

Annotated Bibliography: Contemporary Social Issues

Proposal

The goal of this project will be to critically examine the role of academia in the modern world, particularly in light of increasing globalization, the democratization of information, and the proliferation of trade and technical programs. Whereas in previous generations, higher education played a key role in obtaining the type of white collar work that generally sustained middle-class societies, a proliferation of trade and technical programs, combined with the increased costs and lower returns associated with a college degree, academic institutions now find themselves subject to the often competing pressures to both prepare students with the skills necessary for future jobs, while simultaneously imparting students with a broad, liberal education. The role of these institutions is particularly important in a society where higher-education is heralded as a tool of economic and social mobility. These institutions also serve the critical role of conducting fundamental research, which serves many long-term civic and societal needs, and results in intricate ties between the education system, legislation, and political policy making. Finally, the education system also fulfills a very humanitarian need, to teach new generations about both the great accomplishments and great mistakes of the past, paving the way for a society that incrementally improves generation by generation.

Bibliography

- Acedo, Clementina, et al. *Quality and qualities: tensions in education reforms*. Sense, 2012.
 - This series of papers lays out some of the groundwork of what constitutes "quality" in education, which will serve as an important baseline against which comparisons can be made. It also discusses certain cases of education reform, using case studies from Argentina, Venezuela, and Malaysia. It also discusses the interplay between education and education policy, particularly reforms and national standards, and their relative successes/failures in these cases. One portion addresses the modern trend of measuring and quantifying educational institutions (in the form of various ranking systems, for example) and whether or not this ties to and/or reflects actual indicators of educational quality. It also provides valuable background context on who the educational "shareholders" are, in a time when many research institutions are primarily supported by either taxpayer funding or private donations, and how their motivations and pressures shape things like education reform, legislation, and its evolution over time. Another key issue it addresses are the many seemingly conflicting goals and standards that these institutions are held to, as well as certain inequalities in access and reach that can create barriers and have large effects on social stratification in the surrounding societies. Many of these analyses are informed by publications by UN agencies and UNESCO, and thus provide a window into the current state of international efforts toward improving education.
- Altbach, Philip G. *The international imperative in higher education*. Sense Publishers, 2014.

- This source discusses the transitional period that higher education currently finds itself in, and explores the relations between universities and state/national governments, and lends an international viewpoint by discussing the state of education in China and India. It discusses many pertinent issues relevant to both students and educators, including the effects of new technologies, the structures of university employee systems, the use of rankings, and the issues surrounding the transfer of human knowledge. In particular, it discusses the effects of globalization, which has thrown educational institutions into a transitional period, and examines how this has effected their relationships with governmental bodies. This focused particularly on post-secondary education, but addresses things from an international/global perspective in order to compare and contrast the state of various systems. It addresses such issues as the use of English as the predominant language in academics, the types of systematic inequalities that occur, the impact of private ownership and commercialism, the difficulties faced by international exchanges, the pitfalls of academic career and salary structures, and the overuse of rankings. It also addresses the advent of "open access" through technological advances, and the politics of "academic freedom", as well as several Asian perspectives, in terms of both domestic education and international exchange.
- Kariwo, Michael, et al. *Comparative analysis of higher education systems: issues, challenges and dilemmas*. Sense, 2014.
 - This source offers a wider perspective on the challenges facing education, expanding the narrative beyond Europe and the United States to include Africa, Latin America, Russia, Asia, and more. It particularly highlights the "balancing act" that modern universities are expected to maintain in order to meet various competing needs from communities, governments or state actors, and the world at large. A particularly insightful viewpoint that it offers is a discussion of how markets have become increasingly "knowledge-based" over time, leaving a void for many skilled workers that the education system is expected to fill and alleviate. It also broaches several salient topics, such as problematic artifacts of an overpopulated system, such as diversity "quotas", as well as issues of access and quality related to relative privilege. There are case studies from a wide variety of countries, including Canada, Russia, Mexico, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Korea, and Ghana. It addresses issues such as selective admissions, particularly with respect to minority groups and university diversity quotas, as well as issues in accountability, increases in size and decentralization and its effect on efficiency, and the overall quality and relevance of education to students and society. One portion addresses the pressure on universities to add "value" to the degrees they confer, often with the addition of more technical or applied programs, and whether or not this is problematic and clashes with other overarching outcomes that society expects from universities. Finally, it addresses the issue of greater increases in student populations with relatively smaller increases in faculty, leading to a "massification" of higher education that may have problematic consequences.