Student involvement in university decision-making:
Good reasons, a new lens

Thierry M. Luescher-Mamashela

Post-doctoral Research Fellow, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, Faculty of Education
University of the Western Cape, Private Bag X17, Bellville - Cape Town, 7530, South Africa
thierryluescher@hotmail.com; tluescher@uwc.ac.za
January 2011

Abstract

This paper proposes a framework for understanding student involvement in different domains of university decision-making based on the various reasons brought for and against student involvement. It briefly outlines the historical origins of student participation in university governance with specific reference to student activism and the experience of university democratisation of the 1960s and early 1970s. By means of a review of scholarship, the paper then discusses various reasons for and against student involvement in university decision-making debated in academic literature: with respect to students' political power as an organised group and stakeholders in the university; with reference to students' role and position as users and consumers (as against notions of community membership); in relation to democratic principles and the purposes of higher education in society; and on the grounds of the potential positive consequences of involving students in university decision-making. Finally the different reasons for student involvement in university governance and related conceptions of student are modelled against different domains of university decision-making as a way of providing a new lens for understanding (and changing) the involvement of students in university decision-making. The paper concludes by illustrating the application of the framework and its transferability to other educational contexts.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to develop a framework for understanding and justifying differences in the involvement of students in university decision-making. Firstly, it provides a brief introduction into the historical origins of student involvement in university governance with specific reference to student activism and the experience of university democratisation of the 1960s and early 1970s. The paper then provides an integrative review and discussion of scholarly literature on student involvement in university decision-making, with a specific focus on the various reasons for and against student involvement in university decision-making. It shows that the different arguments can be ordered in terms of different notions of student, whereby students can variably be conceived as stakeholders or members of the community, users and consumers of higher education, experts or apprentices, minors or citizens, and so forth. The paper argues that the different notions of student and related claims regarding student involvement do not have to be treated as mutually exclusive; rather they provide a complex lens for understanding (and changing) the nature and extent of student involvement in different domains of university governance. Thus, for instance, the notions of user and stakeholder apply more readily to matters of student affairs, while claims around student expertise gain prominence in academic governance. The paper illustrates how the different reasons for student involvement in university decision-making can be modelled against different domains of university governance, thus providing a new lens for understanding and justifying the involvement of students in university decision-making.

An outline of the history and changes of student involvement

Different models of the place of students in university governance can be traced historically to the birth of universities in 13th century Europe (Verger 1992, Perkin 2006). The university established in Paris came to be known as a 'university of masters', where the guild of professing teachers shared control over the university with a student rector, who was usually a young master elected by the students. The Bologna University, in contrast, represented the rival model of a 'student university' where students organised in a federation of student guilds (constituted by subject and nations), were in control of the organisation of their studies (Perkin 2006). As Perkin (2006: 165) argues, student control over the University of Bologna was almost complete:

> The power acquired by students, although falling short of control over the curriculum, was
> used to impose the most draconian discipline upon their teachers. The student rector and
> proctors determined the doctors' fees, levied fines on them for starting or finishing their
> lectures late, not keeping up with the syllabus, leaving the city without permission or without
> giving sureties for their return, and forced them to deposit large caution moneys from which
> to deduct the fines.

Towards the end of the 13th century so-called 'doctors' colleges' appeared also in the Bologna University, even though the dominance of students and marginalisation of professors continued in institutional terms (Verger 1992: 49-50). Over the centuries, however, the southern European model of the student university established first in Bologna and eventually in other Italian cities gradually converged with the Parisian model (Perkin 2006: 165). Thus, the pre-modern experience of the student university gradually faded into distant memory. By the mid-20th century, students did not play a prominent role in university governance in most countries.[1]

The current provisions for student involvement in university decision-making have their origins in the wave of university democratisation that swept across universities in the industrialised countries of North America, Western Europe, and parts of the British Commonwealth in the 1960s and early 1970s. According to Luescher-Mamashela (2010: 260), 'university democratisation can be defined as a reconstitution of internal decision-making in universities with reference to democratic principles, *inter alia*, by making decision-making processes in universities more representative of internal constituencies such as students'. University democratisation had significant and diverse outcomes conditioned by the demands of students and the responses of governments in different national systems of higher education and the institutional leaderships of affected universities. Thus, in the US and UK higher education systems, formal student involvement in university decision-making became an established feature of university governance, not only in student affairs governance but also with respect to certain aspects of governing teaching and learning as well as institution-wide strategy and planning. Typically, this was achieved by extending the membership of existing committees and governing bodies to students (see, for example, Moodie and Eustace 1974). Moreover, in the USA, students' right to participate in university decision-making was enshrined in a pact between national student organisations and

organisations of university faculty and student development officers. After years of negotiation, the *Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students* was endorsed in 1968 by ten major associations in US higher education. The *Joint Statement* outlines the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of students in higher education including students' right to participate in institutional governance (Bryan and Mullendore 1992).

Conversely, the continental European experience of the post-1960s transformation of university governance was considerably more dramatic. According to de Boer and Stensaker (2007: 104),

> For example, in Germany the *Ordinarienuniversität*, governed by professors and the state, was transformed into the *Gruppenuniversität*, governed by representatives of the various university constituencies. In the period 1968-1976 new laws on university governance passed national parliaments, for example, in Belgium (1971), Denmark (1970), France (1968), Germany (1969-1973 and 1976), the Netherlands (1970), and Norway (1976). In the first half of the 1970s the University as a representative democracy was born and spread all over Western Europe.

Mason (1978) provides a contemporaneous analysis of the new 'triparital' model of university governance in German and Dutch universities that emerged in the course of the 1970s. In the *Ordinarienuniversität,* as it were, the professorial chair had been the definitive seat of authority within the university and students and the non-professorial and junior academic staff (termed the academic *Mittelbau),* were largely excluded from participation in university decision-making (albeit the university lacked institutional autonomy from the state in very basic respects). By contrast the governance system of 'triparity' of the *Gruppenuniversität* that was introduced in the wake of the student rebellions meant that three major internal constituencies, i.e. the professoriate, non-professorial academics, and students, came to be represented in equal numbers in most institutional decision-making bodies. Thus, not only did students move from a politically marginalised grouping to being recognised as a main constituency in university governance, but in the process, the nature of the university itself was transformed.

The European model of triparital governance in its original conception lasted for little more than two decades. De Boer and Stensaker attribute its demise in the latter parts of the 1980s and early 1990s to

both exogenous and endogenous factors. Among the exogenous factors noted by de Boer and Stensaker (2007: 105-108) were 'the fiscal crisis (since the late 1970s), internationalisation and globalisation, and the dominance of neo-liberal ideologies, including strong preferences for market-oriented values and behaviour'. Endogenous factors related to the 'perceived shortcomings of the democratic university itself' and included the excessive politicisation of the academic environment, the weakening of academic control of teaching and learning to the detriment of academic standards. In subsequent decades incremental changes in university governance gradually compounded this 'weakening of "workplace" democracy within the University' and thus contributed to the emergence of more 'managerial-run universities' also in continental Europe (de Boer and Stensaker 2007: 108).

The perceived rise of managerialism in higher education has sparked the greatest academic interest and most fruitful debates on matters of university governance since the experience of the university democratisation. Luescher-Mamashela (2010: 261) defines managerialism as 'a set of beliefs or an ideology that legitimises the authority of university executives as professional managers; it involves, and is typically described in terms of, the application of leadership styles and management approaches developed in the business world to the academic context of university governance'. The rise of managerialism was described first with respect to US higher education in the 1970s (Epstein 1974). Similar observations were made with respect to changes in university governance in the UK in the 1980s, in Commonwealth universities and South Africa, and eventually in Continental Europe and Latin American universities (1990s and early 2000s) (Trow 1994, Amaral et al 2003, Cloete et al 2006).

While the involvement of students in university decision-making was the key issue in the scholarly debates on university democratisation of the late 1960s and 1970s, in more recent debates about managerialism, students hardly ever feature, except as clients. However, the demise of the university as a 'representative democracy' (Olsen 2007) through the post-1990 higher education reforms and the rise of managerialism does not imply that staff and students no longer formally participate in university decision-making. For example, a cross-national survey of student participation in university governance conducted by the Council of Europe in 2002 shows that legal provisions for formal student involvement

in European public higher education governance at national, institutional and to a lesser extent at faculty and department levels remain close to universal (Persson 2004: 41). The survey also indicates that student influence in university decision-making is perceived to be considerable. Student influence is perceived to be strongest in the area of social issues, including the domain of student affairs, and on educational and pedagogical issues, but their influence is considered weak or even absent in matters of university finances, employment of teaching staff, and degree and admission requirements (Persson 2004: 59-68). Studies from other higher education systems (US, Canada, Africa) also suggest a continuation (or even extension) of student participation in university governance (e.g. Zuo and Ratsoy 1999, Luescher 2005, Lizzio and Wilson 2009). Especially student involvement in matters of quality assurance is a more recent development.

Therefore, on the one hand, there is considerable continuity of formal student involvement in university decision-making even as the 'democratic phase' of university governance has been superseded by a more 'managerialist phase' (Scott 1995). On the other hand, this historical account provides in itself no secure grounds on which to establish a good justification for student involvement in university governance; nor is it a particularly helpful guide to understanding variations in the formal involvement of students in university decision-making. In the following sections, the paper therefore considers different reasons for and against student involvement in university governance articulated from a variety of perspectives.

Research design and method

According to Mouton (2001: 178) philosophical analysis is concerned with 'questions of meaning, explanation, understanding and normativity' and such studies are typically 'aimed at analysing arguments in favour of or against a particular position, sometimes of a normative or value-laden kind'. The core of this paper is based on an extensive review of scholarly publications that was selected on be basis of searches of academic literature (esp. books, chapters in books, journal articles and research reports). Multiple searches and search strategies were employed addressing the question of student involvement in university decision-making. This included searches across the library systems of several

South African universities (especially the universities of Cape Town, Pretoria, Stellenbosch and the Western Cape, and the University of South Africa library) and at the library of the Institute of Education in London. In addition, databases searched included ERIC, JSTOR, AHERO, Google Scholar, the ISI Web of Knowledge, and the Nipad Index of African Studies. Keywords included student governance, student participation, student involvement, activism, student protest(s) and student unrest, student politics, student leadership, and student government, both alone and in combination with terms like university/college governance, university/college administration, and so forth. The various searches yielded a large number and variety of material covering over forty years of scholarship (1965 – 2010), which were each critically reviewed.

In the compilation of this paper, the final selection of sources was driven by theoretical considerations and the aims of the study, whereby only a fraction of the original sources could be directly referred. In most cases, preference was given to peer-reviewed journal articles and chapters in books that showcase the debate within the academy internationally and directly engage with the question how student involvement in university decision-making may be justified. In addition, a limited number of studies on changes and current practices in student involvement were included. The remaining studies refer mainly to debates in US, UK, and Continental European universities. In addition, special attention was paid to embrace in the present 'sample' relevant scholarly publications from the African continent, as scholarship from Africa tends to be less accessible and thus often overlooked in international studies on educational leadership and governance. The result is a historical-philosophical analysis and discussion of key arguments (or cases) for and against the involvement of students in university decision-making, which has been thematically-ordered in terms of different claims and related conceptions of student. The resulting framework is then discussed and its application illustrated.

Student involvement in university decision-making in theoretical perspective

Good reasons for and against student involvement in university decision-making have been articulated from a variety of perspectives: in terms of its modern origins in student political activism; with respect to students' role and position in universities; in relation to democratic principles and the purposes of

higher education in democratic societies; and on the grounds of the potential positive consequences of student participation. This section discusses the various ways in which the case for the formal inclusion of students in university decision-making has been made in scholarly literature.

The politically-realist case: Students as 'stakeholders'

The power of students as a collective political actor has been illustrated most recently in the extensive student protests against fee hikes in the UK in 2010. Unsurprisingly, given the modern origins of university democratisation in the student protests and revolts at leading universities in Europe and the USA, the case for the inclusion of students in the formal decision-making processes at university level has frequently been made historically with reference to students' potential (and actual) ability to disrupt academic life on campus. Various studies point out that violent student protests occurred more frequently where formal channels of communication and consultation were absent. These studies of student politics recommend the establishment of formal structures for communication and negotiation with student leaders as an appropriate response of university authorities to reduce disruptive student political activism on campus (e.g. Nkomo 1984, Mathieu 1996, Alence 1999, Bergan 2004, Munene 2003, Boland 2005).

With a view to its origins in student protests and the crisis this poses for campus authority, the inclusion of students in university decision-making may be considered a matter of *realpolitik,* holding out the promise of a more peaceful and orderly academic life (Olsen 2007: 32, see also Epstein 1974). This argument continues to hold sway. Thus, Menon (2005: 169) has recently argued that 'student participation in decision making plays a role in the creation of an atmosphere of openness and trust in universities, leading to a positive organisational climate'.

The political case for student involvement in university decision-making is tied up with the notion that students are internal stakeholders or a politically significant constituency of the university and the notion that these constituencies or stakeholders ought to be involved in governing the university. According to Morrow (1998: 386), the democratic credentials of governance by stakeholders arise from

its origin in a critique of a unilateral 'monolithic mode of governance' where a single group dominates decision-making. Before the experience of university democratisation, the dominant group has traditionally been the professoriate. Understanding the university as an institution composed of competing, internal stakeholders, all of which must be heard and somehow accommodated, precisely seeks to replace 'antiquated formal hierarchies' and disperse power (Morrow 1998: 386-388, Olsen 2007: 32).

Both moderate and radical proposals based on the political case for student participation in university governance did not go unchallenged during the heyday of university democratisation. According to Moodie and Eustace (1974: 201-202), opponents to the original extension of committee membership to students in British universities argued that, firstly, formal student participation was inappropriate and would simply waste everybody's time and, secondly, it would introduce an organised and permanent adversary into a system of university governance that was basically consensual, thus leading to private caucusing, a lack of public discussion and, eventually, to the creation of an inner circle. Others argued that the supposed democratisation of the university was more illusory than real and that the co-optation of students onto university committees was merely 'a device to introduce token students into a governing process run by others' (Mason 1978: 310).

Thompson (1972) provides an early sophisticated analysis of the political functions and consequences of formally including students in university governance. Considering the principle classically stated by John Locke that legitimate power requires 'the consent of the governed' as grounds to establish students' right to participate in governing the university[2], Thompson (1972: 159-160) argued that 'the idea of consent only becomes important if the nature of the university implies that its decisions should receive the willing and rational assent of its members'. Would the formal involvement of students in university decision-making contribute to rational discussion and the willing assent of its members to decisions? Thompson (1972: 161) pointed out that 'the exposure to the complexities of an issue, the recognition of the serious human consequences of decisions, and the development of personal commitments and loyalties that occur in joint participation [in a political process] frequently do have a

tendency to deflate radical impulses'. Thus, formal student involvement in university decision-making would provide, on the one hand, an alternative to tactics of coercion and disruption by students. On the other hand, it might also moderate the partisan views of other members of the university community and thus create less adversarial relationships on campus.[3] Co-optation of students onto university committees was therefore a double-edged sword with a moderating effect on student activists as well as on the other role-players in decision-making.

If Thompson's analysis provides a basis for some student involvement in university decision-making, more radical proposals of stakeholder politics may be seen as inherently problematic within a university context. Morrow (1998: 392) identifies a number of general problems with governance by stakeholders, such as the difficulty of defining who the stakeholders are; problems arising from the emphasis on differences between stakeholders (producing a climate of hostility and distrust between them) and from assumptions of homogeneity within each stakeholder (leading to the exclusion of dissenting voices within stakeholder groups). Furthermore he views the mode of representation involved in stakeholder governance and the practice of conducting 'negotiations with a view to forcing concessions … and winning "victory" as fundamentally incompatible with rational discussion and democratic deliberation'. As far as stakeholder politics assumes that the institutional purpose is whatever serves the common interest of stakeholders, it also apparently leaves for Morrow (1998: 397) 'no logical space for the idea of constitutive institutions'.[4] For him, the idea of constitutive institutions is, however, at the heart of the university as an institution that is fundamentally concerned with 'nurturing the practices of the maintenance, distribution and generation of [higher] knowledge' (Morrow 1998: 398; also see Olsen 2007).

In more recent studies of student participation in university governance, some scholars imply that there is no longer a need to make a case for the formal inclusion of students in university governance because this is legally provided for (Zuo and Ratsoy 1999: 9). This legalistic case for student involvement in university decision-making can be seen as a recent variation of the political case. From a historical and realist perspective, this view may be somewhat politically naïve. However, it alludes to the problem

posed to emancipatory political groups when accepting inclusion within a formal decision-making set-up. On the one hand, the legal provision for student involvement may be regarded as an achievement of students' political struggle. On the other hand, it also changes the very nature of the engagement: To the extent that student involvement in university decision-making is legally provided for, it no longer needs to be a cause for political struggle. The paradox involved in the political case is that student representatives participating in formal settings may need the subversive, activist support of their constituency in order to be able to defend and possibly extend the gains made by previous student generations, whether or not these have been legally enshrined. This lesson also arises from a reading of De Boer and Stensaker's (2007) study of the demise of the university as a representative democracy. Furthermore, the legislative provisions for the inclusion of students in higher education decision-making may only cover national and institution-wide decision-making, while at faculty, department and classroom levels no legally enshrined provisions may exist (Zuo and Ratsoy 1999, Bergan 2004, Persson 2004, Lizzio and Wilson 2009). Even Bergan's (2004: 15-16) argument that contemporary students may be 'banging in open doors' when asking for representation in decision-making on higher education matters still puts the onus on students to initiate and demand such representation as he concedes with reference to student involvement in the Bologna Process (also see Klemenčič *forthcoming*).

The consumerist case: Students as 'clients' and 'consumers'

As opposed to the political case for university democratisation of the late 1960s and early 1970s, more recently the case for student involvement in university decision-making is made with reference to the role and function of students as clients, users and consumers of higher education. Effectively this involves different conceptions of students as well as of the university. Like the pseudo-Marxist notions of students as proletarians and knowledge workers with the potential to be revolutionary agents in which some 68ers indulged (and the actual Marxist critique of these notions which argues that students are actually products in the education process) (Wolff 1969: 44-47), the more recent, neo-liberal conception of students as clients also emphasises the political economy involved in student-university relations, only now the university is viewed as a service provider in a contractual relationship with

students and the student is viewed as client or consumer of educational services (as mentioned by Bergan 2004: 23-24, Boland 2005: 207, Olsen 2007).[5]

The consumerist case is that as clients or consumers of the higher education services provided by universities, students are affected by decisions that are made on campus and therefore have a right to participate in the making of these decisions (see Zuo and Ratsoy 1999: 2, Boland 2005: 207; McGarth 1970 in Menon 2005: 169). Strictly speaking, this would limit student involvement in university governance to students' immediate and short-term interests. Significantly, though, the consumerist case has been extended to include longer-term perspectives. Some exponents of this view, such as Bergan (2004: 23-24) argue that students are clients or consumers of a special kind, since their interest in the provision of higher education services arguably extends beyond immediate concerns (such as price and quality of services). They argue that the fact that students demand to be included in decision-making rather than choosing the exit option of switching providers/university precisely indicates that students are an exceptional kind of client and that the university is an exceptional type of service provider.[6] This behaviour of students, they argue, is due to their long-term interest in the quality of the service, which extends well beyond personal consumption. In Hirschman's terms (1970), the behaviour of activist student leaders may thus be considered a case of 'quality makers' voicing their interests. Their line of reasoning eventually leads Boland and others towards the view that students' interest in the university may be of a civic rather than consumerist nature (Boland 2005: 209, see also Bergan 2004: 23-25).

Common to both civic and consumerist arguments is therefore the claim that students have rights to involvement in decision-making as a means to safeguard their interests. This can also be formulated as the classic, liberal maxim first formulated by John Stuart Mill. Mill argued that '…the rights and interests of every and any person are only secure from being disregarded when the person is himself [sic] able …to stand up for them' (Mill in Thompson 1972: 158). In relation to student participation in university governance Thompson (1972: 158) argues, however, that if seriously applied Mill's principle of affected interests has very different implications:

If the principle of affected interests by itself points toward any conclusion about university

governance, it suggests control of the university by the state, which, by virtue of the wider

scope of its authority, ought to be able to take into account more of the "affected interests".

Thompson (1972: 159) concedes nonetheless that the affected interests of members merit some claim because members actively share in the pursuit of the university. While grappling with the related problem of how to define the public when speaking of the public accountability of universities, Friedman and Edigheji (2006) argue that if the public is defined narrowly, it does not refer to government but rather to academic peers in the case of higher education institutions.

The communitarian case: Students as 'full members of the university community'

Like Thompson, Wolff (1969: 124-125) also considers Mill's principle of affected interests as a justification for the right of students to be involved in university decision-making, but his analysis leads him to discard it entirely as 'incoherent', 'incomplete' and 'quite unworkable' in the university context. Nonetheless, it points him towards another principle, namely that student participation in decision-making can be justified by virtue of students being members of the community. Indeed, the notion of students as full members of the academic community still carries currency in studies that seek to make a case for student rights to involvement in university decision-making (e.g. Bergan 2004: 23-24, Persson 2004: 31 with reference to the Bologna Process). In the idealised formulation of Wolff (1969: 127, original emphasis), the university is 'a *community of persons* united by collective understandings, by common *and communal* goals, by bonds of reciprocal obligation, and by a flow of sentiment which makes the preservation of the community an object of desire, not merely a matter of prudence or a command of duty'. This communitarian conception of the university may be reinforced by more general democratic norms and values.

The case of Wolff and others for students' supposed full membership of the university community is, however, widely challenged. Some stress that students are by definition and in practice only transient members of this community, whose commitment to the university's mission may be shallow. Thus, students are not likely to be personally affected when decisions they have been party to actually take

effect, since they will have left campus by then (Zuo and Ratsoy 1999: 24). Other authors point out that characteristically the university is not an egalitarian community but structured in a fairly rigid professional guild hierarchy of academic expertise and seniority. They argue that students are at best novices and junior members of the academic community in particular (Moodie and Eustace 1974, Clark 1978, Morrow 1998).

Thus, a widely accepted argument is that students' claims to an equal voice and equal authority in the university community should be tempered in view of their limited knowledge and experience and be weighed against the competencies of other groups within the university, in particular those of the professoriate and non-professorial academic staff as well as the professional competencies of the administration and management (Moodie and Eustace 1974: 219, 228-230, Mason 1978: 309, Bergan 2004: 17, de Boer and Stensaker 2007: 100-101, Wood 1993 in Menon 2005: 170, Zuo and Ratsoy 1999: 24). Accordingly, Moodie and Eustace (1974: 201) refer to 'the principle that authority should reside with the more rather than the less expert and learned'. In view of the importance of peer-recognised academic expertise and competence in a university, Thompson (1972: 159-160) also notes that the Aristotelian claim that popular participation in government could be established on the basis of the competence of ordinary citizens is considerably less plausible in the context of the university community. However, he argues that this does 'not establish the desirability of exclusive faculty or administrative government of the university'. Rather, involvement by all the major groups in governing the university has important benefits, such as a better quality of decisions. In the case of students, the potential educational benefit of participating in decisions-making to participating students can also be seen as a means to pursue the educational purposes of the university (see also de Boer and Stensaker 2007: 100-101).

Political socialisation as reason: Students as 'future elites' and 'citizens'

In democratic societies, the purpose of public higher education is typically not limited to preparing students for specific roles in the labour market only. Over and above that, the function of public higher education is also to provide students with certain generic skills, opportunities for personal growth and

development, and above all with the capacity of critical thinking and deliberating skills in preparation for democratic citizenship (Bergan 2004: 24; Council on Higher Education 2004: 14-16).[7] From this perspective, public universities are sites of democratic citizenship and student involvement in university decision-making functions as a means by which to inculcate democratic values and exercise democratic practice (Boland 2005; see also Bergan 2004). Accordingly Bleiklie (in Plantan 2002: 6, original emphasis) argues that citizenship education at educational institutions can be said to have two distinct learning outcomes:

> First, students need to learn **how** democracy works – through participation in student organisations and university decision-making bodies, and by developing a conceptual understanding of democracy. Second, they need to learn **that** democracy works by experiencing that they can influence events and their own living conditions through participation.

The implication is that students are not primarily viewed as members of the university community. Rather, students are considered as members of the broader political community within which the university is embedded. This argument further implies that university governance should be consistent in some basic respects with the way the wider political community is governed. In democratic societies, students are therefore viewed as citizens of the political community beyond the university, and the university may be seen in some ways as an instrument of the demos. This case is illustrated particularly well by Boland's (2005: 214) who argues that 'higher education has an important role to play in the democratic socialisation process and [student] participation in shared governance presents an important opportunity to practice and nurture the habits of democratic life'.

Much of current literature tends to treat this line of argument as surprisingly uncontroversial; yet as Bergan (2004) notes, it is apposite to enter a few caveats. Firstly, it is curious that most studies that make this argument fail to provide evidence that student participation in university governance actually achieves this virtuous end of democratic socialisation and nurturing the habits of democratic life. Only recently have studies started to question and examine the relationship between university decision-making and democratisation, and the extent to which university governance actually is (or, for that

matter, should be) democratic (Bergan 2004: : 25-26). Thus, among the conclusions of the large-scale US-European study *Universities as Sites of Citizenship*, Plantan (2002: 48) cautions in this respect that

> Authoritarian management styles create additional inertia inhibiting changes in organisational structures, curricula and teaching that would foster or create democratic values and practices. This suggests that the promotion of democratic values and civil responsibility is not merely a pedagogical question, but must also be addressed structurally in terms of the organisation and practice of university governance.

Moreover, surveys conducted with undergraduate students at three African universities in 2009 found no significant difference in support for democracy between students who were formally involved in university decision-making and their non-participating student peers (Luescher-Mamashela 2010). Earlier studied in this context have shown that the culture of governance at certain African institutions is far from democratic (Hall et al 2004). Thus, it is not involvement of students in university decision-making *per se,* but involvement in a culture of governance that is compatible with democratic values and practices, that may achieve the aims of education for citizenship.

Secondly, if political socialisation provides a good reason for student involvement in decision-making that is appealing to democrats, this function may be equally appealing in less democratic societies to a ruling class that is intent on using educational institutions as instruments for cultural and political domination and socialisation of a rather different nature. In the South African context, for example, the apartheid experiment with ethnic universities and the related conception of the university as a *volksuniversiteit* (i.e. the university embedded within, and as an instrument to further the aims of, a particular dominant ethnic group) provides a model case where students (as well as academics) were first and foremost conceived as members of a *volk* or tribe to which the academic community was to be subject and accountable, with precarious implications for academic freedom (Degenaar 1977, Nkomo 1984).

Lastly, the increasing globalisation and internationalisation of higher education raises a host of additional and important questions related to the political socialisation argument. For instance, does the university bear a responsibility for the democratic socialisation of international students, especially

when many will return to non-democratic countries (Plantan 2002: 46)? These kinds of questions remain to be considered. Thus, attempts to politically socialise students into the way 'we do things' may, on the one hand, not necessarily result in the socialisation of constructively critical citizens; on the other hand, failing to attempt this can just as well undermine an important dimension of the emancipatory potential of education in general, and higher education in particular.

The consequentialist case: Benefits of student involvement in decision-making

The case for formal student involvement in university decision-making as a means to inculcate democratic norms and values in students as citizens carries strong consequentialist connotations. Active citizenship is purportedly one among a number of potentially positive consequences of student inclusion noted thus far. Furthermore, Thompson (1972) points out that widening the circle of participants in university decision-making to include students may have positive educational effects in different respects. Student involvement is not only for the benefit of students themselves, but it is also likely to improve the quality of decisions and their willing and informed acceptance by students. In these regards, the inclusion of students in university decision-making contributes to the pursuit of the university's purposes (Thompson 1972:160-162, see also Epstein 1974: 194, de Boer and Stensaker 2007: 101). Benefits of student involvement in university decision-making may therefore accrue not only to the participating students themselves, but also to a democratic society as citizenship education, and to the university community as a whole in the form of a better quality of decisions and a more peaceful campus environment.

Discussion and Application

The historical-philosophical debate analysed in the previous section shows that the meaning and justification of student involvement in university decision-making can be understood with reference to different conceptions of student. These different conceptions provide a heuristic means for understanding the nature and extent of student involvement in different contexts and domains of university decision-making. On the one hand, the notion of students as clients may be increasingly pervasive; on the other hand, it cannot be applied universally across all domains of university

governance. Klemenčič (forthcoming: 20) argues with respect to the quality of teaching and learning that the move towards learner-centered teaching does 'not seem to be compatible with conception of students as clients'. With reference to the work of Lomaz (2007: 42), Klemenčič therefore notes that 'it is, hence, perhaps not surprising that higher levels of institutional leadership tend to be more supportive of the view that students should be regarded as customers than academics lower down the organisational chart' (in Klemenčič forthcoming: 20). Student involvement in university decision-making as users or consumers of specific services is necessarily only consistent with representation on a university's user committees. When considering formal student involvement in committees of the various domains of university governance this and other notions of students and related claims come to play in various combinations.

Governance of teaching, learning and research

The involvement of students in the university decisions dealing with teaching, learning and research involves considerations of students' expertise both as junior members of the academic community and users of educational services. The nature and extent of student involvement will vary with regard to the setting (classroom, department, faculty, university-wide academic policy), the nature of issues under consideration (e.g. staffing, timetable setting, teacher awards, quality assurance), and the seniority of the students who are affected by a decision (undergraduate, postgraduate). Commitments to democratic and participatory pedagogies may also influence the extent to which students are involved in determining methods and content of teaching, learning and research.

Governance of student affairs

Co- and extra-curricular student affairs governance dealing with matters of student government, student associations and recreation, student sport, residences and so forth, offers extensive opportunity for student involvement in decision-making. Here, students are clearly the most interested and affected members of the community; as users and clients of services and facilities for student development, their lived experience offers invaluable expertise in decision-making. Moreover, as young adults they have certain rights and responsibilities associated with governing their own lives. Students' acceptance of,

and support for decisions taken in this domain of governance is particularly crucial, and students' collective power to demand or reject certain decisions must therefore be taken seriously into consideration.

Institutional finance, policy and strategy

A complex combination of different reasons for and against formal student involvement comes into play when considering the nature and extent of student involvement in the university decisions dealing with general university affairs (such as financing, planning, and strategy). In certain contexts, students may have been able to carve a niche historically as a political constituency that needs to be consulted and/or formally involved. Moreover, student involvement in this domain may involve the recognition of certain participatory rights of students as adults and citizens, even though the increasingly dominant conception of students as transient users and consumers means that such high-level participation can only be marginal.[8]

This illustrative application of different claims and related conceptions of students shows that they are not exclusive to (albeit perhaps dominant within) a specific domain of governance. Rather, they provide in combination a heuristic lens for considering student involvement. Furthermore, while this paper is concerned with higher education, the various reasons for and against student involvement in decision-making also transfer to some extent to other educational contexts along with their potential of providing a lens for understanding (and changing) governance practice. With reference to high school learners, Leren (2006: 367) shows that students' expertise as participants in the learning process and users of the school system provides grounds for their involvement in decision-making. Leren (2006: 363-364) further notes that increasing learner motivation and 'a feeling of ownership' are among the positive consequences of student involvement in co-determining classroom activities. Similarly, Mitra (2006: 315) argues that 'before students are accepted as key players in school reform and decision making, the concept of student voice must gain legitimacy among powerful stakeholders in the school'. While Mitra provides powerful case studies of different ways in which students can get involved in decisions about their education, the present paper adds some of the related philosophical arguments to this discussion.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the history of student involvement in university governance and analysed the historical-philosophical debate on the reasons for and against formal student involvement. The synthetic task involved in the integrative review of the scholarly debate has yielded a host of good reasons, nuances and caveats, for the consideration of student involvement in university decision-making. It has been argued that the various claims for and against student involvement, and related conceptions of student, should not be seen as mutually exclusive when seeking to understand and justify formal student involvement in university decision-making. Rather, together they provide a complex lens for analysing (and changing) the involvement of students in different domains of university governance.

Acknowledgements

I appreciate the useful comments received from various reviewers, including André du Toit and Martin Hall. SDG.

References

Alence, R. (1999) Research report: Student protest and transformation at South African universities: An introduction to game-theoretic perspectives on conflict and governance. *Politeia,* **18**, 122-139.

Altbach, P.G. (2006) Student politics: Activism and culture, in J.F.J. Forest and P.G. Altbach (eds) *International Handbook of Higher Education* (Doordrecht: Springer), pp. 329–345.

Amaral, A., Meek, V. L. and Larsen, I.M. (eds) (2003) *The higher education managerial revolution?* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic).

Bergan, S. (2004) Higher education governance and democratic participation: the university and democratic culture, in S. Bergan (ed.) *The university as res publica: Higher education governance, student participation and the university as a site of citizenship* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe), pp. 13-30.

Boland, J.A. (2005) Student participation in shared governance: A means of advancing democratic values? *Tertiary Education and Management,* **11**, 199-217.

Bryan, W.A. and Mullendore, R. (eds) (1992) Rights, freedoms and responsibilities of students. *New Directions for Student Services* **59** (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass).

Bundy, C.J. (2004) Under new management? A critical history of managerialism in British universities, in M. Walker and J. Nixon (eds) *Reclaiming universities from a runaway world* (Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press), pp. 160–175.

Clark, B.R. (1978) Academic power: Concepts, modes, and perspectives, in J. H. van de Graaff, B.R. Clark, D. Furth, D. Goldschmidt and D.F. Wheeler (eds) *Academic power: Patterns of authority in seven national systems of higher education* (New York: Praeger), pp. 164-189.

Cloete, N., Maassen, P., Fehnel, R., Moja, T., Gibbon, T. and Perold, H (eds) (2006) *Transformation in higher education: Global pressures and local realities* (Dordrecht: Springer).

Council on Higher Education (2004) *South African higher education in the first decade of democracy* (Pretoria: Council on Higher Education).

De Boer, H. and Stensaker, B. (2007) An internal representative system: The democratic vision, in P. Maassen and J.P. Olsen (eds) *University dynamics and European integration* (Doordrecht: Springer), pp. 99–117.

Deem, R. and Brehony, K.J. (2005) Management as ideology: The case of 'new managerialism' in higher education. *Oxford Review of Education,* **31**, 217-235.

Degenaar, J. (1977) The concept of a volksuniversiteit, in H.W. van der Merwe and D. Welsh (eds) *The future of the university in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip), pp. 148-171.

Epstein, L.D. (1974) *Governing the university: the campus and the public interest* (London: Jossey-Bass Publishers).

Friedman, S. and Edigheji, O. (2006) *Eternal (and internal) tensions? Conceptualising public accountability in South African higher education: research report* (Pretoria: Council on Higher Education).

Habermas, J. (1971) The university in a democracy: Democratisation of the university, in *Toward a rational society: student protest, science, and politics* [Trans. J.J. Shapiro] (London: Heinemann), pp. 1–12.

Hall, M., Symes A. and Luescher, T.M. (2004) The culture of governance in South African higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management,* **26**, 91-107.

Hirschman, A.O. (1970) *Exit, voice, and loyalty: responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

Klemenčič, M. (*forthcoming*) Student representation in European higher education governance: principles and practice, roles and benefits, in E. Egron-Polak, J. Kohler, S. Bergan and L. Purser (eds) *Handbook on Leadership and Governance in Higher Education* (Berlin: RAABE Academic Publishers), pp. 1-25.

Leren, T.H. (2006) The importance of student voice. *International Journal of Leadership in Education,* **4**, 363-367.

Lizzio, A. and Wilson, K. (2009) Student participation in university governance: The role conceptions and sense of efficacy of student representatives on departmental committees. *Studies in Higher Education,* **34**, 69-84.

Luescher, T. M. (2005) Student governance in Africa: A preliminary assessment of the scholarly universe. Paper presented at the *Seminar on Improving Governance and Student Leadership of the Centre for Higher Education Transformation*, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, April 1. http://ahero.uwc.ac.za.

Luescher-Mamashela, T.M. (2010) From university democratisation to managerialism: The changing legitimation of university governance and the place of students. *Tertiary Education and Management*, **16**, 259-283.

Luescher-Mamashela, T.M. (*forthcoming) The African university and democratic citizenship: Hothouse or training ground? Report on student surveys conducted at the universities of Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Cape Town* (Cape Town: Centre for Higher Education Transformation).

Mason, H.L. (1978) Shared authority, triparity, tripoliarity: cross national patterns of university government. *Polity* **10**, 305-325.

Mathieu, J. (1996) Reflections on two African universities. *Issue,* **24**, 24-28.

McCulloch, A. (2009) The student as co-producer: learning from public administration about the student-university relationship. *Studies in Higher Education,* **34**, 171-183.

Menon, M.E. (2005) Students' views regarding their participation in university governance: implications for distributed leadership in higher education. *Tertiary Education and Management,* **11**, 167-182.

Mitra, D.L. (2006) Student voice from the inside and outside: the positioning of challengers. *International Journal of Leadership in Education,* **4**, 315-328.

Moodie, G.C. (1996) On justifying the different claims to academic freedom. *Minerva,* **34**, 129-150.

Moodie, G.C. and Eustace, R. (1974) *Power and authority in British universities* (London: George Allen and Unwin).

Morrow, W. (1998) Stakeholders and senates: the governance of higher education institutions in South Africa. *Cambridge Journal of Education,* **28**, 385-405.

Mouton, J. (2001) *How to succeed in your Master's & Doctoral studies* (Pretoria: Van Schaik).

Munene, I. 2003. Student activism in African higher education, in D. Teferra and P.G. Altbach (eds) *African higher education: An international reference handbook* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), pp. 117-127.

Nkomo, M. (1984) *Student culture and activism in Black South African universities: The roots of resistance* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press).

Olsen, J.P. (2007) The institutional dynamics of the European university. In P. Maassen and J.P. Olsen (eds) *University dynamics and European integration* (Doordrecht: Springer), pp. 25-54.

Plantan, F. (2002) *Universities as sites of citizenship and civic responsibility. Final General Report* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe).

Perkin, H. (2006) History of universities, in J.F.J. Forest and P.G. Altbach (eds) *International Handbook of Higher Education* (Doordrecht: Springer), pp. 159-205.

Persson, A. (2004) Student participation in the governance of higher education in Europe: Results of a survey, in S. Bergan (ed.) *The university as res publica: Higher education governance, student participation and the university as a site of citizenship* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe), pp. 31-82.

Scott, P. (1995) *The meanings of mass higher education* (Buckingham: SHRE and Open University Press).

Thompson, D.F. (1972) Democracy and the governing of the university. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* **404**, 157-169.

Trow, M. (1994) Managerialism and the academic profession: the case of England. *QSC Higher Education Report* **2** (London: Quality Support Centre).

Verger, J. (1992) Patterns, in H. de Ridder-Symoens (ed.) *Universities in the Middle Ages: A history of the university in Europe,* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 35-69.

Wolff, R.P. (1969) *The ideal of the university* (Boston: Beacon Press).

Zuo, B. and Ratsoy, E. (1999) Student participation in university governance. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* **29**, 1-26.

Endnotes

[1] Universities in Latin America were the main exception. Starting in 1918 at the University of Cordoba in Argentina, a far-reaching student-led university reform rapidly spread across the continent. According to Altbach (2006: 336), 'the "reforma", as it is known in Spanish, established student participation in virtually all elements of academic decision-making, from an election of the rector to important curricular decisions'.

[2] Thompson (1972: 158-159) responded to Wolff's earlier argument that student membership of the university was practically involuntary because of the great value higher education carries in the labour market and in society. This, according to Wolff (1969: 117-118), established a democratic right for students to participate in decision-making in terms of the way Locke's principle of the consent of the governed had come to be claimed by democrats.

[3] With reference to student involvement in high school reforms and decision-making, Mitra (2006: 320) shows that 'becoming part of the formal reform process diminished the student-driven, grassroots nature of the group' so that the 'Student Forum's voices sounded muted after it assimilated more into the school's institutional boundaries'.

[4] Morrow (1998: 397) defines constitutive institutions as 'institutions [which] are themselves a source of needs and interests' e.g. the Christian church in mediaeval Europe or, these days, a soccer federation.

[5] For a useful critique of the student as consumer metaphor as it applies to the educational process and a defense of the alternative conceptualization of student as co-producer see McCulloch (2009).

[6] With reference to Epstein (1974), Mason (1978: 310) argued that 'consumerism, [defined by Epstein as] "the unorganised aggregate power of individual student decisions with respect to enrolment in particular institutions, programs, and courses," has undoubtedly been a factor in university governance, but it can hardly be used for specific political purposes'.

[7] There is extensive scholarly literature on graduate attributes which has not been taken into account in this section. Future research into this topic could fruitfully engage with this literature and thus add to the present debate.

[8] This list of different domains of university governance is only illustrative and not meant to be exhaustive.