The Impact of Neoliberalism on Designing and Developing Postgraduate Education in Australian Universities

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Abstract

This chapter explores the impact of an increased presence of neoliberalism in Australian higher education research environment and considers how today's university research environment is changing work readiness of postgraduate students in the future. This is a time when neoliberal movement and logic are transforming universities from domestic social institutions to competitive market-based and global export institutions. As a result, the speed of change has intensified neoliberal logic into governance and practice within universities. As a consequence, higher degree research programs and supervisors need to prepare new academics to join a vastly different working world than those of their supervisors. Joining the extant academic conversation means to survive and thrive the transformational change that will be an ongoing concern. A world in

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which work is measured by numbers, where by academics is quantified, audited, counted and managed through surveillance at distance, the numbers and norms set by university administrators and executives. It will be an entrepreneurial life that requires candidates to manage the tensions of being competitive, co-optive, collaborative, and collegial as a whole. Everyday academics are required to be strategic thinkers and demonstrate behavior that fits with university compliance and strategy. As a result, universities are required to rethink the PhD education, training, and supervision programs for postgraduate students. Changing the focus from being on developing research skills as a form of organizational apprenticeship to being more focused on the preparation required to survive and thrive in a world where the neoliberal movement is seeping into academic everyday lives.

Introduction

The neoliberal movement and logic have fundamentally transformed the context in which universities and their research governance and practice have changed the work of an academic. As a result, the ripple effect on this changing space sees a flow of neoliberal ideas into the design and development of postgraduate education in Australian universities. The most visible form of neoliberal logic is the marketization of education and research in universities. This can be seen in how rankings, auditing, surveillance, and entrepreneurial aspects of academic life are everyday occurrences. The research candidate will start working in the world in which competiveness, innovation, and commercialization are the norms. Unsurprisingly, the changes to postgraduate research training programs have been focused on research training in this context. However, this shift in the adopting neoliberal logic has occurred in all aspects of the everyday work of academics, with a more ingrained approach. Academics are measured on much more than research. As such, program managers need to focus on assembling a more rounded approach when building capacity for postgraduate education programs. As "The success and reputation of universities is dependent on the calibre and excellence of doctoral programmes. . .success in doctoral education has many definitions, but a timely completion, exciting and exhilarating candidature, and teaching and publishing experience are all effective starting points" (Brabazon 2016: 14). More broadly, intended changes for all-round capacity mean teaching, research, engagement, service, and administration, for the new academic in postgraduate training programs, as new academics need to hit the ground running in a the neoliberal world of academia. Meeting the expectations in a neoliberal university not only means postgraduate training programs need to provide support for the intended consequences of change but also the unintended consequences of assembling the new academic in training in a neoliberal world. For the new academic, this means managing themselves in an environment which asks high levels of administration,

materiality, and competiveness while being collaborative and collegial. Whilst identifying problems and gaps, seeing them as opportunities, and developing entrepreneurial skills, qualities, and attributes. This involves continually learning about research and starting a teaching career, all the while under the constant gaze in the form of an electronic panopticon (Bentham 1838) or surveillance of the university. Surveillance also involves self-surveillance and is also a space where the watched are watched by their colleagues as competitors. The challenge for postgraduate program managers is to understand and embed techniques more closely to manage this neoliberal logic into their programs. For the PhD candidate, the challenge "is to think about it [neoliberal impact] without thinking with it [embedded neoliberal logic]" (Lynteris 2013: 13).

Methodology and Case

The methodology this case study has applied is based on an ethnographic imaginary (Brady and Lippert 2014). The ethnographic methodology employed "utilizes qualitative and ethnographic research methods to gather data on university actors practice, reasoning and knowledge generation" (Khazraee and Khoo 2011). This research takes a critical institutional ethnographic approach to observe and problematize the social relations or transfer of neoliberal logic (Smith 2005). Ethnography is "a descriptive account of social life...in a particular social system based on detailed observations of what people actually do ...in face to face settings" (Johnson 2000: 111). Critical ethnographers use this method in order to make change (Thomas 1993), and institutional ethnography explores the ordinary daily activity of participants (Smith 2005), otherwise hidden (Smith 1987; Thomas 1993; Johnson 2000). This form of ethnography recognizes the authority of experience (Smith 1987) and brings into question the common, mundane, and everyday narratives about neoliberal logic, movement, and power. The research design extracted and analyzed the "thick description" collected from 34 interviews and photographic interviews and eight focus groups, with 36 participants. The participants come from a range of standpoints (Hartsock 1983). Their explicit voices, experiences, and practices involved are from executive management, senior and expert researchers, university administrators, middle managers, and early career researchers. The participant narratives "documented how neoliberal rationalities are reshaping institutions and how we understand and act upon ourselves (subjectivities) by bringing together an analytics of governmentality with an ethnographic imaginary" (Brady and Lippert 2014: 22).

Literature Review

The research underpinning this chapter explores the impact of the increased presence of neoliberalism in today's higher education research environment. In defining the term neoliberalism from the literature, it has been stated that the neoliberal movement is considered a broad cultural phenomenon (Mudge 2008) and that "neoliberalism is the financialization of everything" (Harvey 2005: 33). However, neoliberal ideas cannot simply be defined as just an economic or political paradigm (Harvey 2005) in which both

economic and political logic are embedded in social (Dugdale 2010 in Higgins, V., S. Kitto and W. Larner) of the twenty-first-century life. Neoliberal logic moves across classes, governments, economies, and power and is now a broad social movement, which has stretched beyond its origins and original context (Mudge 2008). As a result, neoliberal logic is a network of intertwined circulating elements of power (Dean 2015), as such is reasoned and organic and appears normal in the micro spaces of the academe. The movement of neoliberal network of logic transpires across global, national, and local spaces and has developed strong linkages, making these norms hard to see and observe and more difficult to challenge. Neoliberal logic seeps right into the bodies of academic actors (Foucault 1979) and circulates through the local spaces and back and forth and in between. Institutionally neoliberal logic is embedded in the strategic planning of higher education institutions and into the everyday spaces of academic practices, such as materials and forms. From the global to the local, this has the unintended consequences of creating twists and turns (Argyris 1968) in the ways of being and knowing of educational institutions and university actors involved. As such, institutions are rooted in norms and standards pertaining to being market driven, whereby buying and selling of knowledge is a natural way of being. This is a time when neoliberal logic is transforming universities from domestic social institutions to competitive market-based and global export institutions (Heath and Burdon 2013), which must have implications of change for postgraduate program offerings.

Changes in the Australian context were triggered by the global financial crisis (Miller 2016) and stronger neoliberal governmentality (Rose 1999). Since the 2008 global financial crisis, the rate and speed of change in university governance and practice has intensified and appears as a more fluid concept, and academic life is moving at a faster pace (Harvey 2005); with this shift come higher expectations and pressure on academics in all aspects of academic work. The 2008 global financial crisis consolidated the adoption and embedding of neoliberal ideas in the research education environment. As a result, many Australian universities are increasingly positioning themselves as enterprise universities, as they are in a quasi-market space (Agasisti and Catalano 2006; Marginson and Considine 2000). This is a position where universities are still funded by the government; on the other hand, they are also immersed in the marketization of research, knowledge, and intellectual labor (Marginson and Considine 2000) and are self-funding research. This form of governmentality is transforming universities, as research, innovation, and commercialization are increasingly important to Australia in the global knowledge economy. This not only signifies a holistic approach to how PhD programs are required to assemble academics in training for the future shift but also explores the relationship between individual academics, their institutions, and the work done in market-based institution.

Assembling the New Neoliberal Academic

This changing context, academic role, and purpose has wider implications for post-graduate student education. The evolving and shifting education environment needs to be clearly understood (Boker 2012). For many, the most noticeable change is the

holistic set of skills, fundamental prior to entering the workplace. Work readiness is defined in terms of capacity to attract funding and partners and to commercialize research, evidence of quality publishing, and strategic capacity. Others are to demonstrate management and administrative skills, teaching quality, leadership, and engagement with industry combined with a high level of technology skills, and undertaking university and community service (Boker 2012) while being under surveillance and in a competitive and audited space. In these context universities are required to rethink research education, training, and supervision of postgraduate students, not only focused on developing research skills as a form of organizational apprenticeship but being more focused on the knowledge, skills, and qualities required to succeed in a very different academic working world (Whitsed and Green 2015), positioned within the neoliberal environment surrounding higher education.

Competiveness at All Levels

Changes to higher education, as a result of globaliztion, can be found at local level, in a new form of competitivness. However, global rankings for institutions and countries are vital to the success, instigsatitng competitiveness at all levels in higher education, the macro or global, through the meso asnd into the micro or local. The World Economic Forum defines competitiveness as "the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country" (The Global Competitiveness Report 2016–2017). From this global context, neoliberal logic of competiveness seeps into the everyday lives of academics by means of a network of capillary power (Foucault's 1977). As such, PhD programs need to prepare new academics to navigate the competitive and power-based workplace doctoral candidates will move into during and post their candidature (Brabazon 2016). Branding is one aspect of being competitive for doctoral programs to include. Branding as an academic means research and teaching narratives, and publishing earlier, which consists of both academic and nonacademic writing, including social media, web pages, and blogging. This creates unpaid and administrative type work in an academic space. Academic marketing and branding themselves need the need to self-promote, so they might meet their performance review criteria in order that they can fund their own research, networking opportunities, and conference attendance.

University research training programs need to explore the unintended consequences of competiveness. Whereas competition in academia has always been a concept worth considering, neoliberal logic has increased competition greatly. Therefore, institutions should provide higher degree research supervisors with an understanding about how competiveness will impact on PhD candidates and how they should manage the practice-based tensions found in the academic environment. These practices are competition, co-option, collaboration, and collegiality, all which can occur simultaneously. Supervisors are aware academics compete. However, tensions arise as the space between colleagues, supervisors, and candidates shifts and becomes more competitive and competitive logic seeps into the everyday spaces and becomes a norm. Working with supervisors and competing with them for

publication space are the new reality, as publishing is expected earlier. As an example, one professor told a candidate, "you are in your final year, you are now my competitor, we are competing for the same publishing space" (AG). However, many academics are still coming to terms with the higher levels of competition in the current research environment; the candidate and the supervisor are in a co-optive relationship, one where they are working toward the thesis, which should be considered a collegial collaboration. However, for some academics, competition is at the forefront of their success, changing the interactions between supervisors and candidates. As a result, HDR programs need to provide understanding and mechanisms for candidates to manage this competitive and co-optive element, leading to a more liminal space for collegiality and the supervisor and student relationship.

Collaboration Versus Collegiality

Collaboration is also being taken to a new level; however, collaboration is related to a means to an end: research outputs, university key performance indicators, and academic performance review metrics. From the literature, collaboration can be described as an academic researcher's willingness, enthusiasm, and preparedness to work together with others in order to accomplish institutional goals (Bedwell et al. 2012). Collaboration is an important element in strategic and operational planning for research and links collaboration to competition, cooperation, and co-option (Clifford and Tewdwr-Jones 2013). However, in order to collaborate, there is a need to network, develop trust, and build relationships and to generate agency at a grassroots level, which is a collegial practice. What is important is that the language in universities has changed from collegiality to collaboration, but the two are not the same. Academics need to demonstrate collaboration; however, what is required for PhD programs is collegiality for new academics to flourish and progress. Trust and relationship building through networking is imperative. This is a skill set needed in doctoral programs. Collegiality is about human generosity and spirit, with no means to an end.

The Entrepreneurial Academic

Many Australian universities have adopted an entrepreneurial or enterprise vision and culture (Marginson and Considine 2000). Neoliberal logic has seeped into performance management criteria, which has seen the universities looking for alternative sources of income to fund research, to be more financially secure in a quasi-market funding space and strategic and managerial in governance to meet universities' entrepreneurial visions (Brown 2015). The shifting academic and specifically research environment requires academics to be entrepreneurial, to bring in money, and to conduct research. Many university strategic plans and academic key performance indicators have listed these criteria for success. As said, PhD students must start developing their entrepreneurial skills earlier (Ronstadt 1990). It is therefore imperative that entrepreneurial skills such as recognizing and

sourcing opportunities and revenue streams, networking and collaboration, and industry engagement are gained or have been acquired. Securing opportunities to secure funding from new markets and to publish alternative journals/markets are complex tasks, requiring higher-order thinking skills that have an entrepreneurial focus. The entrepreneurial academic must develop stronger interpersonal skills and networking abilities, be able to build trust, demonstrate integrity, and build their own reputation at an earlier stage and in many universities. In many cases with little or no funding, support for conferences in order to undertake networking internationally, nationally, and locally and join the academic conversation much earlier is necessary in today's academic environment. Teaching, engagement, service, and research will all need to demonstrate entrepreneurial innovative approach.

Surveillance

In today's academic environment, surveillance and competition go hand in hand. Surveillance occurs from the center of the university and puts academics under "constant and unremitting pressure" (Bentham 1838: 63) of being under the gaze of the institution and each other. This in turn constitutes self-monitoring or self-surveillance (Foucault 1979), and as academics are being watched, they watch themselves and each other. There is an increasing reliance on metrics, as such surveillance occurs in order to audit and rank individuals, faculties, universities, and countries. Contributions in all areas of work are quantitative, numerical, and counted, and this is the predominant tool for performance management (Marginson and Considine 2000). Across the globe, managerialism and related performance management are based on administrative surveillance by means of auditing and metrics (Morris 2011). Quantiication of this kind simplifies a complex and messy academic workspace, and reducing academics to ticking boxes for their performance review as required, is enabling comparative approaches and measurement. This simplification of academic work brings forth higher levels of performance management, accountability, responsibility, and self-checking and auditing. By its very nature, managing surveillance and other forms of competition, generated by metrics, measurement, and auditing needs to be addressed in postgraduate training programs at an early stage. This will raise the awareness of PhD candidates early in their candidature, as this is essential to transition as an early career academic and post PhD. Raising awarness earlier creates an stronger understanding of the changing academic environment in order to manage the tensions, competitive and co-optive nature that surveillance and auditing creates. Understanding competition better, and managing oneself in a complex space can result thriving, not just surviving under the constant gaze of university systems and competitive colleagues.

For some, thriving means co-option; competing and collaborating at the same time with the same academics are a strange juncture. The tension of the constant gaze of surveillance by means of auditing and the power relations generated by the network of capillary power have simultaneously created intended and unintended consequence of survival, that is, compliance and obedience, fitting in and performing

to norms and standards or "doing what I'm told." Strange indeed for an academic culture! It has created in the mind of an academic an "obedient subject . . .an individual who is subject to habits, rules, order, an authority that was exercised around and upon him, in which [s/]he must allow to function automatically inside them" (Foucault 1977: 128–129). Many of the academics interviewed noted that they conform out of self-interest or preservation or self-care. Michel Foucault refers to this self-care related to the university, faculty, discipline, and specifically for the individual, as universities conduct the conduct (Foucault 1979) of their staff. What needs to be considered is that over time the body and mind of the subject, the academic, is subsumed by the gaze of the surveillance (the panopticon). As a result, passive conformity or pragmatism (Teelken 2012) may be the result, and many are becoming compliant as noted by Matt an early career academic "I am happy to be compliant and do what I am told. . .as long as I know what to do. . . ." This has implications for academic judgment within administrative calculation, reducing decision-making while raising levels of compliant and conforming behavior by academics. From the data collected, this is more of an issue for early career academics than experienced academics. The sense of being watched, performance managed, and how to conduct oneself is expected to become a permanent part of an academic's identity. Discussing the unintended consequences of this for early academics is important.

The Tools of Surveillance: Administration and Materiality

Technology and digitalized administrative systems appear as the productive solution for cost efficiencies and effectiveness for university administration is also a space whereby academic work can be counted and collected for auditing. As a result of surveillance and auditing, university administration systems (research, engagement and teaching) increase the academic administrative input and workload. Linked digital applications and software require higher levels of knowledge, learning, and time to undertake these tasks. However, as the engine for administration, the academic undertakes the administrative and material work. This creates a higher frequency of administrative work for academics, which increases as auditing and quantification of academic life occurs. It is important for early career academics and program designers to be aware of the increasing level of administrative work required, in order that the university can code, measure, and audit outputs. This form of neoliberal materiality is found in the everyday aspects of academic life. It is important for postgraduate education programs to make students aware of the embedded neoliberal logic found in university administrative objectives and everyday objects, as well as more broad policy elements such as research frameworks and associated grant funding forms. This is a space and time where a materiality is changing the fabric of university life (Polanyi 1944/1957) and explores how neoliberal logic in the form of materials filter into the "body" of an academic and more broadly into the academic body, at a given moment in time (Foucault 1994) through consumption and use of everyday materiality (Foucault 1977).

Conclusions

Neoliberal logic and the marketization of education and research have raised the competitiveness of universities globally. Rankings, auditing, and surveillance appear in all aspects of academic life and seep into research training programs as neoliberal logic is a continuous movement. However, the unintended consequences (Argyris 1968) of neoliberal movement and logic for postgraduate education in Australian universities have impacted on the ways of being and knowing for university actors, changing everyday academic life. It is essential that postgraduate candidates are made aware of this shifting environment and how neoliberal ideas are shaping university culture. The university staff managing postgraduate programs of support and training need to embrace a fresh approach toward a holistic perspective for capacity building of future academics. Looking at what an academic will need to achieve, we could think the all-round academics are superheroes of the future. PhD candidates of today, the academics of tomorrow will need to publish earlier and more productively, work with social media, and understand the changes to impact and research metrics, demonstrating this to their PhD candidates. Who will need to compete on many levels, with strong personal brand and research narratives for public life that are strategically positioned to fit within university strategies. They will need to have the capacity to be compliant, collaborative, competitive, co-optive, critical thinkers, and collegially oriented while managing these tensions. Collaboration also means working in a cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary manner in a broad range of teams and countries and with a range of industries. They will be lifelong learners: teaching, research, administration, engagement, and service orientated from the global to the local and have the capacity to apply all their skills and knowledge to increase teaching quality and flexibility and increase research funding and outputs. They will have highly developed entrepreneurial, interpersonal, social, and networking skills and solve problems creatively and innovatively. These superheroes will also need to provide academic leadership: work with colleagues and students to support, mentor, coach, and guide, all the while under constant gaze of surveillance by the university, colleagues, and themselves. Confronting this for postgraduate program managers is the challenge. For the PhD candidate, managing the neoliberal logic without "thinking with it" (Lynteris 2013: 13) is imperative if PhD candidates are to retain the essential elements of being and knowing as academics.

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