Dualisms in Higher Education: a Critique of Their Influence and Effect

Bruce Macfarlane, University of Hong Kong, bmac@hku.hk

Abstract

Dualisms pervade the language of higher education research providing an over-simplified roadmap to the field. However, the lazy logic of their popular appeal supports the perpetuation of erroneous and often outdated assumptions about the nature of modern higher education. This paper explores nine commonly occurring dualisms: collegiality/managerialism, student-centred/ teacher-centred, deep learning/surface learning, academics/non-academics; research/teaching, old universities/new universities, liberal/vocational, public universities/private universities and higher education/further education. Illustrated by reference to a range of international contexts, it is argued that over-reliance on dualisms among higher education scholars has adverse effects including narrowing the possibilities of research design and inhibiting intellectual advancement within the field.

Introduction

Academics lay claim to a nuanced understanding of the complexities of the world based on traditions of rationality and empirical evidence. To be 'rational' is one of the fundamental, underlying values of academic life while the pursuit of truth through research, which is often empirical in nature, is integral to this goal (Barnett, 1990). Yet, despite such lofty aspirations, simplistic dualisms play a significant role in the cognitive assumptions of the academic community. The field of higher education research contains a good number of sacred examples in the sense that they have become received wisdom and acquired the status of taken-for-granted knowledge. These dualisms represent the pillars of the interpretative framework of higher education researchers and are rarely questioned. However, despite their appeal few dualisms survive critical examination. They also have a distorting effect on the design of research and broader understanding of higher education.

Nine dualisms, pervasive in the literature, are selected for analysis in this paper intended to illustrate the field of higher education research including policy and teaching and learning. Examples relate to each of the eight headings used by *Research into Higher Education Abstracts*: national systems and comparative studies (higher education/further education; old/new universities); institutional management (collegiality/ managerialism); curriculum (student-centred/teacher-centred); research (research/teaching), students (deep learning/surface learning; staff (academics/non-academics); finance and physical resources (public universities/private universities); and contributory studies and research approaches (liberal/vocational).

The study of higher education is not unique in its reliance on dualisms. All academic fields contain them: top-down/bottom-up management in management studies; and the distinction between positivism and phenomenology in reference to research methods are just two examples. The dualisms presented here are intended to be illustrative rather than comprehensive but, taken together, have a powerful influence in shaping the research assumptions, modes of analysis and collective thinking of higher education researchers.

Types of dualism

The word dualism is derived from the Latin *duo*, meaning two and is a term widely deployed in the history of theology, philosophy and sociology. Dualisms have several overlapping characteristics and may be split into three types: moral, othering and category. First, dualisms are invariably moral in nature distinguishing right from wrong, just from unjust, or good from evil. Derived from theological roots, *moral dualisms* can be widely found in the representation of life as a contest between the benevolent and the malignant (Lewis, 1996). The causes and conduct of wars are often analysed as either just or unjust (Walzer, 1977) while systems of government are commonly characterised as democratic or undemocratic. Moral dualisms are also symbolically represented in popular culture. In old cowboy films the 'good guys' wear white hats while the 'bad guys' wear black ones while in Robert Louis Stevenson's Victorian novel the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886) the central character has as an identity disorder manifesting itself in a good and an evil personality.

Othering dualisms isolate one group of individuals from another and are closely associated with the sociological analysis of post-colonialism (Mills *et al.*, 2010). Sometimes they are a means to classify mainstream

from alternative concepts, beliefs or practices reinforcing prejudices and helping to reproduce them in the process. Othering dualisms not only oversimplify but often exacerbate existing prejudices and create fear, suspicion and even hatred in the process. The etymology of the word 'heathen', for example, is someone who is not either Christian or Jewish. Hence, it is those that promote and popularise the dualism who have the power to other. This is satirically portrayed in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* where the animals, once in charge of the farm, invent the rallying cry 'four legs good, two legs bad!' (Orwell, 1946).

Some dualisms might be considered more descriptive or classificatory in nature. These are *category dualisms* and originate in philosophical discussions distinguishing two different sets of principles. This is most famously represented by the Cartesian mind-body dualism (Gorham, 1994) or in a religious sense by the expression 'body and soul'. Hence, a category dualism might be either epistemological or metaphysical. There are a number of well known examples of category dualisms such as nature/culture (or 'nurture') in respect to child development, individualism and collectivism in sociological analysis, right-wing and left-wing in reference to political affiliations and the division between universalism and relativism that is often the focus of debate among ethicists and cultural theorists. Yet category dualisms can be readily turned into an othering or moral dualism depending on the language deployed. For example, the secular-religious distinction is a category dualism while Christian or heathen is more emotive and accusatory in its implication of moral disapproval of the latter group.

The foregoing analysis provides an organising framework by which to analyse the nine dualisms identified in relation to higher education studies.

Moral dualisms

Collegiality/managerialism

This is one of the most popular 'good guy, bad guy' moral dualisms in higher education studies and is intended to represent the contrast between academic self-governance and control of university affairs by 'managers'. Collegiality is a word associated with a romanticised past and has the effect of demonising new forms of university management, often referred to as 'new managerialism' (Deem and Brehony, 2005). It rarifies a golden age when academics supposedly made decisions themselves uninhibited by commercial or economic considerations and is used to reinforce the idea that a gulf has opened up between the

managers and the managed or, to deploy Winter's (2009, p. 121) distinction, between 'academic managers' and 'managed academics'.

Despite the surface resonance of this dualism it is in many respects misleading. First, there is an implict assumption that (new) managerialism has displaced more democratic forms of self-governance. While the relative importance and influence of university senates may have declined, the constitution of such bodies was not as representative or democratic as might be presumed. In the pre-managerialist age very few academics below the rank of a full professor had any say whatsoever in university affairs, which were dominated by an almost exclusively male oligarchy of full professors in a British context (Trow, 2010). This means that the claim that new managerialism is more 'hierarchical' than 'soft' management systems based on collegial control is largely misinformed. Writing in an Australian context, Marginson (1997) equated the collegial tradition with a self-selecting academic hierarchy rewarding itself and operating as a kind of British colonial club. This type of characterisation stands in stark contrast to the ideals of democratic self-governance more often ascribed to collegiality. Marginson is not alone in seeking to de-bunk the mythology that surrounds collegiality. Charlesworth (1993, p. 10) likened it to a defensively driven 'collective neurosis' and an avowedly amateurish approach to administration.

The collegiality/managerialism dichotomy also contains the assumption that 'academics' and 'managers' are two distinct groups of people. However, Smith's (2008) study of pro-vice chancellors showed that four fifths hold a professorial title while more than two-fifths of full university professors in the United Kingdom (UK) occupy managerial positions either on a faculty or institutional-wide basis (Macfarlane, 2012). This means that despite the rhetoric about managerialism 'academics continue to lead academics' (Smith, 2008, p. 349).

The collegiality-managerialism dichotomy is essentially a moral dualism. It evokes nostalgia for a lost era when academics, according to legend, were more in control of their own governance and where administrators (rather than managers) were benign figures who responded to the needs of academics rather than sought to exercise tight managerial authority over their day-to-day lives. As a result, tropes about 'managerialism' tend to have a ritualistic function and form part of the routine of complicity by which academics accept a competitive, market-based framework rather than one based on a concept of higher education for the public good (Nixon, 2010). The bargain on which this is based protects academics from many

burdensome administrative demands in return for retaining their independence (Kolsaker, 2008). Managerialism as a term has become little more than a pejorative and, as a result, extreme caution is needed when using this noun.

'Student-centred'/teacher-centred (and deep learning/surface learning)

This twin set of dualisms has emerged from the adult education and higher education literature and is based on the work of several inter-related researchers and scholars who have explored the theory and practice of teaching and learning (Marton and Säljö, 1976; Biggs, 1996; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). This humanist tradition of scholarship emphasises the primacy of developing students as learners and autonomous persons and can be traced back to the work of Dewey (1938) and Rogers (1951).

The phrase 'student-centred teaching' can be directly attributed to Rogers (1951, p. 389) who famously argued that 'we cannot teach another person directly; we can only facilitate his learning'. Student-centred learning means placing students at the centre of the learning process and prioritising their needs as individuals. In a compulsory schooling context it is normally referred to as being 'child-centred'. By contrast, being teacher-centred means the teacher has authority as the expert to communicate a specialist body of knowledge to students in a style in which he or she sees fit. This normally implies use of the lecture method in which the predominant role of the student is to listen while the teacher talks (Hancock *et al.*, 2003; Mascolo, 2009).

Deep and surface learning, derived from the work of Marton and Säljö (1976), is one of the five most influential concepts that inform learning and teaching certificates for university lecturers commonly found in the UK and Australia (Kandlbinder and Peseta, 2009). When students engage in 'deep' learning they develop the ability to analyse, link ideas to other concepts, explain and share meaning in relation to knowledge. By contrast, 'surface' learning involves acquiring knowledge in an uncritical way and with an allied intention to later regurgitate such material in examinations. Hence, according to the literature, the role of the teacher is to encourage students to become deep rather than surface learners.

In a derogatory sense the distinction between deep learning and surface learning seeks to delineate 'good' from 'bad' teaching (Howie and Bagnall, 2013). Student-centred/teacher-centred also implies to return to, and adapt, Orwell's (1946) parody, 'student-centred good, teacher-centred bad'! Like many dichotomies that have become

entrenched in the language of higher education they both convey a moral judgment. Being student-centred implies a sense of caring and responsibility toward the needs of learners while being teacher-centred is a disparaging term for an egocentric performance of the self by the lecturer, combined with a lack of humility and sensitivity towards students.

Here there is a parallel with the use of the phrase 'woman-centred' in midwifery endorsed by the Royal College of Midwives (2001) as its approved philosophy of care. This mantra is intended to convey the notion that care is determined by the user and based on their informed consent. The opposite attitude is sometimes labelled the medicalised or technocratic model of care characterised by over-reliance on technology and medical intervention. The technocratic model represents a lack of respect for the patient while, in parallel, being teacher-centred is a pejorative phrase denoting a failure to value the primacy of the interests and needs of students.

Mascolo (2009) argued that the power of this dualism has effectively weakened the role of the teacher in the learning process. He argued that this has occurred because the importance of students constructing understanding of knowledge *for themselves* is often seen, falsely, as entering this process *by themselves* (Mascolo, 2009, p. 7). Hence, while it is popular to cast the teacher in the role of 'facilitator' or 'coach', students still need authoritative teachers to stimulate and guide them. The censorious nature of the phrase 'teacher-centred' means that it is highly unfashionable to assert such a role.

Another of the adverse effects of the 'student-centred' mantra is that many postgraduate certificates in teaching and learning (or 'learning and teaching' to be more politically correct) contain very limited guidance with respect to teaching methods. Instead, such courses focus on the theory of student learning, the concept of constructive alignment and the importance of teacher reflection (Kandlbinder and Peseta, 2009). While learning theorists understand the need for scaffolding learning and developing shared meaning with students through mediated discussion, the student-centred/teacher-centred and deep/surface dualisms overpower such nuances.

Student-centred learning is now, moreover, a rhetorical boast made by universities; a form of politically correct advocacy akin to organisations over-egging their green credentials. While the literature and the rhetoric of university teaching and learning strategies and quasi-professional organisations such as the UK Higher Education Academy places great emphasis on student-centredness, the reality is rather

different. As Kember (1991) has observed, while a deep approach to student learning is frequently espoused by lecturers, it is more rarely achieved in practice.

Othering dualisms

Academics/non-academics

This is probably one of the most disrespectful of othering dualisms. Yet, despite the liberal image of the academy it still holds considerable sway. One of the problems with othering dualisms in general is that those doing the othering often appear to be blissfully unaware of it, something that has been observed in relation to both sexual and racial dynamics (Apple, 1996). In this instance it is the academics who fail to recognise that there is a problem with the use of the term 'non-academic' because they see the world of the university as revolving around their role. While this dualism is less frequently invoked in a more politically correct age, where the phrase 'non-academic' has been replaced by other expressions such as 'professional support staff' (or simply 'staff' rather than 'faculty' in contexts influenced by the terminology of the North American university), it still has a powerful hold on prevailing assumptions.

The academic/non-academic binary also looks increasingly out-moded given the supposition that an 'academic' is someone who teaches, researches and performs some administrative or managerial tasks. It is not just the term 'non-academic' that is crude in its othering capacity. The term 'academic' needs much more scrutiny too as role specialisation increases. Just 52 per cent of those employed on academic contracts at UK universities both teach and research (HESA, 2011). This statistic undermines the presumption that 'academics' can be understood in such a conventional manner. In contemporary systems, early career tracking has evolved in response to the expansion of the sector and institutional differentiation. This has led to the emergence of para-academics who carry out just one specialist role (Macfarlane, 2011). In Hong Kong, for example, universities have created roles below the level of an assistant professor for junior academics to work predominantly as teachers ('teaching consultant') or researchers ('research assistant professor'). Hence, the reality is that 'academics' have become role specialists who teach *or* research *or* manage rather than performing all three functions.

In researching higher education the disintegrating nature of the academic/non-academic dichotomy means that researchers need to think

more imaginatively in considering research subjects or participants. A further example of this complexity is among part-time or so called 'sessional' academics. They have grown significantly as a proportion of university employees as part of a process of casualisation globally (Altbach *et al.*, 2009) representing anything up to 40 per cent in an Australian context (Coates and Goedegebuure, 2010) although the true figure might be closer to 60 per cent (Bexley *et al.*, 2011). Yet casual and part-time academics are rarely the subject of research and are often excluded, or at least, seriously under-represented in research studies. A similar level of complexity and specialisation occurs amongst full-time academics but researchers rarely look beyond the somewhat out-dated concept of the all-round or 'classic' academic who teaches, researches and performs service duties.

Category dualisms

Research/teaching

This is a category dualism representing what universities and academics purportedly do and also an indicator of relative status. It is constantly invoked and reinforced in the way in which governments fund universities together with the infrastructure of committees, management roles and career paths for academics found within institutions. While this dualism may appear to be entirely descriptive it serves to exclude the fact that universities (and academics) spend a large proportion of their time engaged in administrative and service activities rather than teaching or researching.

Work time distribution patterns at US universities show that academics spend, on average, twice as much time doing activities *other than* research and scholarship. Even at élite private research universities, academics spend more time on administration and service than in conducting research (Snyder and Dillow, 2012, table 265, p. 385) Moreover there is a tendency to present time spent by academics in these kind of activities negatively as 'bureaucracy' or 'form filling', a characterisation that fails to capture the importance and complexity of work supporting academic communities and professional life.

In seeking to overcome the research/teaching dualism, and inspired by the work of Boyer (1990) and others, it is fashionable among scholars of teaching and learning to promote the so called 'teaching-research nexus'. This challenges the embedded separation of teaching and research as entirely discrete activities demonstrating that, in practice, they are intimately intertwined (Brew, 2010). Yet the enduring rhetorical

strength of this dichotomy is undeniable. As with all dualisms it squeezes out a more complex reality representing what universities do and how academics spend their time.

The effect of this dualism can be observed in the construction of questions in attitudinal surveys directed at academics by higher education researchers. It is, as Booth (2012) has commented, deeply embedded in the way academics explain their professional lives. While such research questions tend to focus on teaching and research functions they often exclude service activities or frame such work using a negative lexicon: 'administration' rather than 'service', for example. This means that academics are encouraged to report on their activities when completing time-motion studies or attending committees rather than, say, mentoring colleagues or reviewing papers for publication in an academic journal that are vital features of a healthy academic infrastructure. At an institutional and system level, the research/teaching dichotomy is used as a qualifier in reference to types of professors ('research professors' and 'teaching professors') and institutions ('research universities' and 'teaching universities'). This language conveys a status differential: research universities (and research professors for that matter) are more prestigious than teaching universities (or teaching professors).

Old universities/new universities

This category dualism is frequently leaned on by higher education researchers but is arguably among the most specious. In the UK this division is invariably made with respect to pre-1992 and post-1992 universities (or pre-1988 and post-1988 in Australia) neglecting the rich diversity of insitutional traditions and histories that exists in most national contexts. The rapid expansion of higher education in the developed world during the late twentieth century, and now in developing contexts such as China and India, means that this dualism needs to be used with extreme caution.

What exactly is an 'old' university? Writing in the mid 1990s, Scott (1995, pp. 40–41) pointed out that two-thirds of British universities were established after 1960. Since the publication of Scott's book though, a second significant wave of post-1992 universities have been created. By 2012 considerably more than half of all UK universities had been established since 1992. This makes most UK universities very 'new' indeed. Similarly, classifying a university as 'old' is more of a bureaucratic than a historical distinction with just 16 UK universities founded before the turn of the twentieth century out of a total of 129.

One of the other problems with using this dualism is the allied assumption that 'old' (or 'traditional') universities are more research-focused. This is an assumption historians of higher education know to be entirely fallacious given the role of the medieval university as training establishments for the clergy and later, from the nineteenth century, for the education of lawyers, engineers and government civil servants (Delanty, 2001).

Every university has its own unique history and traditions. This makes crude classification in terms of 'old' or 'new' university, and all this implies, of limited representational value aside from creating a convenient classifier. Most countries have newer and older higher education institutions leading to the adoption of this dichotomy. Moreover, expansion of university systems can rapidly reshape conceptions of old and new in the popular imagination. The Chinese University of Hong Kong (1963) and Simon Fraser University (1965) both have the distinction of being the second universities founded in Hong Kong and in the Canadian province of British Columbia respectively. Each of these institutions used to be regarded as 'new' compared with the first universities founded in these territories: The University of Hong Kong (1911) and The University of British Columbia (1908) respectively. However, the considerable expansion in the number of universities in both Hong Kong and British Columbia in the 1990s and 2000s has rapidly 'aged' perceptions of these 1960s universities. Hence, researchers need to recognise that the language and traditions of an institution are shaped by many factors including their founding intentions, geographical location, system of governance, religious and civic connections, contemporary mission and system expansion.

Liberal/vocational

This category dualism flows, to some extent, from the distinction made between 'old' and 'new' universities. Put simply, it is often presumed that 'old' universities are more likely to possess a curriculum and educational philosophy that is 'liberal', in the sense that it involves the teaching of subjects that are not directly related to the workplace whereas 'new' (or perhaps, newer) universities offer 'vocational' subjects that are directly related to lower status occupations. 'Traditional' university subjects such as anatomy, divinity, Greek, medicine and modern history are associated with ancient institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge, Dublin, Glasgow, St Andrews, Aberdeen and Edinburgh. To this day, the British monarch still approves regius professorships in

these subjects (Hogg, 2007) although regius professorships have been extended to some of the newer UK universities (for example the Open University).

Silver and Brennan (1988) made a critical distinction between direct and indirect vocationalism. While subjects such as engineering or dentistry are examples of the former because they lead directly to occupations, many liberal arts degrees can lead indirectly to a particular career route or occupation. In the UK, one in eight graduates from the performing arts becomes a teaching professional, for example (HECSU, 2010, p. 65). Hence, the 'liberal' can, in practice, be highly 'vocational'.

Many universities were founded to meet what might be termed 'vocational' needs in the sense of being responsive to local and regional commercial and industrial interests. The US Land Grant universities and the British civic universities founded toward the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century are representative of this purpose. The polytechnics, both in the UK and Australia, were a more recent incarnation of this goal in serving the needs of a modern industrial society before 'academic drift' (Pratt and Burgess, 1974, p. 23) put paid to this distinctive mission.

The liberal/vocational dualism is not unique to the study of higher education and its effect can be detected across all phases and forms of education. Its rhetorical strength cannot be underestimated though in informing the assumptions of researchers in, for example, selecting students drawn from a range of degree subjects that, often implicitly, are intended to represent the range from academic to vocational or in trying to understand institutional cultures.

Public universities/private universities

This might appear to be a clear-cut category dualism inasmuch that public universities receive government subsidy whilst private universities need to draw on a combination of charitable and business funding sources. Yet the reality is far more complex and becoming increasingly fuzzy. The reasons for this stem from the changing attitudes of governments to the funding of the public sector of which higher education is a part. There is now a more hands-on approach that demands the application of market-like activity and a private-sector approach to management sometimes termed new public management. Aside from the application of performance measures to ostensibly evaluate efficiency and value for money, public universities have been encouraged to become more business-like in generating funding from private sources leading to philosophical critiques that this is

marginalising the independent, intellectual basis on which it means to 'be' a university (Menand, 2010; Barnett, 2011; Collini, 2012). However, the pressure is two-way. At the same time public funding for university education is being increasingly accessed by private providers as governments seek to create a quasi-market for educational services.

Moreover, worldwide private universities are more numerous than publicly funded institutions and in many countries (for example, Japan) the number of private universities far exceeds those that are publicly funded. Elsewhere, particularly in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and in most of continental Europe public universities predominate. Category dualisms convey subtle messages about status (see the sections on liberal/vocational and old universities/new universities). It is sometimes mistakenly thought that publicly funded institutions are universally more prestigious. Again this is very much dependent on context. In the UK, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand public universities are the most esteemed. Here, institutions such as Oxford, Melbourne, Auckland and Hong Kong University are the ones with the most cudos. Yet in the US, by contrast, the most lauded institutions tend to be private (for example, Harvard, Yale, Stanford) as in some other countries, such as Japan (for example, Keio University).

A further nuance that is often lost in invoking the public/private distinction is that private universities can only be truly understood by reference to whether they are for-profit or not-for-profit/charitable institutions. Not-for-profit private universities tend to be among the most highly regarded and also have a public service remit linked to their charitable status. The University of Phoenix is one of the largest for-profit providers but its status as an academic institution is not comparable to a private not-for-profit such as Harvard. Arguably this makes some top 'private' universities more like 'public' universities if their ethos and commitment to fundamental scientific research and public service is taken into account.

'Higher' and 'further' education

This final dualism goes to the very heart of the question as to what higher education *is*. Too often higher education is equated with universities as an organisational form excluding the reality that much higher education takes place in institutions that are not called or carry the status of a 'university'. These include liberal arts colleges in the US and colleges of further education in England, otherwise known as community colleges in a North American context. Around one in every 12 students registered for a higher education award in England, for example, studies in a

further education institution (Parry *et al.*, 2012, p. 12). This is part of the messy reality worldwide with wide variation in the role of community colleges in degree-level provision. In British Columbia in Canada, a metamorphosis has taken place whereby certain institutions have been transformed over a 20-year period from community colleges into universities (Plant, 2007). Academic drift has also taken place at the subject level. A large number of professional subjects (for example, nursing education) have migrated across the divide between further and higher as part of an ongoing process by which 'higher education' both renews and re-defines itself by reference to emerging areas of knowledge and shifting conceptions of the relative status of disciplinary knowledge. This has also affected the institutional status of specialist agricultural colleges and others that teach culinary arts. Despite the constantly shifting nature of both organisational and cognitive boundaries, research about higher education beyond university contexts is overlooked.

Most fundamentally, this dualism raises a key philosophical question about whether higher education represents something distinctive or 'special' based on the concept of criticism of propositional and professional knowledge forms (Barnett, 1990) or simply a bureaucratic distinction controlled by governments and regularly revised according to political expediency (White, 1997). If universities can be created at the whim of government what is distinctly 'higher' about higher education? Despite the importance of this question, it is one too rarely interrogated by higher education researchers.

The further/higher dualism also pervades the world of 'higher education'. Here, technological and professional education has often suffered by comparison with so-called academic higher education (Wiener, 1980). The nature of this distinction is so powerful that government attempts to rid the world of higher education of this class distinction through the abolition of binary systems through the conversion of polytechnics in England and Australia into universities in the 1980s and 1990s, have largely failed. The evolution of university rankings further undermines so called unitary systems.

The effect of dualisms

What harm, it may be asked, do dualisms really do? At one level they give us a short-hand language by which to explain the social phenomena that surrounds us and they throw into sharp relief debates, such as the purpose of the university and role of the university teacher, that are central to higher education research.

There are insidious effects, however, that flow from a collective over-dependence on dualisms. An example is research design. Here, it is common for higher education researchers to rely on pervasive dualisms such as the distinction between 'old' and 'new' universities when justifying their sampling technique. Obtaining interviews or questionnaire responses, in roughly equal numbers, from students or academics attached to 'old' and 'new' universities is frequently presented as a robust and self-explanatory piece of methodological logic. This not only obscures the complexities of institutional history but also makes the false assumption that individuals have only been educated or spent their careers in either 'old' or 'new' universities, however arbitrarily these might be defined. The results of such work only serve to reinforce this simplified dualism and the assumptions of a binary divide that is, in reality, far more nuanced.

Studies are also excessively influenced by the distinction between research and teaching resulting in questions that tend to exclude the consideration of how academics use their time in a range of service roles or that many, if not most, are causal, part-time or do not have an 'all round' classic role as an academic. The work of Whitchurch (2012) provided a way forward in identifying the 'third space' that has opened up bridging academic and professional support roles. These so called 'blended professionals' are symbolic of the way in which, 'the binary distinction between "academic" and "non-academic" roles and activities is no longer clear-cut' Whitchurch (2012, p. 99). Researchers need to pay heed to the limitations of such outdated frames of reference. The scholar/teacher/researcher model is another way of conceptualising the academic role in a way that is non-dualistic (Booth, 2012).

Researchers further need to be alert to the political agendas that can lie behind dualisms. Sometimes dualisms can travel from the research literature and then onto the political stage. Government and institutional strategies pertaining to the improvement of 'student learning' now frequently invoke dualisms such as quality enhancement/quality assurance and student-centred/teacher-centred. Higher education researchers, especially those with teaching and learning interests, need to be keenly aware of their use of language and how their research may be the object of, rather than an influencer of, policy at local and national level. Dualisms highlight the inadequacy of language that is used routinely by researchers in the field: 'traditional', 'vocational' and 'collegiality' are three examples that demand very cautious framing.

The power of the dualism retards the process of thinking critically about knowledge claims, a shortcoming that threatens the very purpose

of a higher education and research undertaken in this context. This holds back the renewal of intellectual knowledge that is vital to the advancement of higher education studies as a disciplinary field. Dualisms, as concrete expressions of received wisdom, only get in the way of this much-needed process by imprisoning debates within an either/or framework. It means that researchers often rely on the outdated prejudices conveyed by the power of dualisms in approaching their investigations.

In teaching about and researching higher education there is a need to develop a different way of understanding and challenging dualisms. This might draw on the Taoist (and Aristotelian) notion of balance whereby dualisms need to be kept in balance, or complementary, as with yin and yang, for example. In other words, it is possible for two opposites to exist in harmony. Applying this approach to collegiality and managerialism, for example, it would be important to stress that elements of both have always played a role in university administration and decision-making rather than demonising one and eulogising the other. More fundamentally, dualisms often mask continuums. Blurring divides between private and public universities and academic and non-academic staff are evident in more recent years while many of the other dualisms discussed in this paper are timeless examples of counterpointing the sacred (collegiality, student-centred) with the profane (managerialism, teacher-centred). It is not a question of either/or but of a point along a continuum from one extreme to another.

Conclusion

It is understandable why dualisms are well loved. They provide certainty rather than doubt; clarity where fuzziness may otherwise prevail. This is what makes them so appealing. Their simplicity is seductive while their function is similar to a security blanket; in an uncertain world dualisms give people something 'safe' to depend on. Their explanatory appeal paints a picture in black and white rather than shades of grey producing a simple organising framework by which to make sense of complex social and economic phenomena. However, despite their appeal there is a very important intellectual reason to challenge the collective ease with which dualisms become part of the language. Accepting a dualism as an accurate account of reality is simply far too easy. The philosopher Dennett (1991, p. 37) argued that a dualism should be avoided wherever possible and believes that reliance upon them is like 'giving up' intellectually. He explained that it is exactly because a dualism 'rings bells' that we should be suspicious of its easy, yet clichéd logic.

Academic life, especially in its devotion to empirical methods of enquiry, is associated with rationality and detached objectivity. Yet this characterisation is in itself an implicit assertion of the superiority of reason over emotion; yet another dualism. Readiness to succumb to the power of the dualism is easily observable in academic work in higher education and constitutes a collective weakness. The dualisms discussed in this paper cut across the field of higher education studies understood by reference to both policy (for example, collegiality/managerialism) and teaching and learning (for example, student-centred/teacher-centred) research. Dualisms may of course be seen more positively as a kind of linguistic shorthand producing a common frame of reference by which the academic community portrays some of the key debates within their field of study. Yet bifurcation dangerously over-simplifies the world of higher education research. A shared commitment to challenging these common characterisations is needed in order to improve the quality of research design and question received wisdom.

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