

## OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

### **Student as Producer: The Struggle for the Idea of the University**

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I get my “idea of the university” from the University of Berlin, the first modern European University, founded in 1810. The significance of the University of Berlin is that it established the university as a site for the production of knowledge and meaning, for research more than teaching, although learning remained an important component of academic life. This was something different from John Henry Newman’s formulation. In Newman’s “Idea of the University” (1873/2015) the University is for teaching canonical work: the book, with its roots in the dogmatic theological concept of wisdom. “If the university is about research,” he asked “then why have students?” (1873/2015, p. 1). My idea of the university is about the connection between research and teaching and collaboration and cooperation between teachers and students.

The University of Berlin was about more than teaching and research. It was conceived by its founders, Prussian idealist philosophers: Wilhelm von Humboldt, Georg Hegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Johann Fichte, as a political philosophical project. As a philosophy it favoured the speculative university, an idealist concept to reconcile the contradiction between knowledge for its own sake and training professional citizens to administer the

Kingdom of Prussia. This reconciliation would manifest itself as general social knowledge at the level of society, as a social encyclopedia (Lyotard, 2005/1984, pp. 31-37). As a political project it was to propagate the principles of liberal humanism: individual freedom and universal peace (Kellner & Lewis, n.d.) This political philosophy provided the liberal justification, as a global standard, for murder, genocide, empire, and war (Seymour, 2012). From out of the ruins of this catastrophic 20th century history came Social Democracy as state-centric worker-welfarism, which was only ever the avoidance of communism (Binns & Dixon 1988; Pannekoek, 1919). Liberal humanism is now being restored as “necro-neoliberalism” where all forms of human-natural life are reduced to the brutal logic and violence of money-capital and the market (Haiven, 2011): a form of living death that passes for life in capitalist institutions, including the university.

At its core the University of Berlin contained a radical idea: higher education as the collaboration between academics and students for the production of knowledge and meaning, against the dogmatism and scholasticism of the medieval university. Is it possible to maintain that radical idea, based not on a political idealist philosophy

but grounded in the materialised history of radical social movements, class struggle and insurgent learning? Academics and students collaborating as forms of intellectual labour in the production of anti-positivist critical practical knowledge against capitalist science (Gunn, 1997; Harney & Moten, 2013; Winn, 2015).

In my own work with others, I have developed this practice of connecting research and teaching under the slogan “Student as Producer” (Neary & Winn, 2009). During the time when I was the Dean of Teaching and Learning at the University of Lincoln, 2007-2014, Student as Producer was adopted as the organising principle for teaching and learning and research across all subject areas at all levels of undergraduate and Masters study. Student as Producer at the University of Lincoln does not start from an affirmation of the capitalist university but focused on what has become the dysfunctionality of the core activities of higher education: research and teaching (Brew, 2006). Student as Producer challenges and invites academics to consider ways in which this negative arrangement might be re-engineered through their teaching practices as part of a democratic and collective production of knowledge; and not just as a teaching and learning technique, but as a way of making the future: part of a dissensual culture in which everybody has something to learn (Readings, 1997).

The slogan Student as Producer is an adaptation of Walter Benjamin’s “The Author as Producer” (1934/1998). In this paper Benjamin asked how do radical intellectuals act in a moment of crisis. Benjamin was writing during the rise of Hitler and the Nazification of Europe after the failure of the Spartacus revolt in 1919.

Benjamin argues that radical intellectuals do not just produce intellectual objects, nor can they be identified by their commitment to a radical principle, but work to transform the social relations of capitalist production for communism. We might define communism, after Zapatismo, as a new form of social wealth based not on the morality of work and the demoralisation of non-workers, but everything for everyone and nothing for ourselves (Callahan, n.d.).

There is nothing unique about undergraduate students doing research in collaboration with other students and academics. The difference at Lincoln is we made it the organising principle for the whole university, with the capacity to transform all aspects of institutional life: decision-making, classroom design and assessment in a renewed form of collegiality (Brew, 2006). As you might imagine this has been a complex and messy, contradictory and conflictual process with lots of support and some opposition from teachers and students, as well as senior managers. This has been set out in a series of reports, articles and academic publications (Neary, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, Neary et al 2015; Neary & Hagyard, 2012; Neary & Saunders, 2016; Neary & Winn, 2015).

Student as Producer gained national and international recognition as a model of good practice by the HEA and the QAA and was taken up in adapted forms by other universities and FE colleges (Neary et al, 2015). As the necro-neoliberalisation of higher education continues, Student as Producer has been recuperated as various forms of student engagement and student as change-agent and students as partners,

# student as producer

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## MANIFESTO

- **STUDENT AS PRODUCER RESTATES THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION BY RECONNECTING THE CORE ACTIVITIES OF UNIVERSITIES, I.E., RESEARCH AND TEACHING, IN A WAY THAT CONSOLIDATES AND SUBSTITUTES THE VALUES OF ACADEMIC LIFE**
- **THE CORE VALUES OF ACADEMIC LIFE ARE REFLECTED IN THE QUALITY OF STUDENTS THAT THE UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN AIMS TO PRODUCE**
- **STUDENT AS PRODUCER EMPHASISES THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT AS COLLABORATOR IN THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE**
- **THE CAPACITY FOR STUDENT AS PRODUCER IS GROUNDED IN THE HUMAN ATTRIBUTES OF CREATIVITY AND DESIRE, SO THAT STUDENTS CAN RECOGNISE THEMSELVES IN A WORLD OF THEIR OWN DESIGN**

### WHAT IS STUDENT AS PRODUCER?

Student as producer is a development of the University of Lincoln's Teaching and Learning strategy, previously based on the principle of *research-informed* teaching, to an approach grounded in the notion of *research-engaged* teaching. Research-engaged teaching involves more research and research-like activities at the core of the undergraduate curriculum. Student as Producer will make research-engaged teaching an institutional priority across all faculties and subject areas. In this way students become part of the academic project of the University and collaborators with academics in the production of knowledge and meaning. Research-engaged teaching is grounded in the intellectual history and tradition of the modern University.

### WHO IS STUDENT AS PRODUCER?

The focus of Student as Producer is the undergraduate student, working in collaboration with other students and academics. Undergraduate students will work alongside staff in the design and delivery of their teaching and learning programmes, and in the production of work of academic content and value. Students will be supported by student services and professional staff so they can take greater responsibility not only for their own teaching and learning, but for the way in which they manage the experience of being a student at the University of Lincoln.

### WHERE IS STUDENT AS PRODUCER?

Student as Producer is now the organising principle for the learning landscapes at the University of Lincoln. At the core of learning landscapes lies an awareness of the importance of space and spatiality to promote the social dimensions of teaching and learning. The most compelling pedagogic spaces in higher education are those that seek to connect research and teaching. Based at the University of Lincoln the Student as Producer project involves other universities from across the sector.

### WHEN IS STUDENT AS PRODUCER?

Student as Producer will be introduced across the University over the next three to five years. This will be done by formally acknowledging pedagogic practices that are already imbued with the spirit of Student as Producer, by a teacher education programme to enable staff to engage with the principles and practices of Student as Producer, and through the University's normal quality and validation procedures. This work will be supported with funding from the Higher Education Academy from 2010 to 2015.

For further information see: [studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk](http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk)



denying the subversive intent out of which it originated (Neary & Saunders, 2016), all underpinned by the model of student as consumer and the pedagogy of debt (Williams, 2006).

Our response has been to move outside the university in 2011 to establish a new form of social institution: the Social Science Centre (SSC), Lincoln, UK, while remaining at work inside the university. The Social Science Centre, Lincoln is a co-operative for higher learning run by students and academics (“scholars”), practicing critical pedagogy and popular education. The SSC currently has about forty members. There is no fee, members pay a subscription based on what they can afford as well as a payments in kind. The Centre “occupies the city” (Neary, 2014) making use of down-town public facilities: libraries, community centres, cafes, pubs and parks. Scholars (students) can gain an award at the level of HE validated by members of the co-operative and associate members who act as external peer-reviewers. The Centre teaches courses in Social Science Imagination, Do it Ourselves Higher Education, the history of the cooperative movement, as well as social documentary photography and poetry (<http://socialsciencecentre.org.uk/>). The SSC has no formal connection with any institute of higher education.

In the last year we have been consolidating the model through an Independent Social Research Foundation funded research project: “Beyond Private and Public: Making a Co-operative University” (Neary & Winn, 2015). In our model the state and the market are not seen as antithetical: State-public-good, Market-private-bad. Rather, we recognise that both the state and the market are complementary

forms of capitalist regulation. The problem is not just how financial sustainability might be achieved, for example, by drawing on a member’s levy from the global cooperative movement, or even increased state funded support; but, more fundamentally, how to create vital, viable and vibrant life enhancing forms of social value.

There are three ways in which we as workers and trade unionists can do this now (Winn, 2015):

Conversion: convert an existing university into a co-operative, either through a planned “executive” decision or out of necessity, as in a worker takeover of a failing institution. In the UK, this route would seek to maintain any remaining public sources of funding and the “university” title. There are many examples from around the world where failed enterprises have been taken over by self-managing workers (Ozarow & Croucher, 2014).

Dissolution: Create a co-operative university from inside-out, through the gradual increase of co-operative practices, such as co-operatively run research groups and departments; programmes of study in aspects of co-operation, social history and political economy; the conversion of student residences into housing co-ops; changes to procurement practices that favour co-operatives, and so on. Through this route, the university might eventually become a “co-op of co-ops.” Student as Producer has been an inside-out project “in and against” the capitalist university. There are an increasing number of student housing co-ops in Europe, North America and the UK.

Creation: Create a new co-operative form of higher education. This is the least

compromising most ambitious and unashamedly utopian, drawing inspiration from the actually existing worker and social solidarity co-ops around the world. This is the model on which the Social Science Centre, Lincoln is based.

Student as Producer and the Co-operative University are not the future, but they are a moment on the way to the future, building on lessons learned from the history of workers' educational movement (Rose, 2010). They seek to ask and answer the question what does the future look like now in an ever repeating present where the now and what comes after it are only ever chaos and catastrophe. What Student as Producer and the Co-operative University offer is the possibility of democratically owned worker-student forms of association saturated with social value: everything for everyone and nothing for ourselves, not as a matter of choice or even as an alternative, but as an urgent critical-practical necessity. We might call this new institution for higher learning the University of Utopia (<http://www.universityofutopia.org/>).

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