Quality Education and the Marketplace:
An Exploration of Neoliberalism and its Impact on Higher Education

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Abstract
This paper is an attempt to open discussion about the impact of globalization and theories of neoliberalism on higher education. More specifically, viewing higher education institutions as a market place, where the more a product costs, the greater supply and quality of the product should be received; the quality of education received by university students should also reflect this. Considering the conflict between teaching and research in higher education, quality of education becomes questionable. This paper explores issues of neoliberalism resulting in a greater demand for the completion of research in higher education institutions. Furthermore, the imperialism of higher education leading towards the demand for more research, the teaching versus research nexus within universities, and discussion of how these theories impact international students will be examined throughout this paper.

Introduction
It is widely recognized that there are competing and conflicting competencies within higher education institutions. Acknowledging the gap between those who want to teach and those who want to complete research, the quality of education being taught can therefore be questioned (Pocklington and Tupper, 2002). Furthermore, as it becomes increasingly more difficult to enter university, academically speaking, so does it financially (Little 1997; McMullen 2004; Frenette 2005). Liberalist perspectives focus on economy and the marketplace and having an understanding of the “dynamics of marketization as it operates within capitalism is therefore key to understanding the changes taking place in education and their effects” (Raduntz 2005, 238). Scholte (2005) explains that a “[liberalist] approach is generally taken by people who are interested in maximizing human progress through the pursuit of currently dominant models of ‘development’, with an emphasis on economic growth and liberal democracy” (124).

Neoliberalist theories and practices are defined by Bourdieu (1998) as being a program fully able to annihilate any configuration attempting to oppose the logic of the ‘pure market’. This statement is one that I am forced to ponder as I continue to read literature and formulate my own theories and practices within an educational context.

There is a divide between those who view the primary role of the university as a teaching institution and those who perceive the university as a primary place to complete research. This pedagogical divide brings into question the quality of education students receive (Pocklington and Tupper 2002). Specifically, what is the impact on students if within the institution, teaching is a part of a faculty member’s workload, but research is their primary focus? Higher education

1 Although this research primarily focuses on the university, by higher education institutions I may also refer to colleges and other post-secondary education institutions.
2 My practices as an educator in higher education are constantly in flux between teaching and research.
3 Workload is variable amongst universities, so for the purposes of this paper I define workload as 40% teaching, 40% research, and 20% service.
originated with the intent to teach, thus an exploration of how research came to be such a powerful skill and tool within higher education is necessary. Perkin (1984) suggests the role of the university must be contextualized in order to determine what it should be in terms of research, teaching, service to the community, and knowledge production.

In this paper I argue that as a consumer-supplier relationship exists within the marketplace; higher education being the market in this milieu, then as the price continues to rise, so too should the quality of education accessible. Therefore, by taking a neoliberalist approach whereby the more a product costs, the better quality the product should be; the more education costs students, the better quality education should be received by students. I am prompted to question the validity of this theory, cognizant that teaching versus research conflicts within higher education institutions exist.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between the teaching versus research tension and neoliberalism and the marketplace. I draw upon Noble (2002) who addresses the marketization of education. Noble (2002) questions the “…departure from the promise of affordable quality education for everyone who wants it, within a communal and collaborative setting dedicated to the free exchange of ideas to understanding the world, and to transmitting and thinking critically about the received wisdom of participants’ cultures” (xii). The focus will be on theories of neoliberalism and the marketplace and their impact on higher education; the imperialism of higher education leading to the conflict between teaching and research; and lastly, how these theories can impact international students in higher education.

**Theoretical Framework**

As a university instructor and teaching assistant in higher education, I bring forth the perspective that teaching is an essential part of higher education in that I am part of the teaching and learning process of future generations. I have no control over tuition fees; however, I do have the ability to create lesson plans to reflect curriculum. I believe that it is my job, and furthermore my responsibility, to ensure that students receive the best quality education of which I am capable. As someone who is pursuing a career in higher education, I am forced to reflect upon Pocklington and Tupper (2002) who state “…all university professors must be teachers and researchers, and good research is essential to good teaching” (6). Furthermore, I am made aware of the challenges the lie ahead of me, and all faculties, to publish and achieve promotion and tenure.

Bringing forth this lens, I use a constructivist approach as my theoretical framework. Scholte (2005) explains this perspective more clearly. “…constructivism concentrates on the ways that social actors ‘construct’ their world: both within their own minds and through intersubjective communication with others” (131). Furthermore, a constructivist framework observes how this communication can produce widespread “…understandings of reality, shared norms for social behaviour, and notions of group identity and solidarity. Conversation and symbolic exchanges lead people to construct ideas of the world, rules for social interaction, and ways of being and belonging in that world” (Scholte 2005, 131). Viewing institutions of higher education as a marketplace where the cost of tuition is high, quality education should be received by all students.

When considering methodology underpinning this framework it becomes an intricate and challenging task to implement. “Methodology refers to the manners in which knowledge is

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4 In this context I use methodology to refer to more than just a science of completing research. I also take up this term within my role teaching my students and aspiring professional within the pre-service program.
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built: that is, the ways that questions are asked; and the principles and procedures of inquiry that are now used to answer the questions posed” (Scholte 2005, 269). Furthermore, “Methodology involves issues both of general approach to knowledge construction and of specific research tools” (269). In considering this methodology within an educational environment, it is possible to envision this methodology as a shift to becoming more critical and analytical, which purposes can be two-fold: students can be taught more holistically and with learning becoming deeper and more meaningful; and for the ability to write and produce better and more research.

Through this framework, I would assert that a quality education can be received by students, with a focus on teaching students to be reflective, critical, and analytical through communication, social interaction, and conversations. How this can be implemented into curriculum, is at the hand of the professor, instructor, and teaching assistant.

Neoliberalism and the Marketplace

It is widely recognized that there is no one or true definition of globalization and many contradicting theories surrounding concerning issues. Raduntz (2005) recognizes that globalization:

…has come to express the phenomenon of the capitalist market economy’s expansion worldwide and its penetration into almost all aspects of social life. The momentum and the changes as a result have caused advocates of neoliberal globalism to interpret globalization in terms of a fundamentally new age in human progress (233).

Concurrently, research recognizes that “globalization has two complementary dynamics: economic globalization through a neoliberal development model that emphasizes the market and a technological revolution that has increased the ubiquity and speed of production and information technologies” (Stromquist 2002, 6). It must then be acknowledged that neoliberalist tendencies reach far beyond the borders of a consumer-supplier relationship, to that of technological advancement. However, considering the scope of this paper, more emphasis will be placed on the market and neoliberalist theories and practices regarding education.

A neoliberalist ideology supports notions of “individualism, consumerism, competition, and minimal governmental interference, which, it is claimed, will induce self-reliance, initiative, and creativity, attributes a marketized education system would promote” (Raduntz 2005, 234). Furthermore, neoliberalism contends that the greater the cost of a product, the greater the value and quality of the product should be consumed. Raduntz (2005) offers an abstract definition where “…market exchange is conceived as a transaction in which buyers and sellers enter freely into a relationship for the purpose of exchanging useful objects of equal value” (238). More poignantly stated by Olssen et al (2004) “The market ensures rapid response to changes in the allocation of resources and, in turn, the production of goods is responsive to the market demands” (140). Placing this concept within a higher education context serves to broaden the understanding of higher education institutions as a marketplace. Olssen et al (2004) identify the market as “…the central and guiding mechanism which all commercial and interpersonal transactions should be conducted…Such transactions are based on price mechanisms which are seen to contribute to the social order (because they provide a value derived from demand and supply)” (140). This concept applies to a consumer-supplier relationship in that students paying to attend higher institutions are also consumers. Raduntz (2005) suggests that “…globalization and the marketization of education are both interrelated contemporary outcomes of capitalism’s expansionary tendencies, driven by the need to maintain economic growth based on the

5 (Bourdieu 1998; Stromquist 2002; Olssen, Codd and O’Neill 2004; Scholte, 2005)
accumulation and expansion of private capital wealth” (232). This perspective offers little hope to students entering higher education to receive a quality education. While acknowledging “...the capitalist form of the market exchange in its mediating role cannot deal with quality education nor with social, ethical, or equity concerns” (Raduntz 2005, 242), it is my hope as an educator in higher education that students can be taught and receive a better quality education in spite of the capital exchange.

The expectation of students entering and attending university is that students will be taught by knowledgeable professors, so that they may continue in higher education with the desire of achieving a degree. Raduntz (2005) states that “…in the marketization process educators have been marginalized in favour of trainers and business managers” (242). With a deeper understanding that professors may be employed by higher education institutions for their abilities to conduct comprehensive research and not necessarily their abilities to teach, or train, gives new light to the fact that students pay thousands of dollars annually to be taught and receive degrees. This becomes a moot point as many university students are taught by teaching assistants, instructors and sessional instructors (Pocklington and Tupper 2002). This is not to suggest that these particular educators are unqualified or incapable, it goes to support the argument that higher education students are not receiving the quality of education that they have paid for as they are not even being taught by those who are considered specialists and experts within their field.

**Imperialism of Higher Education**

I venture that the teaching versus research nexus between faculties and professors exist from an imperial following of higher education institutions and government, in the struggle to be considered comprehensive. McCulloch (1997) articulates that “the nature of the historical images of schooling has changed. Dominant imagery of education as being ‘safe, domesticated, and progressive’ (that is, as leading towards progress and social/personal improvement) has shifted to become ‘threatening, estranged, and regressive’” (80). The imperialism of this higher education trend can be witnessed on a global level. Altbach (2006) highlights that academe around the globe is greatly affected, and affected differently by these trends. Furthermore that “All the contemporary pressures on higher education, from massification to the growth of the private sector, are characterized as resulting from globalization” (121).

Historically, the status of a university was not solely accredited by the students and professors in attendance. Geiger (2000) observes that engaging in research granted prestige and influential status. The completion of research was becoming an inherent part of higher learning. The belief in the rationality of science had developed specific criterion in selecting what constituted, and furthermore what did not constitute as valid knowledge (Weiler 2001). A system was formulated within the institution in order to monitor publications and research funding. This was in opposition to the early foundations of the university where knowledge and learning was to seek what was already known. The idea that knowledge was something to be ‘produced’ (Welier 2001; Noble 2002; Pocklington and Tupper 2002) was becoming influential and thus helped to promote the movement of research in universities.

The notion of research spread, from Germany to Britain and was modified to suit the needs of those who used it. Tapper and Salter (2003) in examining the pursuit of scholarship and research, contend that historically research was most strongly embedded in German and

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6 This statement serves to disrupt the taken-for-granted knowledges of those attending institutions of higher education in that those teaching within higher education, more often than not, have not received teacher training.
American models of higher education. The German model was also used by reformers like the Oxford and Cambridge administrators of the 1850s to promote a strong professoriate. Their purpose was to support a strong university as a balance to the divisive colleges (Perkin 1984). The British system of higher education, although partially adopting the German model, did not fully acclimatize to the notion of a holistic research-oriented program. Teaching was still valued as an important component of the university within the British model of higher education. Woodside (1958) details that British systems of higher education were in strong opposition to the introduction of organized research and graduate schools into their institutions, on the basis that it would upset teaching. A university could not be a place disseminating knowledge without a teaching component.

The emergence of research can be traced from Germany to Britain and then to the United States. American scholars travelling and studying in Western Europe were adopted in the research-oriented ideal before introducing it to North America. “Aspiring Americans who visited Germany and returned with the phrase ‘scientific research’ on their lips compounded this phrase from elements of German theory and practice which had very different contexts in their habitat” (Vesey 1970, 127). Similar to Britain and Japan, the Americans synthesized what they saw and modified it to fit the needs of American society. Vesey (1970) states that the German notion of ‘pure learning’ became what the Americans referred to as ‘pure science’. This notion had also assumed methodological implications which the German model had often lacked. Thus the notion of scientific research and inquiry became the basis for research in American institutions. The German model was greatly respected by the Americans; however could not be further from the state-controlled and well financed university in Germany than higher education in the United States in the nineteenth century (Perkin 1984). Perkin (1984) furthermore, notes that Americans even down to the interwar period had self-doubts about their higher education when comparing it to the European and German systems in particular.

More specifically, Canadian universities must maintain status for research, publications and government funding. They have been swayed by “…practices and philosophy of higher education in England, Germany, Scotland, and the United States. They have also been shaped by changing democratic ideals, by the imperatives off an expanding economy, and by the forces of bureaucracy and urbanization” (Pocklington and Tupper 2002, 19). Whether this is purely a result marketization of higher education institutions remains questionable, however, its relationship to this process certainly cannot be denied. Furthermore, the effects of globalization on the imperialism of higher education become even more evident. What is interesting is that Canadian universities were shaped by the beliefs of Oxford and Cambridge, which in the nineteenth century did not view research as a university priority. However, Canadian universities were also shaped by American institutions that were charged with doing practical research (Apple 2001; Pocklington and Tupper 2002). Thus with Canada’s physical proximity to the United States, many of their ideals were adopted.

As research became more important to universities on a global level, so too became the quality of research conducted by faculty and students which led to an increase in enrolment. As the need for higher education continued to grow:

…government-funded expansion of education began to occupy a sizeable slice of national budgets, which substantially raised education’s potential exchange value if education systems were to be marketized along the lines of private enterprise. However, the marketization of education was not seriously implemented at national levels until the late 1960s… (Raduntz 2005, 237).
Furthermore, “The conditions favouring the marketization of education have their genesis in the current era…” (Raduntz 2005, 236). The latter part of the 20th century has witnessed a major transformation of the “prevailing order of knowledge production” (Weiler 2001, 25). Weiler states that:

Both the criteria by which we judge the validity and adequacy of knowledge (the philosophical or epistemological construction of knowledge) and the structural arrangements under which knowledge is being produced (the social and institutional construction of knowledge) have been and continue to be profoundly challenged in our time (25).

This trend which has travelled from England, Germany, the United States and finally to Canada, has made such an impact that it has remained current to this day. Money and university status come from research and government funding. Teaching does not appear to fit into this equation.

Teaching and Research in Higher Education

The role and responsibilities of academics remains questionable. Professors “…are mostly called upon to transmit the received wisdom’ and tend to acquire a vested interest in mainstream interpretations of a given reality” (Appelbaum and Robinson 2005, xiv). However, research is the up and coming phenomenon in higher education and furthermore, what helps to secure promotion and tenure. Pocklington and Tupper (2002) state that “University research, a broad and complex phenomenon, is now said to be the university’s lifeblood, it’s strength, and the basis of its prestige” (79). Where does teaching fit in to this equation? Scholte (2005) writes that “With regard to methodology, the spread of globality has helped to promote new fields of study, new approaches to education, new literacies, and new kinds of scientific evidence” (257). This scientific evidence is aiding in promoting universities, helping them make the link to being comprehensive, and assuring government funding. Furthermore, universities are beginning to house independent research centres that have no link to teaching (Pocklington and Tupper 2002; Olssen et al 2004). I, therefore, question how higher education students are being taught and how they are learning.

The effects of globalization are massive in terms of their impact on higher education. “In the past two decades, globalization has come to be seen as a central force for both society and higher education. Some have argued that globalization, broadly defined as largely inevitable global economic and technological factors affecting every nation, will liberate higher education and foster needed change” (Altbach 2006, 121). I postulate that with this liberation there will be a shift from the rigid belief that higher education is for publication opportunities, to a focus on students and the production and creation of knowledge. Stromquist (2002) declares that “Globalization takes educational systems out of the state of monopoly and into the marketplace. It reorders fields of study according to the needs of the market, increasingly substituting those needs for the traditional search for truth” (15). Moreover that:

While much of the globalization discourse refers to the ‘market’, in reality the market takes on concrete forms as business firms on the supply side and diffuse clients on the demand side. And although the discipline of economics makes a stark distinction between who sells and who buys, often those who sell also shape the mentality of those who buy” (10).

This statement can be used to represent the student body as those who are consumers of higher education. “Academic and professional requirements for graduates increasingly reflect the demands of the globalization of societies, economy and labour markets and thus higher education must provide an adequate preparation for that” (Zha 2003, 248). Olssen et al (2004) interestingly
highlight that education as a private good is seen to be a “tradable commodity in the marketplace for money and status, and hence is seen as used for the advancement of the individual where returns accrue to that individual” (148). These returns are also accrued by higher institutions. Research within itself is a business that brings forth bursaries, government funding, and grants to universities, thus increasing the status of a higher education institution.

The ‘production of knowledge’ has become revolutionary in that the massification of universities and higher education seemingly promote the ideal that because they complete research and receive governmental grants and funding, that this then equates to quality education, and that education is a separate entity from politics and policy. Weiler (2001) states:

A final aspect of the contemporary political economy of knowledge production has to do with the growing commercialization of knowledge in the modern world…This has something to do with the increasing cost of knowledge production and, hence, the dependence of knowledge producers on external financial sponsorship…the support and the production of nature of modern economic activity has become so massively dependent on the up-to-date knowledge constantly increasing scope and complexity that the linkage between knowledge and both productivity and profitability has become inescapable (36).

What becomes clear through this statement is that the ‘production of knowledge’ and the ‘dependence’ upon up-to-date knowledge is only beneficial to the completion of research that of which is meant to bring in more government funding and thus increase the commercialization of the institution itself.

What must be acknowledged moreover is the pressure and competition to research and publish by faculty. The more one publishes the more money and funding one brings to the institution itself. “The level of specialization in research and the size of the investments that are indispensable to certain fields of research and development require collaborative efforts and intensive international cooperation” (Zha 2003, 248). More specifically, the more specialized and publicly acclaimed, the more focus and attention are dedicated to the institution and to the researchers themselves. This is critical to securing promotion and tenure within universities and thus, more incentive to focus on research and publication as opposed to teaching.

…it is the evaluation of scholars, students, research proposals, manuscripts, and publications that determines the principal rewards of academic life; peer recognition, institutional standing and influence, research grants and, most importantly publication…the institution reality of evaluating the quality of scholarship has tended to become a force of retardation and hindrance in the quest for new and better forms of knowledge production (Weiler 2001, 42).

It becomes a question of job security and how it can be achieved is through publication and the building of curriculum vitae. However, with this supposed ‘quest for better forms of knowledge production’, I maintain that knowledge dissemination (teaching) should be a starting block.  

International Students in Higher Education

The marketplace of higher education has extended beyond the borders of North America. It is estimated that the average full-time international student spends $10, 000 to $15, 000 per annum on tuition alone (Holyroyd 2006). This being the case, according to theories of marketization, international students should be receiving a higher quality education than their peers as they expend almost twice as much in tuition. This section will briefly explore international students in higher education, trans-border education, and moreover, the notion of internationalization.
Research is a key aspect of an academic’s workload. “Given the centrality of the knowledge economy to 21st century development, higher education has assumed a higher profile both within countries and internationally because of its roles in educating people for the new economy and in creating new knowledge” (Altbach 2006, 122). Knight (1993) poses a very interesting argument in relation to faculty workload and internationalization. He depicts the internationalization of higher education as “the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution” (21). Scholte (2005) concurs that “A great deal of globality is manifested through communications, that is, exchanges of ideas, information, images, signals, sounds and text” (67). What becomes apparent through these statements is the accessibility of information and furthermore, with this integration of international/intercultural dimensions, the quality of the information being collected is richer and in-depth. This quality of information is what should be taught and passed onto students of higher education, not just for the sole purposes of conducting more research.

It is acknowledged that globalization is continuously growing. “It obligates us to consider institutions that operate beyond national borders…” (Stromquist 2002, 5). “Not since the medieval period have such a large proportion of the world’s students been studying outside their home countries – more than 1.5 million students at any one time” (Altbach 2006, 128). What is extremely interesting to note “…school boards, colleges and universities, strapped for cash and often experiencing strong enrolment pressures, realized that many international students were willing to pay the full cost of their education” (Holyroyd 2006, 2). Furthermore, “As the number of Canadian students at the elementary, secondary and university levels is expected to decline sharply in several provinces over the next few years, universities and school boards are realizing the economic importance of recruiting more international students” (Holyroyd 2006, 1). In preparation of this decline, higher education institutions must market themselves appealingly in hopes of attracting international students. Interestingly, “Most international students pay for their own studies, producing significant income for the host countries…” (Altbach 2006, 128). The notion that education, particularly higher education, is an economic marketplace where students invest their capital in hopes of receiving quality education is reinforced.

Discussion and Conclusion

Much change has been witnessed over the last century regarding higher education. From an era that focussed on teaching to one that views university as a marketplace and a growing economic opportunity, there has been much debate on whether or not university students are being educated or becoming mere agents of research studies and grants. Apple (2001) advises: “In a time of radical social and educational change, it is crucial to document the processes and effects of the various and sometimes contradictory elements of what might best be called ‘conservative modernization and of the ways in which they are mediated, compromised with, accepted, used in different ways by different groups for their own purposes, and/or struggled over in the policies and practices of people’s daily educational lives (411).”

Globalization has had a large impact on how and what is mandated in university curriculum, and even how it is delivered by university educators and professors. Stromquist (2002) suggests that globalization should search for an understanding of “…the forces that produce the dynamics and interrelated effects of globalization, and then assess its outcomes not merely on economic productivity and the accumulation of wealth but especially on social outcomes, specifically, who benefits and who does not” (1). I remain questioning if students in higher education are
benefiting from their university experiences, and not just aiding in the ‘economic productivity’ of a university.

What cannot be denied is the consumer-supplier relationship that has become an inevitability of attending a higher education institution. “As a private good, education is seen to be a tradable commodity in the marketplace for money and status, and hence is seen as used for the advancement of the individual where returns accrue to that individual” (Olssen et al 2004, 148). In order for this statement to be true, students in higher education would be receiving the quality of education that they are paying for. What are they accruing besides being ‘producers of knowledge’ they are being trained to be by professional researchers who are labelled ‘higher education professors’? As Altbach (2006) declares:

The powerful universities and academic systems – the centres – have always dominated the production and distribution of knowledge. Smaller and weaker institutions and systems with fewer resources and often lower academic standards – the peripheries – have tended to be dependant on them. Academic centres provide leadership in science and scholarship and in research and teaching. They are the leaders with regard to organizational structure and mission of universities, and in knowledge dissemination (124).

If funding is available to a student wanting to attend higher education, the quality of education from these universities should also be available. However, I find it interesting, that it is these universities that are also the leaders in the completion of research and government funding. I question how students are receiving quality education for their dollars when teaching is secondary to research.

It is much easier to criticize and analyze than it is to come up with reasonable answers in attempt to create solutions to these issues. “We are told by neo-liberals that only by turning our schools, teachers, and children over to the competitive market will we find a solution. We are told by neo-conservatives that the only way out is to return to ‘real knowledge’” (Apple 2001, 409). In reflecting upon the current educational conundrum, I find myself asking more questions and finding fewer answers. Altbach (2006) states that:

We are now in a new era of power and influence. Politics and ideology have taken a subordinate role to profits and market-driven policies. Now, multinational corporations, media conglomerates, and even a few leading universities can be as seen as the new neocolonists – seeking to dominate not for ideological or political reasons but rather for commercial gain (126).

More than anything else, those in higher education need to take a critical look at the current status of the quality of education being delivered. Aside from the high cost of tuition fees, with the globe at our finger tips, students deserve the best quality of education possible so that they can take on the next level of globalization and see to it that this process evolves in a positive, yet very powerful way. Although research is a crucial element, for many reasons, to higher education, it must not continue to be the main objective. Education can no longer be viewed as a market place; instead it should be one of higher learning.
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References


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