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Public good , common good and public, private partnerships in education : Some thoughts on a longer view

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In this talk I want to put three terms, public good, common good, and public private partnership in education under scrutiny, which is partly historical, partly conceptual, framed by some contextual reflection. I am drawing on a number of publicly funded research projects some going back decades, involving complex collaborations across different political perspectives, locations, and experiences. In some ways this is a view from inside public education, although I am conscious that public education is not equal education or even, at present, untainted by features of marketisation more reminiscent of the private sector. In the UK and South Africa, where I have lived and worked,, public higher education is entangled with many historical inequalities, and forms of public private partnership amplify this. .Some of the contextual framing I am going to use will be historical, drawing out a long view. This is in my intellectual training, but I am also turning to history to try understand some perplexing features of the present.

My long view starts in 2016 and goes backwards. 2016 is widely regarded as a year of disjunctures, possibly signalling an end of many of the institutions that marked the 20th century. Some examples of end points are the aerial bombardment of civilians in Aleppo. Attacks of that form had not been seen since World War 2. The war in Syria contributed to the enormous numbers of refugees crossing the world, again reaching figures not seen since

the 1940s. The outcome of the Brexit referendum in the UK called into question the post war European project, in the same way that the election of Donald Trump as President of the USA called into question particular assumptions about national and foreign policy in that country. The decision of the USA and Israel to withdraw from UNESCO while I was writing this talk, have only amplified my sense of endings. What is interesting about all these events is that they were generally not predicted. They were shocking partly because they were unexpected. Adam Toews, in an article published in *Prospect* last year, compared 2016 and 1917 . In 1917 he wrote, 3 similarly world shattering, but unexpected events took place in a way ushering in the 20th century: — Lenin took a train from Zurich back to Russia, a decisive move in the history of Bolshevik leadership of the Russian revolution, Woodrow Wilson, who had pledged American neutrality at the beginning of World War 1, decisively entered the war in Europe, and began a chapter of American global interventionism. Gandhi, who had returned to India from South Africa in 1915, began the movement of peasants, farmers and urban labourers that was to build towards the anti-colonial and national movements that successfully came to challenge colonial rule in Asia, Africa, indeed across the world. We could multiply these examples and add in many other significant moments in 1917, that were to shape the century. Something about women's suffrage seems an obvious omission, but, since reading Toews' article , I have been interested to uncover what the education ideas were that were circulating in 1916, and what light they throw on the question of defining the public good and what perspective they give us on public private partnerships. I want to build from this long perspective across a century to help with disentangling some ideas.

Here are three education ideas circulating in 1916, although it is not a comprehensive list,. . The South African novelist and women's rights campaigner, Olive Schreiner. had been a close

friend of Eleanor Marx, and outspoken critic of Rhodes' invasion of Zimbabwe. In 1916 she made a speech in London to the Union of Democratic Control and the Non-Conscription Fellowship, She invoked ' 'many hundreds of thousands, who have not desired war, and who are determined that when the peace comes it shall be a reality, and not a hotbed for the raising of future wars. ' She went on to say:' 'We feel that as the Governments have made the wars - the peoples themselves must make the peace! We are organizing ourselves, that, when the time comes, we may be able effectively to act. Our second aim is to educate ourselves and others to this end'. (Schreiner, 1916) This vision of education made, despite the actions of warmongering governments, and uniting 'people themselves' partly because of their capacity to educate themselves, is a hopeful vision of common good, achieved by public processes in which education plays a major role. This idea has a long pedigree and was one of the ways in which Enlightenment celebration of rationality had come both to be associated with morality and to underpin social policy about the importance of expanding education provision. The idea about education connecting the hearts of people who wished for peace in the shadow of war, as to find its way into the Preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO.; ' since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed (UNESCO, 1945) We see here a strong identification of education in all forms with common good. The notion of common good here is that used by Simon Marginsonin his new book on higher education, where common good is a form of open, solidaristiic engagement. He draws on the concept of fraternity, although Schreiner, with her strong sense around women's rights woul probably deploy a different term. For her the sense is associated with a notion that the widest access must be given to a large public to participate in education, both

contributing to and benefitting from the common good of building ' the defences of peace'.

A second education theorist writing in 1916 was Sol Plaatje, an eminent linguist, writer, and acute observer, who was to play a key role in the founding of the ANC. Plaatje published   *Native Life in South Africa*, in 1916. This was an account of the dispossession, poverty and distress associated with the South African 1913 Land Act. The book was published in London and, widely circulated partly through networks of African American educators like WE DuBois. The work is a trenchant criticism of poverty, inequality and colonial rule, A key idea is how the views of Africans in South Africa are not represented and the voices of people who have direct experience of the effects of colonialism and racism are not heard. (quote page 210).For Plaatje, it is the failure of policy makers to talk to and engage with the people who experience the decisions of colonial rulers that drives some of the dispossession and injustice he depicts. He is appalled that the terrible suffering of World War 1 has not generated a sense of peace building for the common good.

A third education idea of 1916 comes in the writings of John Dewey, who published *Democracy and Education* that year. Dewey's core idea, which was to be so definitive of much of the 20ᵗʰ century, was that school was the place where the personal and the social connected, where democracy as a lived relationship between people could be fashioned, and where a democratic citizenship that took mutuality and equality seriously could be fashioned.

   . The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. Since a

democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education. But there is a deeper explanation. A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. (Dewey, 1916,

For Dewey common good was not entirely natural, 'located in the hearts of men and women' in Schreiner's words. For Dewey common good had to be constructed, and the school as a public institution was one means to do this.

Thus Schreiner invokes education as a common good, while Plaatje is acutely aware of the inequality and relationships of colonialism that makes common good difficult to sustain. For him education, discussion, and use of the press can form insight to generate understandings of public good for change, associated for example, with addressing poverty. Dewey is more explicit about how schools and teachers might work for public and common good.

For Schreiner, Plaatje and Dewey, a key shared assumption is that education is a public project, it is a project that happens *despite* the actions of contemporary governments, which all three see as failing to support or provide adequately for the appropriate kinds of knowledge and form of education for certain groups of people. Dewey and Plaatje argue education appropriate for democracy could be supported by government, but they note how the support of governments is often neglectful, linked with race and class assumptions. All three had experience of different kinds of private education, often linked with religious organisations, but for all three privately organised education enterprise does not seem to be relevant to their vision of education. Why and how has the private come to be seen to be an important contributor to public good in education in our times?

I want to fast forward from these generally hopeful delineations of education in 1916 to the present. I acknowledge that for the sake of making my argument I am not mentioning a host of other arguments around education and public good circulating in 1916, some of which stressed obedience and hierarchy, some noted dark features of the enlightenment and formulations of common good, and some of which acknowledged the complexity and difficulties of mixing education ideas about public and private. I selected Schreiner, Plaatje and Dewey because they give particular visions of public good and common good, that seem helpful in relation to thinking about the unanticipated arrival of features of the 20th century, noted in Toews' article.

Let me now turn to our own times. What are some ideas about education circulating at the moment that might help us frame the events of last year which appear so epoch changing? Here are three, and I'm sure you can add more. Firstly there is the idea that I have heard attributed to some large philanthrocapitalists that we need to think about education as taking an aeroplane. You can fly first class or on a budget airline but, whatever way you go, you get to your destination. It is clear that in this form of the argument, public good, public goods , common good or public sphere (to use distinctions elucidated by Marginson) can be achieved instrumentally by a range of means . This could include private provision in elite private schools, low fee private schools or public-private partnerships.   In this argument the means is less important than the ends. In the work I have done with colleagues as part of the ESRC/Newton Fund/NRF funded project on higher education and the public good in four Africa countries, we have Identified a group of arguments that stress the instrumental role of higher education in relation to the public good (Unterhalter et al, 2017),. Our analysis highlights that for writers who deploy these arguments higher education can be portrayed as

instrumental in shaping a version of the public good. It is perceived to lead to particular manifestations of public good, delineated as economic, social, political or cultural (McMahon 2009; Stiglitz 1999). Thus an expansion of higher education can be shown to be associated with economic growth for particular societies or regions, political engagements, and expanded provision of both market based and non-market goods. The meaning of public good in this form of argument can be linked with better health, inclusive government ,or more sustainable environment. Different levels of the public good are invoked, - individual, community, or'global public goods' (Marginson, 2007; 2013; Menashy 2009).. The notion is that higher education , which rests on good basic education, is instrumentally associated with these developments, whether or not a causal relationship can be demonstrated. The argument made here is that education, increases public good(s) over time . In this form there is nothing special about education as a public site. Thus for instrumental arguments, it is clear, and this point is made often by advocates of private schools and universities,, by public higher education institutions that recruit disproportionately from private schools, and by supporters of various kinds of public private partnerships (PPPs) that public good at a range of levels can be produced regardless of the form of the education institutions - be these public, private, or some mix. There is nothing in the instrumental argument that says only public institutions can be linked with increasing local, national and global public good. Public or private institutions or PPPs are to be evaluated because of their outputs, what public good flows, regardless of the form of input or the   public or private processes associated with generating outputs or outcomes. Public good is here often linked or used interchangeably with common good. There is a lack of precision, where the one elides into the other; education is a public good, which is a form of common good.

A second current critiques this instrumental view that sees the education means, experiences or processes as largely irrelevant to public good. This approach notes how the form of education provision is likely to reflect and reproduce the inequalities within the society or the global polity. Unless this is explicitly changed or managed reflexively, we cannot simply assume an unproblematic public good will be generated by education institutions that reproduce destructive inequalities. . To take the aeroplane analogy, whether you travel first class or economy may have considerable bearing on how you are treated and experience your journey, view your destination, and what happens to you when you get there. For writers on this theme, and I am one of them, education provision is marked by intersecting inequalities and this has considerable bearing for how one thinks about how to define public good and common good.   The amount and form of what is deemed private and why has considerable salience. Different writers taking this perspective note a range of intersecting inequalities, of race, class, gender and location. A range of politics and different state and institutional formations frame the ways in which ideas about education and the oublic good and its similarity or difference from the common good are   framed, contested, negotiated., traded off , evaluated. and contextualised . In the higher education and public good research project in Africa, we have pointed to a host of studies which note the intellectual, physical and cultural experiences enabled through higher education express and enact the public good (Calhoun 2006; Leibowitz, 2013; Locatelli 2017; Marginson 2011; Nixon 2012; Singh 2001). Thus education is a site for enacting features of the public good in particular spaces (public sphere) of open debate, information exchange, reflective pedagogies, knowledge formation. However these spaces can be fragile, put under threat, or can be enriched by cultures of openness, hybridity, interdisciplinary flows, or multiple voices. This connects with movements which question and seek to change intersecting inequalities,

exclusions and forms of exploitation and oppression. In this argument public good and critically reviewed notion of common good is central to the experience of education, it really does matter whether education institutions are associated with forms of fair employment, and decent work, that certain values of equality and fairness govern research, teaching and administration. Relationships with institutions locally, nationally, and internationally have a bearing on intrinsic forms of the public good. Forms of privatisation, hierarchy and exclusion will distort the intrinsic public good dynamic of education. They need to be kept under rigorous scrutiny.

 Forms of private accumulation of income and wealth undermine this.. Thomas Piketty's analysis draws out how a feature of the last 30 years has been an increasing growth returns on capital, which far outpaces the grown in returns on income. It is this, he argues, that has driven the widening inequalities in income and wealth in so many countries, as well as globally, resulting in shocking statistics, for example that three South African billionaires own assets that exceed those of 50% of the South African population, or that 8 men, who can fit in a golf buggy have wealth equivalent to that of 3.6 billion peole, the poorest half of the world. Piketty only comments on economic capital and earned incomes. However, let's extend the meanings of capital to take in intellectual and social capital. If we look at the positional advantages associated with attending or working at one of the global or national 'superpower' universities, or in one of the high status disciplines, current ways of ranking returns means that the rate of growth in status here far exceeds that associated with the returns from study or professional work in lower ranked institutions, and indeed inequalities between institutions are increasing. If we look at figures like citation, publication, research investment, we see increasing inequality, despite considerable rhetoric on the importance of

south-south learning, listening to local voices,. This widening inequality places the notion of higher education and common good under considerable strain. Simon Marginson's book notes how in the UK and USA support to remain in the EU and vote against Trump were disproportionately higher amongst those who were university educated with a more global outlook More recent research nuances this assertion somewhat, but the point Marginson brings out, which I have tried to deploy in relation to Piketty's argument, is that higher education may expand some forms of public good for some individuals and segments of a society, but the link between unequal higher education and the common good cannot be assumed, it has to be consciously put in place, maintained and kept under review.

This brings me to the third contemporary idea, which I want to present as an amalgam of feminist and other counter hegemonic ideas which question the notion of what is public, what is private, and that deploy some aspects of a communitarian views of care, invoke some aspects of solidarity, and formulate an idea of common good, that questions the form of contemporary institutions and relationships of hierarchy and exclusion. (Ekeh, Ngugi)

To summarise, the three education ideas concerned with public and common good I have reviewed could be described as:

i)   the causation idea - education brings about public good – and this will enhance the conditions for common good

ii)   The conditional idea – conditions in education may enhance public good, together or separate from common good, but only under certain conditions in certain contexts

iii)   The critical communitarian idea – we can develop the relationships of care and community by enhancing the quality of relationships between people which will

generate common good, and through this possibly deepen experiences of public good.

The ideas I presented from Schreiner, Plaatje and Dewey in 1916 were all in their time counterhegemonic ideas with a kind of organic connection to the movements that came to define the 20th century. The three ideas I've outlined above are different . The conditional idea may explain, as Marginson has done for the UK and USA, why the referendum result and the presidential election went the way they did. At a pinch it may explain some of the failures to deliver on public good associated with attempts at the dismantling of post war multilateral architectures and inadequate actions on humanitarian crises. But I am always doubtful of an argument, that has too much explanatory weight. We still have to explain why the causation argument so often lacks the political and economic clout to make it happen, (despite having a great deal of statistical information to support it) and why the communitarian argument cannot generally move from the local to the national and the global. We have to engage I think with the possibility that features of education may be associated with a public bad, forms of marketized individualism, and orientations that pull in two directions, appearing to lean towards social justice, while wrenched in other directions. It is here that I've found the proliferation of PPPs in education particularly fascinating.

In some work I've done linked to our EQUIPPS network in various guises I've looked at the ways in which gender equality and women's rights are positioned in policy texts concerned with girls' education PPPs . The argument made is that these documents exemplify an oscillation, between pragmatic initiatives that recognise existing sites of power, and attempts to develop a political project that dissolves differences between

public and private constituencies, who share an interest in getting girls into school (position as a particularly important cause of common good) .'ve investigated the potential and limits of this approach to support integrated policy around rights and equalities in education using the case of DFID's *Girls' Education Challenge*. In critiquing the implementation of this large aid package I've elaborated a political and epistemological process which I've termed dispersal, which I've used to consider some ways to investigate the effects of PPPs as a mechanism to address intersecting inequalities, which both appear to address, but ultimately fail to engage with substantive intersecting inequalities and the feminist critique of the political construction of what is public and what is private. Dispersal entails talking public good and common good, while walking, either pragmatically or complicitly. with those who have very different agendas.

To briefly expand on education PPPs. Since the 1990s PPPs have been advocated to enhance the provision of education in the global north and south.(LaRoque, 2008; Robertson, Mundy and Verger; 2012; Pestoff, , Brandsen,., & Verschueren 2013; Draxler ,2015) A range of different kinds of partnership are entailed, including public sector contracts with the private sector to deliver core components of the education system or support services, publicly subsidised education in private schools through vouchers or other financial arrangements, philanthropy in a range of guises spanning policy advocacy and building of public schools, and governance mechanisms which include collaborations between government, profit and non-profit third sector organisations.

There is no single way that PPPs link with work on gender equality in education, partly because this concept of gender itself is so fluid (Unterhalter, 2016). PPPs have been lauded as offering girls opportunities for schooling, denied by standard public provision in developing countries (Patrinos., Osorio, & Guáqueta, 2009), cautiously considered because of potential to support advocacy around equalities and enhanced service in Africa and South Asia (Rose, 2010), and criticised as deepening gender inequalities, by diminishing the state's capacity to support gender equality frameworks in India (Srivastava, 2010). Charges against PPPs in India and Pakistan include the employment of low paid women teachers, and ambiguous signals on gender equality in secondary education (Brans, 2013). In their evaluation of DFID's work on education, gender equality and women's empowerment in a range of developing countries, Rose and Subrahmanian (2005) argue that private providers, sometimes working in partnership with the state encompass initiatives for better quality services, reserved for those who can pay, and projects which offer 'last chance' opportunities for the poorest where insufficient school places are available. Public policy on gender equality and girls' education can thus be supported or diluted by PPPs.

PPPs appear as key instances of dispersal, and the ideas which are used to argue for their effectiveness show how this framework operates both in shaping relationships of policy, practice and research. Dispersal as a framing has a number of features. Firstly, a particularly fluid meaning assigned to gender, public and common good. Secondly, oscillations between a pragmatic politics of power, and a heterodox engagement with divergent politics of voice. Thirdly, a form of education that is confusingly both part of the problem and part of the solution to widening global inequalities. DFID's GEC and the forms of PPPs involved provide examples of all these features of dispersal. Some focus simply on getting girls into school,

Others show some concern to work with communities to examine ideas about gender. In my own discussions with GEC partners at meetings, conferences and on field visits I have heard a wide range of understandings expressed encompassing some   seeing this work as advocating for equalities, while for others it entails ensuring girls are kept clean or away from teenage sex. Thus the orientation to equalities or women's rights is sometimes present and sometimes absent. some commentators on transnational feminism note how policy has moved away from the integrated focus of the Beijing Platform to more superficial engagements with aspects of women's employment, or girls' education (Baksh and Harcourt, 2015).Dispersal as a framework generally entails a double entendre about politics, which provides a perspective on why it is difficult to make a definitive judgement about PPPswhich appear to offer much as a win-win harnessing of the best of both public and private, but confusingly do not always deliver, as some of the evaluations of GEC illuminate (Coffey 2015; Coffey, 2016b; DFID, 2017).

PPPs thus entail a plurality of ideological, organisational and material engagements with addressing marginalisation, girls' schooling, gender equality and common/public good. Often substantive issues, that talk to concerns of women's rights and the realm of public social policy reform are overlooked for addressing an immediate need to get girls into school. This resonates with approaches to addressing health needs or poverty that have gone for the most immediate intervention, for example the inoculation, the malaria net, or the cash transfer, rather than the detailed understanding connected forms of inequalities and dispossession and developing integrated programmes critically engaging with ideas of common good and public good to address these. We cannot read off from the

organisational form of PPPs whether they are in themselves good or bad for gender equality, girls' schooling or advancing a women's rights agenda. We can make some links between them and causal conditional and communitarian forms of the education and public good argument, but it is always quite contextual. Assessments have to be made in context, taking adequate account of the views of those affected by the interventions. A feature of dispersal as a framework, is the way policy advocacy tends to float away from the detail of what is actually happening to whom where, and for what reasons.. PPPs may, under some circumstances, offer one small part of this project, but I have considerable doubts in relation to the examples I've studied. Much more investigation is needed

My conclusion is thus going to be an inflection point, a raised shoulders, open hands, and the need to listen. I have sketched three versions of ideas about education, public good and common good circulating in the education circles I move in. Two are quite hopeful and one sceptical, but I remain unsure. The big education ideas of our time may be appearing as slogans painted on a wall in a refugee settlement, they are almost certainly not being expressed in English, but I think we will only be able to be alert to them if we take a critical view of our current vocabularies about public, private and common good, using a longer view..

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