once enrolled. At aggregate level, socioeconomic status appears to explain little of the variation in higher education success and retention rates. Once enrolled, low SES people do almost as well as medium SES and high SES in terms of retention, success and completion (James, 2008, p. 4).

This conclusion stresses access to university as a key dimension for widening participation. Further research is needed to determine if students themselves see the issue of access of prime importance in achieving university entry.

What can universities do in order to attract and retain low SES students?

In the traditional meritocratic pathway, high achievement dominated explanations of tertiary entry, but an early Australian study characterised entry into higher education as dependent on four conditions: aspiration, achievement, access and availability (Anderson et al, 1980). Certainly some universities have initiated a range of schemes to enable bright students from low SES schools with limited university entry to gain a place. These strategies have focused on individual students rather than the group and

hence their effect has been limited. The Bradley report is calling for system change and this cannot be achieved through the activities of a few individuals. Noting Appadurai's claim that 'aspirations are never simply individual', there comes a necessary realisation that aspiration is culturally linked (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67). A sense of entitlement leads some young people to aspire to tertiary learning without needing to think about it as it is so much a part of their taken for granted world – in Bourdieu's terms part of their *habitus* – whereas for others aspiration has to be learned and cultivated before it can become part of a shared view. Viewed in this way, the capacity to aspire is not evenly distributed within society but operates as a dimension of social division. Given the preponderance of tertiary students coming from some middle class schools and the very limited numbers from others (low SES schools) it would appear that aspirations are produced and maintained within the group. Hence there is potential for treatment at the group or school level as well as at the level of individual student. University-school partnerships offer one way of working towards greater aspirations from particular schools, thus making university more accessible to first generation students. The meritocracy survived by celebrating individual achievement in ways that did not seriously challenge education's role in the production and maintenance of social and academic elites. The move by the Bradley report signals a more profound challenge to the current social settlement but it must be framed in terms of a group response.

Outreach support through the schools

Recently Australian universities have become involved in programs to attract young people to think of university. Most have focused on year 10 as the year at which subject choices are made, a crucial feature in determining future possibilities. Certainly Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) give examples of tertiary aspirations being comprised in the *habitus* of middle class young people, deriving from their home experience and amplified by their teachers at school, along with peers and extended family. For low SES youth, in the absence of tertiary experience in family and peers, the school must take on a greater role in enabling young people to aspire to tertiary education. Research into outreach programs shows that while a considerable number are currently operating, the absence of careful longitudinal evaluation makes it difficult to determine the most effective way to raise aspirations and encourage low SES students and teachers to connect with higher education (Ferrier, Heagney & Long, 2008).

While condoning the idea of outreach programs, the Bradley report is not conclusive. While it sees such programs as appearing to make 'the most significant difference to participation of under-represented groups' (Bradley et al, 2008, p. 42), it insists that higher education must involve other education providers and community organisations to assist with the task (Bradley et al, 2008). However the details are left unspecified in the report, a significant gap given the huge implications for the entire sector and the broader society.

Financial support

All support services have considerable resource implications, a crucial component if the universities are to become more inclusive institutions.

Non-traditional students are more costly to attract to university and require more academic support and other forms of support once enrolled. But this is what is required if serious inroads are to be made into the present participation imbalances (James, 2007, p. 14).

At the same time these resources are not enough in themselves to produce significant changes in the student body (Gorard, Adnett, May, Slack, Smith & Thomas, 2007). Some UK commentators encourage the use of monitoring devices whereby universities can be seen to achieve their targets and propose a reward system for evidence of widening participation.

When allocating funds for expansion, priority should be given to HEIs [higher education institutions] which can demonstrate a commitment to WP [widening participation]; have in place a particular strategy, a mechanism for monitoring progress, and provision for reviewing achievement by the governing body (HEFCE, 2006, p. 13).

At the system level it is clear that the implications of the Bradley report are going to require financial support for effectively widening the participation of low SES groups. Such financial support must be widely advertised and the programs clearly understood so that students realise that university costs will not constitute an impossible burden. As Tranter's study showed, low SES students in senior school are very disinclined to get into debt and are not well informed about possible support (Tranter, 2010).

Cultural change

Traditionally, universities in Australia and overseas have attracted one type of student, typically from high SES backgrounds. Many of these students adapt well to university and to the 'culture of academia' (Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2003) like fish in water (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), while other students feel like fish out of water (Tranter, 2003). Some UK analysts have described student learning at university as a training experience that is dependent on background and prior knowledge in ways more pervasive than simple school subjects.

Firstly, the student experiences institutional 'controls' through, for example, the 'regulated communications' of the lecture, the essay and the examination, and the rewards and punishments of the grading system. Secondly, the student is constrained by her or his own 'knowledge' of what it is to be a 'good' student, a knowledge which has been constructed through socially dominant discourses, including those produced and maintained by the university itself. Such 'knowledges' and practices are legitimated by their 'naturalisation': they come to be seen as the only or 'natural' way of thinking or acting (Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003, p. 269).

Undoubtedly some students will experience a greater challenge in becoming accustomed to university practices than others. For those students coming from middle class schools, some of which advertise their programs as involving 'tertiary literacy',

the change to university study patterns will be less than for others whose schools have not been oriented towards university learning.

However the cultural change resulting from the proposed reforms is not restricted to the new-style students and they are not the only ones to undergo cultural change. The massification of the higher education sector has had considerable consequences for academics, particularly for those within non-elite (and generally newer) institutions, which have a greater population of non-traditional students. Academics have reported 'increased pressure on resources, and greater demands from student 'consumers' for improvements in teaching quality' (McInnis & Anderson, 2005, cited in Hardy, 2010, p. 2). Furthermore, Brew (2010) suggests that with this change of dynamics within the higher education system, academics and students may become further distanced from each other.

In contrast, Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) studied the attitudes of low SES students within an elite university. This UK study found that working class students in elite universities felt they were treading in unfamiliar territory, which often resulted in 'disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty' about their studies (Reay et al, 2009, p. 1105). These researchers reported that working class students have to master the ability to operate within two differing cultures, and in many cases are torn between keeping ties to their social background while also trying to adapt to the middle class institution (Reay et al, 2009). For these students success involves developing 'almost superhuman levels of motivation, resilience and determination' (Reay et al, 2009, p. 1115). This study shows the complexity of the situation in which the success of non-traditional students is impeded.

According to UK researcher Archer, the challenge is to get students 'to feel that they 'belong' in any institution, but this will not happen until the elite universities are no longer the preserve of 'traditional' students' (Archer et al, 2003, p. 197). Furthermore British researchers write of the importance of challenging institutional cultures which legitimate traditional exclusionary practices (Archer et al, 2003). Hussey and Smith (2010) argue that if higher education really wants to change then it will not only have to alter the academic structure but also the timetabling to be more flexible. Archer, Hutchings and Ross go even further with this idea and suggest a dismantling of 'a fixed university site' (2003, p. 200) and instead propose that universities go out to communities.

While UK researchers appear fairly dubious about the possibility of change, the situation in Australia may hold more potential. Certainly some aspects of university culture have changed in recent decades from the formal routines that used to be in place in classrooms and tutorial groups to a rather more relaxed and friendly environment, but this varies between universities and between disciplines. 'Belonging' implies feeling comfortable, knowing the ropes, so detailed induction programs and clear communication systems are essential.

Researchers agree on the need to build a more inclusive student culture, a difficult challenge at a time when students are less likely to be identified with their place of

learning. International comparisons reveal that Australian students have amongst the highest rates of paid work accompanying their studies (Withers, 2009). The high involvement in part time work also means less time for engaging in wider university culture. With the PC taking on the traditional function of the library, student life can be reduced to minimal social involvement. With the demise of compulsory union fees in 2005, there are fewer dedicated spaces on campus for student interests. No longer are there union funded clubs and societies and so the opportunities for mixing and mingling are limited. In these conditions students are thrown back on their own networks which tend to be classed, raced and gendered. Some disciplines operate with a set curriculum that takes most of student time on campus. While these groups, typically professional courses such as medicine, engineering and others, may afford greater degree of student identification and sense of belonging, this is less true for those doing less structured courses where currently many of the low SES students are found, such as in enabling courses (Bradley et al, 2008, p. 30). It seems there is a need for universities to develop new ways of getting students to work together in order to develop a sense of themselves as part of an inclusive group within the institution.

Particular features of student life in and around Australian universities may render them less likely to provide the experience of a 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961) that governs their days and nights than their US or UK counterparts. While most Australian students attend their local university, far fewer 'go away' to university when compared with students in the UK or the US. Thus they tend to be grounded in their local backgrounds which may vary in providing support for student life. The widely accepted practice of students undertaking part time work (McInnis, 2002) means that many only come for the set hours of classes. Consequently for today's students there is little campus life when compared with the experience of former generations. The sense of belonging to the institution becomes increasingly elusive.

Academics: Re-education and curriculum change

University is idealised as an excellent teaching and learning environment, staffed by leaders in research who teach with the latest resources on cutting edge topics (AEN, 2011). However, in the Australian context, university continues to cater for a specific type of student, one who has a white, academic history, knowledge of university processes and conformity to university norms and culture. In this way higher education reproduces class division by presuming these qualities are readily available to all students. If higher education is about imparting knowledge, developing critical thinking and adapting to a continually changing world it behoves academics to become more aware of their presumptions and to be alert to ways of making the learning more relevant to and inclusive of the non-traditional students in their classes.

Some tertiary faculties may be understandably resistant to curriculum change. For example, the professional fields, such as engineering, medicine and law, have certain agreed commonalities set in consultation with professional bodies about what every graduate must know in order to become the 'safe practitioner'. But there needs to be consideration for different starting points, for which there must be well designed diagnostic instruments geared to a broader range of student entry, which would identify

any knowledge gaps and include short courses designed to overcome them. Only with such a system in place can universities claim to be the democratic inclusive institutions of the Bradley vision.

University teachers are generally appointed based upon their research and knowledge of a particular field, which has distinct advantages for developing new research, generating funding and elevating the status of a department as well as the university. However, the actual 'teaching' component of the university teacher is often missing or underdeveloped. While there have been encouraging developments in the tertiary sector to advance the focus on teaching and learning at this level (eg, Carrick Grants initially and then the Australian Learning and Teaching Council), the drivers for this work have been largely in terms of 'efficient throughput' and developments in ICT applications for university teaching. Our argument here is that the interests of widening participation call for a specific focus on curriculum reform for entering non-traditional students. Nor are we the first to make this point.

Equity policies and programs are closely related to choices about the curriculum and approaches to teaching and learning, though this is rarely recognised ... So the widening of participation, especially in the Go8 universities, invites a re-conceptualisation of first year curricula to accommodate students from different backgrounds with different types of preparedness (James, 2007, p. 14).

The changes urged in the Bradley report necessarily entail developments within the university culture and curriculum structure along with increased resourcing for the sector if they are to be implemented effectively. Rather than seeking to make the students adapt to their traditional ways, the universities must engage with real change if they are to accommodate a wider group of students.

Conclusion

The Bradley report takes a bold stand in the face of the established university tradition in Australia. While details of the implementation of its recommendations have yet to be worked out, the logic of its argument is clear. Universities are asked to draw students from a wider social range than before and in particular to attract a specified quota of students from low SES backgrounds. In order to demonstrate their capacity to do this they must agree on a shared definition of SES and then adopt a range of carefully monitored strategies to achieve the goal. We have identified some key features of this development which we hope will lead to further thinking and action.

The focus of this paper has been on the barriers to inclusivity within higher education institutions. Like Bradley we believe that higher education should be readily accessible to those who have the academic potential and interest, regardless of their socioeconomic status. In this spirit we concur with UK scholars who write, 'the creation of 'meaningful' education will require appropriate levels of resourcing and a commitment to ensuring a system that challenges, rather than reinforces, classed, raced and gendered inequalities' (Archer et al, 2003, p. 201). Ultimately our position is that

tertiary education, in ways similar to primary and secondary education, must come to be seen and to understand itself as a public good, most obviously in the ways it works to produce a democratic participatory society. While we do not dispute that university graduates are more likely than non-graduates to end up in more fulfilling better paid jobs, the social benefits of a more inclusive tertiary system stand as the most compelling drivers for the Bradley report recommendations.

This paper has described the problems associated with the current indicators of SES, and has emphasised the need to establish a more satisfactory measure. The issue of cultural change within the universities calls for significant resourcing and ongoing monitoring. It is envisaged that some higher education institutions will welcome this change, while others may fight to maintain traditional ways of operating. For the latter, the transition from elite to mass education may be viewed as relinquishing their position of power. However, until these issues are addressed, the Bradley report's recommendations and targets will not be achieved and higher education will continue to be stratified, favouring the traditional student and reproducing class inequalities.

Whether the adoption of the Bradley recommendations will involve the end of the traditional university system in Australia is still a moot point. Certainly the exclusiveness which the system has long enjoyed will have to undergo fundamental change. Bourdieu's theorisation of education as a systematic contributor to class division would seem to be less appropriate in the new style institutions prefigured in the Bradley report. However, his concerns about a multi-tier education structure constitute a real warning to current developments in Australia and should necessarily be a constant issue in future developments. Only time will tell if the nexus between education and class can be broken or at least rendered less determined.

In conclusion, while we welcome the recommendations of the Bradley report, our analysis signals the need for significant change in the culture and practices of Australian universities. In this paper we have identified a range of issues that warrant further work if the recommendations are to be implemented successfully. First, the work must be shared across the entire sector and not just left for some universities to accommodate the broader social mix of students and all that it entails. Second, there must be agreement throughout the sector as to what constitutes the most appropriate way to measure SES so that the requirements are met on a comparable basis throughout. Third, research into the experience of non-traditional students along with careful monitoring of outreach programs would ideally be accompanied by professional development for faculty and increased resourcing of learning and teaching advisers. Bradley gave a deadline date of 2020 for some specific demonstrable change to have occurred. It looks like being a busy decade around the campuses.

Endnote

- [1] John Dawkins was the Federal Education Minister from 1987-1992 and during this time he initiated significant changes in the Australian higher education system – most notably the expansion of Australian universities and the introduction of the HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme) scheme.

References

- AEN. (2011). *Australian universities*. Retrieved 6 June 2011, from Australian Education Network <http://www.australian-universities.com/>
- Anderson, D., Boven, R., Fensham, P. & Powell, J. (1980). *Students in Australian higher education: A study of their social composition since the abolition of fees*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Appadurai, A. (2004). The capacity to aspire: culture and the terms of recognition. In V. Rao & M. Walton (Eds), *Culture and public action* (pp. 59-84). Stanford, MA: Stanford University Press.
- Archer, L., Hutchings, M. & Ross, A. (2003). *Higher education and social class: Issues of exclusion and inclusion*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1999). Extracts from - The weight of the world: Social suffering in contemporary society. In P. Bourdieu (Ed.), *The weight of the world: social suffering in contemporary society* (pp. 1-5). Oxford: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society, and culture*. London and Newbury Park, CA: Sage in association with Theory Culture & Society, Department of Administrative and Social Studies, Teesside Polytechnic.
- Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H. & Scales, B. (2008). Review of Australian higher education: Final report. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
- Brew, A. (2010). Imperatives and challenges in integrating teaching and research. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 29(2), 139-150.
- Carrington, K. & Pratt, A. (2003). *How far have we come? Gender disparities in the Australian higher education system*, Current Issues Brief No. 31, 2002-03. Canberra.
- Carver, S. (1960). *Official year book of the Commonwealth of Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics.
- Considine, G. & Zappala, G. (2002). The influence of social and economic disadvantage in the academic performance of school students in Australia. *Journal of Sociology*, 38(2), 129-148.
- DEET. (1990). *A fair chance for all: National and institutional planning for equity in higher education*. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Commonwealth of Australia.
- DEEWR. (2009). *Measuring the socio-economic status of higher education students: Discussion paper*. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Commonwealth of Australia.
- DEST. (2001). *Summary of 2000 - 2002 triennium equity plans*. Retrieved 6 June 2011, from Department of Education, Science and Training http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/pubs/equity00_02/overview.htm
- Dobson, I. & Skuja, E. (2005). Secondary schooling, tertiary entry ranks and university performance. *People and Place*, 13(1), 53-62.

- Ferrier, F., Heagney, M. & Long, M. (2008). Outreach: a local response to new imperatives for Australian universities. In F. Ferrier & M. Heagney (Eds), *Higher education in diverse communities: Global perspectives, local initiatives*. London: European Access Network and the Higher Education Authority of Ireland.
- Forsyth, A. & Furlong, A. (2001). Access to higher education and disadvantaged young people. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(2), 205-225.
- Gale, T. & Sellar, S. (2010). Response to the DEEWR discussion paper: 'Measuring the socio-economic status of higher education students': National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), The University of South Australia.
- Gallagher, M. (2010). Go8 response to the 'measuring the socio-economic status of higher education students', discussion paper, 2009. ACT: Group of Eight Limited.
- Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Gorard, S., Adnett, N., May, H., Slack, K., Smith, E. & Thomas, L. (2007). *Overcoming the barriers to higher education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- Hardy, I. (2010). Academic architectures: academic perceptions of teaching conditions in an Australian university. *Studies in Higher Education*.
- HEFCE. (2006). *Widening participation: A review*. Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England.
- Hussey, T. & Smith, P. (2010). Transitions in higher education. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 42(2), 155-164.
- James, R. (2002). *Socioeconomic background and higher education participation: An analysis of school students' aspirations and expectations*. Melbourne: Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne.
- James, R. (2007). Social equity in a mass, globalised higher education environment: the unresolved issue of widening access to university. Paper presented at the Faculty of Education Dean's Lecture Series 2007, 18 September, Melbourne.
- James, R. (2008). *Participation and equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people*. Melbourne: Universities Australia and Centre for the Study of Higher Education.
- Knibbs, G. (1911). *Official year book of the Commonwealth of Australia containing authoritative statistics for the period 1901-1910 and corrected statistics for the period 1788 to 1900*. Melbourne: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics.
- Marks, G., McMillan, J. & Hillman, K. (2001). *Tertiary entrance performance: The role of student background and school factors*. Melbourne: ACER.
- McCalman, J. (1993). *Journeyings: The biography of a middle-class generation 1920-1990*. Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press.
- McInnis, C. (2002). Signs of disengagement: responding to the changing work and study patterns of full-time undergraduates in Australian universities. In J. Enders & O. Fulton (Eds), *Higher education in a globalising world: international trends and mutual observations*. London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- McMillan, J., Beavis, A. & Jones, F. (2009). The AUSEI06: a new socioeconomic index for Australia. *Journal of Sociology*, 45(2), 123-149.
- Nunez, A., Cuccaro-Alamin, S. & Carroll, C. (1998). First-generation students: Undergraduates whose parents never enrolled in post-secondary education. National Centre for Education Statistics, US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

- Pink, B. (2008a). *An introduction to Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA): Information paper, 2006 (Preliminary)*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Pink, B. (2008b). *Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA): Technical paper 2006*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Pink, B. (2008c). *Year Book, Australia*. In B. Pink (Ed.). Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Ramsay, E., Tranter, D., Charlton, S. & Sumner, R. (1998). *Higher education access and equity for low SES school leavers: A case study*. Canberra: Evaluations and Investigations Programme, Higher Education Division, Commonwealth of Australia.
- Read, B., Archer, L. & Leathwood, C. (2003). Challenging cultures? Student conceptions of 'belonging' and 'isolation' at a post-1992 university. *Studies in Higher Education, 28*(3), 261-277.
- Reay, D., Crozier, G. & Clayton, J. (2009). 'Strangers in paradise?': Working-class students in elite universities. *Sociology, 43*(6).
- Sellar, S. & MacMullin, C. (2010). A measure for all things? Retrieved 6 June 2011, from *Campus Review* <http://www.campusreview.com.au/pages/section/article.php?s=Comment&idArticle=15635>
- Tranter, D. (2003). *"Fish out of water": students from disadvantaged schools and the university experience*. Paper presented at the Creating Spaces: Interdisciplinary Writings in the Social Sciences Conference, Canberra, 17-18 July 2003.
- Tranter, D. (2010). *Why not university? School culture and higher education aspirations in disadvantaged schools*. PhD thesis, University of South Australia, South Australia.
- Win, R. & Miller, P. (2005). The effects of individual and school factors on university students' academic performance. *The Australian Economic Review, 38*(1), 1-18.
- Withers, G. (2009). Submission to inquiry into rural and regional access to educational opportunities. Universities Australia. <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/resources/253/264>
- Young, J. (2004). 'Becoming different': accessing university from a low socioeconomic community-barriers and motivators. *Systemic Practice and Action Research, 17*(5), 425-469.

Thomas Putnam is a PhD Candidate within the School of Education at the University of South Australia. His research focuses on gender and class in higher education.

Email: Thomas.R.Putnam@gmail.com

Judith Gill is an Associate Professor within the School of Education at the University of South Australia. Her research and publications have long focused on issues of equity in educational provision and practice, in particular those concerned with gender. Most recently she has been investigating questions of citizenship education seen in recent work such as *Knowing our place*, ACER Press 2009 and *Globalisation, the nation state and the citizen*, Routledge 2010.

Email: Judith.Gill@unisa.edu.au