Never mind the quality, take a seat!

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Abstract

This paper considers whether lecturers delivering Business Higher Education Programmes (BHEPs) in Further Education Colleges (FECs) in the UK see education to be a production industry, or a knowledge industry. It will consider the effects of managerialism and marketisation that the UK government (and others around the world), are applying to the education sector, and their possible effects. The study considers the narratives of twenty-six lecturers delivering BHEPs in FECs in relation to government intervention, and the impacts it may be having on their role as a lecturer. The research highlights that there may be a great deal of frustration and angst amongst these lecturers, and from this, suggests that colleges may be behaving more like production factories, rather than institutions of further and higher education.

Keywords: HE in FE, HE, Production Operatives, Knowledge Industry, Managerialism.

Introduction

One of the most significant discussions in the United Kingdom (UK) to date, is that of Higher Education (HE) in Further Education (FE); often referred to as HE in FE. This paper draws on the narratives from interviews with lecturers (conducted in 2007), delivering Business Higher Education Programmes (BHEPs), in Further Education Colleges (FECs) in the UK. It highlights how they [the lecturers] make sense (lived or imagined) of their role and working environment. The study goes on to highlight how these lecturers may be displaying high levels of frustration and angst concerning the changes in education policy the UK government was implementing at that time. With the present funding cuts the new coalition government in the UK have announced concerning HE and HE in FE, these fears may be further exacerbated.

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One recognises that FE in the UK has many remits, for example vocational education (modern apprenticeships), 14-19 educational provision, Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), and many more, and it is this breadth of service delivery that makes FE so complex, or as Barnett (2000) writes about HE, super complex. However, the focus for this paper is on the perceptions of those lecturers delivering BHEPs in FECs.

The research suggests that lecturers in their individual institutions/communities of practice perceived that learning and pedagogy were taking second place to funding, and because of this, they professed that their FECs resembled conveyor belts rather than institutions of learning and instruction, in this case, in the sciences of business and management. Management therefore need to be aware of these perceptions and beliefs, as low morale and motivation, along with learning becoming too prescriptive, could have detrimental effects upon lecturers, who may decide that education is no longer the career for them. Subsequently, in the short- long-term this may have an impact on students learning. This is evident when Smith (2007, 42) writes "...the funding methodology prompted the most adept colleges to prioritise the interests of the college over student needs." Fisher (2009, 20) may be in accord when writing:

> Ever since Further Education colleges were removed from local authority control in the early 1990s, they have become subject both to 'market' pressures and to government-imposed targets. They have been at the vanguard of changes that would be rolled out through the rest of the education system and public services – a kind of lab in which neoliberal 'reforms' of education have been trialed [*sic*], and as such, they are the perfect place to begin an analysis of the effects of capitalist realism.

This implies that lecturers in FECs are being used as 'lab rats' and as such the government wittingly deracinates their existing culture to bring about changes in education, which gives

meaning to Tony Blair's mantra of 'what works is all that matters' (Ball 2010). However, Joseph (1998, 87) may argue against Fisher (2009) when writing:

> Starting from a more general point, the practice of science attempts to develop theories or laws of the actual processes and mechanisms that operate in the physical world. This is done through experimentation [*sic*] which seeks to isolate certain mechanisms and analyse the pattern of events.

Here Joseph (1998) is arguing from a capitalist realist view that this experimentation is necessary in order to understand the 'real world', and may help offer a plausible explanation for the events occurring from the experiment in a given social environment (Joseph 1998). That is, the facts and experiences that come to light are socially produced, and therefore can be socially changed (Joseph 1998). However Elliott and Hall (1994, 4) argue that "Government policies which force colleges and schools to adopt quantitative, calculative approaches to resource management...fit uneasily into educational cultures that have traditionally *valued human beings as people* [My emphasis], not assets...".

Successive UK governments over time have made education so prescriptive, in that pupils may no longer need to think for themselves, and thus by removing the autonomy of teachers in schools, colleges and universities, have paved the way to the results the government are now reaping today (Jones 2011; Wolf March 2011). This is not unique to the UK, Gray (2009) highlights in America, that 'twelfth' grade teachers are expected to teach a prescriptive curriculum as outlined by the "...*'No Child Left Behind'* Act 2001." (Gray 2009, 27), and that schools are under considerable pressure to meet standard achievements set by the Act (Gray 2009). Therefore, we are in a target driven economy where position on league tables, or research output, is more important than how knowledge is disseminated throughout education and society (Fisher 2009). Fisher (2009) discusses TINA – 'There Is No Alternative', there is always an alternative, if one is willing to search for it, otherwise we just settle for the status quo.

Methodology

The main study took place between 2002-2009, and this paper presents some of the findings from that study. An interpretivist and ethnographic stance was employed; interpretivist, because I wanted to understand how lecturers made sense of their working 'lifeworld' (Smith 2001), not the natural world per se. Ethnography, because I was based in an FEC for nearly two years delivering BHEPs. Therefore, I was grounded in that culture (Aunger 1995; Glaser and Strauss 1999), and developed an understanding of the tribe/community I was immersed in (Becher and Trowler 2001; Clegg 2008; Nagy and Burch 2009), at that time. Subsequently, the reader needs to be aware of possible bias, however, as Smith (2007, 35) writes:

> I cannot be other than situated within the field of research. For me, that is to acknowledge that all researchers bring position with them. The elimination of those values and attitudes that a researcher brings with them into the field would require an erasure of self.

A semi-structured questionnaire was posted to individual lecturers (n=150), in colleges identified via the HERO website (HERO Ltd 2007) that delivered BHEPs, of which n=92 were returned completed; the survey covered a large geographical area of England. In addition to the questions posed, the questionnaire allowed for the respondents to 'self identify' if they wished to take further part in the study, and if so, to provide contact details; n=52 self identified. Purposive sampling was then used to select n=26 to be interviewed, allowing me to ensure that each category was represented (Robson 2002; Saunders et al. 2007). For example, gender, age, ethnicity, length of service, level of qualification, geographic location (around the Yorkshire and Humber region in the UK), full-time/part-time contracts, and individual role within their employing institution.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, which lasted between 45-60 minutes. These interviews were tape recorded and later fully transcribed to allow content analysis to be undertaken, searching for recurring threads or themes within the narratives.

In regard to the research ethics, the British Education Research Association (BERA 2004) guidelines were complied with in relation to preserving anonymity and the rights of both the individuals, and the institutions where the research was conducted. Permission and informed consent was gained from all parties who took part in the research, prior to the questionnaires being sent, and before the interviews began. To this end, names of people and institutions within this paper have been removed to protect their anonymity.

Discussion

This discussion will offer a brief overview of the concept of HE; as it is HE in FE that is being considered here, and primarily the views of lecturers employed by FECs to deliver HE in FE. However, it is understood that there are clear hierarchical levels between the universities, and other institutions of education. That is, the pre 1992 universities that are seen as research intensive (C&G Media Group 2008). The post 1992 universities [old polytechnics] that are seen more as teaching universities (Feather 2009), and HE in FE as vocational and offering second chances to individuals who may not have done so well in education or, have returned to education through forced unemployment, and/or necessary re-skilling for career changes (Ainley 2000; Smith 2007; Parry 2009). In addition to this, FE is often viewed as the Cinderella service of education (Feather 2009; Simmons 2009, 2010), as such, it could be said there is a degree of professional snobbery within education. This snobbery may be heightened further in the competitive free market economy in education that the UK government is trying to bring about in 2012 (Browne 2010). Feather (2009, 2011) identified that a degree of professional snobbery was already manifesting within certain

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FECs, for example, between those lecturers that delivered HE in FE, and those who only taught on FE programmes, where the lecturers saw the culture as one of 'them and us'. This could have implications, that is, in the breakdown of agency, collegiality, and/or communities of practice (CoPs). For example, Haslam et al. (2011) argue that some people may be seen as 'in group', and others as 'out group', which in itself may be divisive, more so, if one group is deemed to be more favoured by the manager/leader than the other, or inequity is apparent. Feather's (2009, 2011) work highlighted that some managers in some institutions were actively encouraging this practice; this may have additional implications for the motivation and morale of the staff employed at those institutions. Jones (2011) however, suggests that teachers should be professional and put the needs of students' before those of their own. At every institution I visited, this was evident in *all* [my emphasis] cases, the lecturers always put the needs of their students first, but as they stated to me, good will only goes so far, and management were seriously impinging upon this good will.

When reflecting upon the research undertaken, and the narratives of the lecturers who took part in this study, immediately one was confronted with two distinct identities concerning both Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and FECs, that is, are they a 'knowledge industry' or a 'production industry'? From an HE perspective Barnett (2003, 1) writes:

> Higher education is the knowledge industry, although in a special sense. It manufactures not knowledge as such – that is the business of the university's research arm – but knowledge competencies. It produces graduates with abilities to handle knowledge in definitive ways.

It is interesting how Barnett (2003) sees universities from two different perspectives, one as a producer and supplier of knowledge abilities, and the other as the manufacturer of knowledge. Yet, the common perception of the mantle of 'university' is that universities are

both the seekers of truth, knowledge, understanding, and freedom (Truscot 1943; Newman 1996; Quiggin 2001; Barnett 2003), and also guardians of these academic credentials; and that teaching is constantly updated by research and new knowledge (Knights 2006). Further, that the seeking of new knowledge is so important to universities, that in 2005 some universities were poaching entire research teams from other universities (Fazackerley 2005). The view here was to obtain better Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) score, and thus attract more funding. However, some universities also rely on other funding from government bodies such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which for many universities and colleges, are in the process of being reduced, and will be reduced further by 2012 (Browne 2010). It will be evidenced later, that HE has a lot in common with FE regarding the attraction of funding (Simmons 2010), and therefore, what is discussed, and highlighted here, may also apply to HE in FE.

Giroux (2010) in his paper entitled: *'Dumbing Down Teachers: Rethinking the Crisis of Public Education and the Demise of the Social State'* , argues quite venomously, and passionately, about the affect the 'Obama administration' is having on education in the United States (US), with its political war cry of 'Race to the Top' (Giroux 2010). His argument is that the present administration are using management (Managerialism, Corporatisation, and Marketisation) concepts to undermine pedagogy (Giroux 2010). However, this practice is also occurring in other countries such as Australia and the UK (Quiggin 2001; Fanghanel 2007; Nagy and Burch 2009; Simmons 2010; Eacott 2011). Giroux (2010) goes on to write:

> The dire effects of the reform measures will include turning colleges of education [in the US] and alternative routes to certification into gatekeepers for a new kind of pedagogical culture and learning environment in which teachers are dumbed down. (Giroux 2010, 345)

Further, that:

> It [managerialism and marketisation] is an economistic model that has no interest in questions of ethics, ends, and justice; it offers instead a pedagogy in which an emphasis on practice supplements the hard work of learning how to think, standardization replaces creativity, and the deskilling of teachers replaces an emphasis on creating the economic, social, and pedagogical conditions for teachers to combine thinking and implementation, autonomy and creativity, in the service of the public good. (Giroux 2010, 350-351)

These are very powerful and thought provoking comments, especially as signs of this are manifesting here in the UK, with what Quiggin (2001, 10) refers to in Australia as the "...chimerical belief that some combination of market forces and bureaucratic control could produce a cost-effective alternative to the university system in its traditional form." Nevertheless, this has been threatening for some time as Elliott and Hall (1994) was writing about this in relation to FE when they suggested that:

> Thus as FE Inc. becomes a reality, it potentially loses not only many of the characteristics of service institutions...but also the educational values and professional status that informed its activities as an educational provider. (Elliott and Hall 1994, 6)

When discussing this subject with Int.15 in relation to the FEC she worked for, she stated that: "...my understanding is erm that they're wanting us to run everything more like a business all the time…" These two quotes, along with Int.15's comments, fits equally well to the managerialist culture currently experienced in universities. Having said this, I agree with Giroux (2010) that the classroom should be a place without fear or favour, where students' comfort zones are disturbed, and where they can be inspired to become autonomous learners, to be able to use academic underpinning theory to guide them, when the practical does not work. That is, they have their academic knowledge and skills to fall back upon. As Giroux (2010) suggests, knowledge should be meaningful, and that we as academics, lecturers, facilitators, practitioners should "...teach students to be informed and critical of the world around them." (Giroux 2010, 355). Giroux (2010) argues that it is the ability to 'critique', that

the management regime of quantification and prescriptive teaching wishes to remove. The alternative is to replace it [critique] with a teaching methodology, where the students are expected to imbibe and regurgitate the information that is laid before them (Giroux 2010). Barnett (2003) wrote along similar lines, arguing that the UK government is overstepping its interests in, and interfering too much with HE. Barnett (2003) likens HE to currents in a river, arguing that one of these currents is 'impure'. Further, that UK corporations are abusing their interests in HE by seeking to control the freedom of academics to speak openly (Barnett 2003). I would add, as Giroux identifies in the US, UK companies today are expecting universities and colleges to provide 'off the shelve' or 'one size fits all' students who have the practical skills, rather than also having the academic underpinning knowledge, which allows them to reflect, and think critically about a problem that they may be facing. Using Deming's 'Red Bead' theory (Walton 2000) as an example, universities were expected to turn out white beads, those students with academic knowledge. Those who were too practical (the red beads) may have not been required by businesses at that time, as they wished to mould the white bead student in their own image – therefore they wanted malleable, generic students who could evidence that they had the ability to learn. This is evidenced in a discussion forum for the 'Direct Marketing Alliance' group on 'Linkedin' (of which I am a member), where the question posed was whether executives with MBA's and, little or no practical experience, were having a negative effect on businesses. To this question Boettger (2010) a manager for an electronics company in the US replied:

> I have always said and believed that while college and continuing education are noble undertakings, all a degree really shows is that you know how to learn, not that you "learned" anything. The first thing any firm does with a new hire is say, "Forget what you learned in school, this is how we do it here." There is no school better than the school of hard knocks and experience! Many of the best CEOs in American history have nothing more than a high school diploma. (Boettger 2010, 1)

From this quote, one can see that to Boettger (2010) there is no real value in the academic underpinnings of academic theories, and concepts, despite him having a university education. However, because Boettger views learning as '...the way we do things around here', does not mean that his or any other company's way, is the correct way to accomplish that learning. The school of hard knocks in business can be costly. Having said this, it does infer that organisations may still require generic individuals who can prove they can learn, and therefore are we (universities and colleges) the factories of education (Parker 1997), producing these individuals?

Boettger's perception may be aligned to new government policies, not just in the US, but also in the UK, in that the premise is that students need to be more practical, and that there is no room for academic theory. Giroux (2010) echoes this when he writes that the American administration wishes to banish theory and replace it with practical skills. In the UK, we are seeing this manifest in the introduction of 'Academies', which are supported and run (in some instances by corporations/businesses). To this end, are colleges and universities expected to become the manufacturers of 'tins of beans' or 'clones'? This is a frightening proposition; would one as an academic want, or wish to be in a position that Feather (2009, 2010) identifies, where academics are only 'reading to teach' due to their heavy teaching loads and intensive administrative roles? That is, like the students Giroux (2010) describes, do lecturers absorb a chapter of a core text each week, and regurgitate this to the students in the next lesson. According to Feather (2010), this is already happening in some colleges. More so, as FECs are at the mercy of the government and its inspectorates, and are thus market driven (Parry et al. 2006; Fisher 2009; Wolf March 2011). Giroux (2010, 361) writes:

> In the *college Inc* [emphasis in original] documentary, one former recruiter [of students] stated, 'If our numbers started dropping, trainers would come around and start telling you to up your outgoing calls anywhere from 300-450 calls a day to meet these quotas, to get those applications.

This evidences that it is not just UK colleges and universities chasing funding (Parry 2009), (what the participants in this study referred to as 'bums on seats'), especially now that the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has implemented massive cutbacks in funding to HEIs, which may also affect some HE courses within FE. Int.1 echoes the above when stating:

> FE's changing a lot more......you know, erm actually, it's a lot more, erm, actually….erm….teaching...err…without anything else being there, there is no reward, it's being stripped, erm, of status. Benefits are all diminishing,…erm…lecturers are expected to do a far more erm, need to be actually multi-skilled, a lot more administration work, erm a lot more trying to actually erm get people on their courses, with I thought less recognition. ……………..I think the way colleges are going now, it's actually turning to more bums on seats. It's basically, I think, what you've actually got, you've gotta…it very much depends on the type of Principal you've got in charge, and what they actually want to do and I think…you know, that I think that is far more important than anything else. A lot of Principals – their idea is to go and save as much money as possible, make as many redundancies as possible, make as many people work as hard as possible, and feather their nest [as] much as possible, and with little regard......will pay lip service to all the other staff.

This perception paints a very dark picture of the feelings (at the time of the study) some staff were exhibiting towards their particular institution. The 'bums on seats' analogy was a common theme that was used by lecturers when discussing the culture of their institution; another, was one of 'blame' and 'Teflon' management. Smith (2007, 43) appears to support this when writing that the "...student belongs to a faceless cohort of dehumanised 'bums on seats' (a phrase that was used frequently to characterise the industrial approach to education that was sweeping through the sector [of FE]."

From the above, it would appear that Ritzer's (2002) views on the 'McDonaldization of HE', is now showing signs of fruition, where the universities and colleges [colleges far longer than HE institutions] are now in, or been driven towards a 'free market' (Simmons 2010), where universities and colleges will be competing for the same pool of students (Browne 2010).

Deviating a little from the main discussion, but what I see as a major impact on the points made above, is that funding is all important, and therefore institutions appear to do whatever it takes to keep their students happy (or that at least is the public relations view point). To this end, Simmons (2010, 369) writes that lecturers have become producers, and students consumers. Today we are seeing a significant increase in the use of the phrase 'students are consumers' (Ritzer 2002; Barnett 2003; Giroux 2010; Simmons 2010); I do not align myself with this phraseology, as students do not consume in the literal sense, in reality they are supposed to absorb what they read, and read wider than the core text. However, they do not eat books in order to accomplish this task. Students are investing in their future, if they are not willing, or capable to undertake and carry out the tasks set for them (that is, read in order to gain the sufficient depth of knowledge needed in any given subject to pass that subject well), then they should not be awarded with the degree. The problem appears to be that we now live and work in a society where people demand something in return for their money, and quite right, in the commercial sector; but education does not fall neatly within this remit of corporatisation (Elliott and Hall 1994). Therefore, as we are discussing consumerism, we must consider hedonism or edutainment as Ritzer (2002) calls it, where the student expects to be entertained whilst at the same time educated, I will use a 'gym' as an example. If a person pays their money to be a member of the gym, they are not by default guaranteed to get fit. *They* [my emphasis] have to put in the time, and large amounts of effort in using the available resources at their disposal, in order to accomplish this goal. The same could be said of education, if a student is granted a place, and they pay their money, and then do not bother to do the reading, or attend classes, or submit work, or that work is not of a good enough standard to pass, do we pass them and let them walk away with their degree? No. But as Fisher (2009) identifies, colleges do not fail students, because they would lose funding.

Today we are seeing more cases where lecturers and/or institutions appear to be blamed for the student's lack of ownership and responsibility for their own learning, time management, and/or for failing the course. Fox (2002, 130) takes this a stage further when writing that students are "...the masters who must be flattered and cajoled by humble lecturers who are warned that student's will take their custom to other educational institutions if they are not satisfied with the marks they receive or the way they are taught." This may become reality, as Browne (2010) outlined in his report, that the money [funding] now follows the student, and that "Choice is in the hands of the student." (Browne 2010, 2). This comes down to the belief that the customer is King/Queen, but as I have already argued, students are not consumers/customers they are members of an academic community, where one wishes to develop one's knowledge and skills.

Returning to the main discussion, the question I pose here, taking what has been discussed so far is, are universities becoming hybrids/chimeras testing the government educational experiment further (Fisher 2009), and turning into what I have termed 'Pontiversities'? This is a combination of 'Pontins' holiday camps [no longer in business], in the UK, where the focus/priority was about keeping customers happy and entertained (somewhat akin to Ritzer's (2002) 'cathedrals of consumption'). The expectation here is that the institution may receive a good result in the National Student Survey and UK league tables; the secondary element is that of learning. Ironically, this is the opposite side of the spectrum, where, in universities 'pontificating' was the norm, where universities may be seen as been officious, giving a lecture or a speech. From this, one could argue that universities, and indeed HE in FE colleges, appear to be moving from a culture of 'Academia' to one of 'Arcadia'.

Ball (2010, 49) argues, "Performativity is a culture or a system of 'terror'. It is a regime of accountability that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control, attrition and change." Ball (2010) identifies how managerialism was the mantra of Tony Blair and New Labour, and that Blair's philosophy was 'what works is all that matters'; Obama's is 'race to the top' (Giroux 2010). Eacott (2011, 47) echoes Ball (2010), adding that performativity is now taught to, and embedded in the leader's sole. Therefore, it appears HE in FE and HE has moved more towards hegemony, rather than egalitarianism, whilst at the same time showing an inimical view towards teachers values and beliefs on education (Smith 2007). However, what Peters and Waterman (2004) identified in the 80s was that in markets with high competition, what worked (using Tony Blair's mantra), was to differentiate yourself from your competition, and therefore one needed to identify their core product, and then to focus their attention on polishing this core product until it shines brighter than your competitors. That is, excellent education and resources for both staff and students. This is what education should be focusing on, not if we can put a tick in a box to evidence we have undertaken a certain task, that is, whether we have held staff/student panel meetings, or if the students received feedback in a set period – proceduralism. We should be focusing on what Giroux (2010) identified, that of, disturbing their [students'] comfort zone, engaging them [students], getting them [students] motivated to take responsibility for their own actions and some of their own learning. This is good in theory, but has Quiggin (2001, 20) writing from an Australian perspective reminds us:

> ...managerialism and neoliberalism are as one in their rejection of notions of professionalism and the idea of autonomous academic disciplines. Both managerialists and neoliberals reject as special pleading the idea that there is any fundamental difference between higher education and say, the manufacturing and marketing of soft drinks.

From a manager's (Senior management in FE) perspective Fisher's (2009) thoughts, from a capitalist realist perspective, may be apparent, in that, " ...capitalism subsumes and consumes

all of previous history...which can assign all cultural objects...a monetary value." (Fisher 2009, 4). The problem we have here is that this may not work, as not all lecturers in FE apply monetary value to the service they provide students, and this for me, is where capitalist realism falls down. For example, personal professionalism (Jones 2011), and goodwill exhibited by those lecturers interviewed for this study. Therefore, the values of the lecturers are out of kilter with those of management. Smith (2007) may argue that capitalism (for FECs in the UK), was down to the incorporation of FE colleges, and that they had to adopt managerialism because of the 'Further and Higher Education Act of 1992', and the "...funding methodology initiated by the legislation" (Smith 2007, 34). He further argues that central government in the UK were beginning to place constraints on funding, and as such wished to see a definite increase in productivity (Smith 2007). This then fits with Quiggin's (2001) quote above, and Feather's (2011) work on the culture within FECs, where lecturers may be seen as production operatives, and students as the tins of beans. In addition, Quiggin (2001) and Jones (2011) raises the notion of professionalism, this is important, but too large an area for this paper to cover. Parker (1997) may agree with Quiggin (2001), when suggesting that we are all operatives in the factory of education, this issue of production operatives was also highlighted by Taylor (1999, 1) when reciting a friends comments on his new job at a university:

> Given the duties of developing materials for Logan has come at pretty short notice, and on top of our normal workload, there has been very little time to develop this sort of perspective. I suppose the main change is that I have lost any illusions I might have had about being part of a community of scholars, and I now see myself – or I think the university sees me – simply as a production or office worker in a large hierarchical organization. (Also quoted in Feather 2009, 31).

This compliments what has been discussed above, and is further supported by Poynter's (2002) views that successive UK governments have used funding as the means to reduce the independence of the academic profession, and to instead focus more on vocational or work

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related delivery of courses. When one reads the Wolf (March 2011) report, it can be seen that the UK government is placing a lot of emphasis on vocational qualifications, and apprenticeships within the 14-19 age group. From reading the Wolf (2010) report, and comparing it with the work of Giroux (2010), it appears that the UK government and the US government have similar mindsets when it comes to education. That is, to introduce an education system that mainly involves practical hands on experience and training to meet employers' needs, that is devoid of underpinning academic theory, as discussed above.

When discussing funding and managerialism, Int. 8 commented:

I think we're moving, certainly more towards err, targets...It's often been talked about that in terms of funding there'll be more funding given to achievement than there will, to what we call, on programme. But we've seen what happens when you fund achievement, unscrupulous trainers will have the certificates ready in their draw to give out to anybody who wants to come along...never mind the quality, feel the width.

This certainly conjures up the image of a conveyor belt, especially if people have the means to pay for it. This then raises doubt about widening participation, in that the present government could eventually withdraw funding (although Browne, 2010, indicates in his report that funding will be made available to those individuals with low incomes), may be opening up education to where it is only accessible to those who can afford to pay for it. Additionally, when Int. 8 uses the phrase 'unscrupulous trainers', one could argue that quality of delivery may come into question. That is, would these trainers have the required teaching credentials called for today by various professional bodies and the government, and also the academic authenticity to stand in front of students and deliver courses at a level that will stretch them, or as Giroux (2010) writes, disturb them, so that they [the student] have to think for themselves. However, Int. 8 offers a reality check when saying: "...err.........I think the way in which FE is treated...we are nothing more than manufacturers of tins of beans...we are pushing out bits of paper, you know people with qualifications." (Feather 2009, 186; 2010,

197). It is interesting when Browne (2010, 2) writes " A degree is of benefit both to the holder, through higher levels of social contribution and higher lifetime earnings, and to the nation, through higher economic growth rate and the improved health of society." Where does Browne (2010) say that degrees, like Giroux (2010) argues, are to give students the knowledge and skills to reflect and think critically about problems they may be encountering both in the world of work, and in life. Browne (2010, 2) goes on to say, "The interests of students will be protected by minimum levels of quality enforced through regulation." If we take this in a literal sense, one could infer that it fits with Int. 8's views above about funding, and having certificates ready to handout to those who pay, and as such, Giroux's (2010) notion of dumbing down the teacher appears to have some credence. Lecturers interviewed for this study, discussed how they perceived pupils coming out of school were conditioned to expect handouts, and subsequently becoming unused to seeking information for them self. Int. 11's comments appear to be in accord with this view. He believed that HE in FE was like a conveyor belt, but this belt started in schools:

> ...they're coming off a conveyor belt already from GCSEs (General Certificate in Secondary Education), that again, this, this is pressure put on schools to perform, and to measure performance, you've got to get the GCSEs, and erm......fed the information, they regurgitate it, and, and then they come here with no thinking skills; well very few.

On this same subject matter, Int. 7 commented along similar lines to those of Int. 11; she argued quite passionately that:

> [Leans forward when speaking] ...the curriculum is so prescriptive, I don't have to think. I'm told what I'm going to teach, I'm told how we're going to teach it, I'm told how I'm going to assess it. And while I agree with transparency of assessment, the assessment criteria is so prescriptive, the students don't even have to think for themselves anymore...providing they do each one of the steps that are laid down...they're going to get a good mark. It's a conveyor belt, they come in at one end, and they go out at the other, and because of funding, you don't fail them [slaps her hand on the desk]; they just keep retaking it.

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Both these interviewees raise concerns over the students' capacity to think, which, given what has been discussed earlier, is one of the key elements of university study, that is, the ability to acquire knowledge and think critically. Yet the root of the problem may be that teachers in schools are also being restricted in their abilities and skills to teach, and thus having to follow instructions on how best to deliver their lessons, and what content needs to be delivered. Lucas and Nasta (2010) touch upon this when they write:

> In the case of teachers, this trend of downward regulation has spanned decades of Conservative and New Labour government since 1979 seeking to render teachers increasingly subservient to the state and its agencies. (Lucas and Nasta 2010, 448)

This same trend is prevalent in some FECs. For example, Int. 18 comments on how both the "...government and employers are expecting students to be passed..." This again fits with Fisher's (2009) views above, that students in FE may not be failed due to the targets set by government for the number of students to pass certain qualifications. Int. 18 comments that her institution is somewhat like a conveyor belt, that she feels guilty, mainly because of the lack of time, resources she has at her disposal, and that the policies of the FEC dictate that they do process students. She states in a very hushed voice that: "...it becomes...you almost end up writing the stuff for them...you refer work, and you think miss this, this, and this...you almost end up seeing your own words in some notes."

Twenty-two (82.64%) interviewees identified with the term 'production operative', they acknowledged that this was a given at their individual institutions, especially due to the fact that their timetables were heavily frontloaded, where some of them had class contact time in the region of thirty hours per week (Feather 2010).

Int. 9 added to the above when he commented on how students are just seen as pound signs. With an air of humour, but not able to hide the passion and anger on the view point of production lines, said:

> They come in, we get them through, and then they're gone [laughs], we wash our hands of them, NEXT! [Shouts this word, and looks over my shoulder, waving his hand as if gesturing for the next set of students to step forward].

From these various statements, it can be seen that some FECs, if not most, have been driven by, and become focused on obtaining funding, and that this practice is not only common to the UK, but also apparent in other countries. Int. 22 commented that her institution is driven by funding, and that she had never worked for an institution where so many of her colleagues were off sick [with stress] (Feather 2010). This may be evidence of the stress that individual institutions, in trying to comply with government demands, are placing on their teaching staff.

The government should stop, and practice what they ask of schools, colleges and universities, teachers and academics, that is, '*Reflect*' [my emphasis] on whether they should, rather than if they could, use various managerialist concepts to govern education. The decisions that government make can have enormous effects, not just on universities and colleges, but the businesses and communities that have built themselves around these institutions. Just because it works (to take up Blair's mantra from Giroux, 2010), does not necessarily mean that it is fit for purpose. Sometimes, to move forward, one needs to look backwards, that is, see where the successes have been in the past, and benchmark those. Jones (2011) highlights how we were once a great nation, and that today our universities, and I would add, our FECs) are amongst some of the best in the world. What is needed is for management to sit with its frontline staff and ask them what they think will work. This is a management concept, which has been proven to work, as it is the frontline staff who come

into daily contact with the student, and who listens to their stories and ideas about what they need and want. Perhaps, then, some of this could be weaved into the fabric of education to aid students and staff in developing an engaging learning environment works.

Conclusion

This paper has offered an overview of literature, which has considered whether FECs and HEIs are in danger of becoming a production industry, churning out students with key skills that the government and employers demand. Or, whether they should be a knowledge industry (which is where many of the older universities have their roots, see Truscott, 1943), and turn out students with in-depth knowledge in their chosen subject areas, and have the abilities and skills not only to undertake research, digest, and analyse the information, but to apply these skills in the commercial sector. Further, that they do this with a critical eye, not just looking inwards, but considering the bigger picture as well, and as such, may offer real benefits to both employers, government, and the societies they are emerged in.

The paper as shown that FE has been the testing ground for many of the government initiatives, which have now been rolled out into schools and universities (Joseph 1998). The research has also shown that of those lecturers that took part in this study, there was a real anger and frustration at these managerialist control mechanisms imposed upon them, and that these mechanisms and controls were having an impact upon their own identity (see the works of Elliott and Hall, 1994; Feather, 2010), and their professionalism (Poynter, 2002). That these measures were becoming intrusive; Int. 20 commented that if she ever lost the autonomy she had in the classroom, that this would be time for her to move out of education. Others indicated that they were suffering with high amounts of stress and anxiety. However, as evidenced in this paper, from considering other authors' views, managerialist concepts are being applied to education, especially in schools, where the work is so prescriptive that

teachers may no longer have to think for themselves. One of the interviewees highlighted that this was already happening at her FEC. Feather (2009) and Robbins (2010), both suggest that colleges may be fragmented, that is, trying to comply with, and introduce policies laid down by the UK government into their current working practices. But as Elliott and Hall (1994) identifies, this does not fit hand in glove with the culture of FE.

Int. 23 suggested that funding is either 'keyotic' or 'chaotic' to education, both at FE, and HE level; it would appear that it is both. That is, key to survival, but chaotic in that the government is not providing information on how exactly HE, HE in FE, and FE are going be funded come 2012, and subsequently, how this new funding regime will affect education and students per se.

The paper has also identified that lecturers may be fearful of upsetting students, especially as from 2012 the funding follows the student to their chosen institution (Browne, 2010). Ritzer (2002) discusses cathedrals of consumption, Poynter (2002) highlights how students are the masters and that lecturers now appear to have to dance to whatever tune the student plays.

I have put forward the term of Pontiversity for discussion, where universities are now more interested in performativity, and keeping students, (what they now call customers), happy in order to obtain good results from the National Student Survey, and thus where they [the university] place in the performance league tables. Ball (2010) has identified that performativity is a system or culture of terror, and that institutions should back away from this and look at other avenues. Perhaps management should consider the motivation and needs of its staff. Managers may also be leaders, and should look not only at the operational side, but at the softer issues I have identified, needs, wants, resources, time (Haslam et al. 2011). Managers need to be part of the community (the in group) and represent and support

their staff in all matters that effects their working environment and continuous professional development (Haslam et al. 2011). Especially as lecturers are 'front facing', that is, those who engage and facilitate the students learning and thus are the most crucial element to an institution's success. A lecturer who is passionate about their subject, and allowed the flexibility and resources to explore, and debate (rather than draw up lesson plans to show what they are doing, or tick boxes to say they have accomplished this task, or been on that training course), is important to the student experience. Subsequently, from this, the students themselves should become passionate, a lecturer who is not given this freedom or the resources to do a professional job, will not exude passion, but may instead focus on exit strategies, thus having a detrimental effect on students, and possibly the institution.

From the above, the conclusion drawn here, is that education today, and in particular HE in FE is seen more as a factory, churning out students with bits of paper, which may not only devalue the degree qualification, but the professional identity of the lecturers/teachers working in the colleges, and universities. This is a clear message to the government and the management of the various institutions that their workforce are no longer motivated and/or happy, as they are experiencing high levels of angst over their identity, and their knowledge. That is, they wish to deliver lessons that are engaging, and that they can draw upon their own depth of knowledge, and not just regurgitate from a textbook. According to Giroux (2010) in the US, this is what the Obama administration want for their students. Students do not expect to pay vast sums of money to have text regurgitated to them, they want people who are knowledgeable in the subjects they have elected to learn and possibly even specialise. Let us not measure so much (although I do accept an element of this is needed to assess what is being delivered is being understood), but focus more on engaging with our students through having the autonomy to debate and explore, create learning experiences, rather than just

deliver from textbooks. Education is about learning, applying, expanding, and advancing knowledge, not what one of Feather's (2010) interviewees stated, that of 'reading to teach'. Therefore, it should be about the quality of service, and not bums on seats.

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