

The Price of Knowledge in the Times of Commodification of Higher Education: A Case Study on the Changing Face of Education

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Abstract : Current developments in the Western economies have turned some universities into corporate institutions driven by practices of production and commodity. Academia is increasingly becoming integrated into national economies as a result of students paying fees and is consequently using business practices in student retention and engagement. With these changes, pedagogy status as a priority within the institution has been changing in light of these new demands. New strategies have blurred the boundaries that separate a student from a client. This led to a change of the dynamic, disrupting the traditional idea of the knowledge market, and emphasizing the corporate aspect of universities. In some cases, where students are seen primarily as a customer, the purpose of academia is no longer to educate but sell a commodity and retain fee-paying students. This paper considers opposing viewpoints on the commodification of higher education, reflecting on the reality of maintaining a pedagogic grounding in an increasingly commercialized sector. By analysing a case study of the Student Success Festival, an event that involved academic and marketing teams, the differences are considered between the respective visions of the pedagogic arm of the university and the corporate. This study argues that the initial concept of the event, based on the principles of gamification, independent learning, and cognitive criticality, was more clearly linked to a grounded pedagogic approach. However, when liaising with the marketing team in a crucial step in the creative process, it became apparent that these principles were not considered a priority in terms of their remit. While the study acknowledges in the power of pedagogy, the findings show that a pact of concord is necessary between different stakeholders in order for students to benefit fully from their learning experience. Nevertheless, while issues of power prevail and whenever power is unevenly distributed, reaching a consensus becomes increasingly challenging and further research should closely monitor the developments in pedagogy in the UK higher education.

Keywords : economic pressure, commodification, pedagogy, gamification, public service, marketization

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