Global Inequalities and Higher Education: Whose Interests are We Serving?

Elaine Unterhalter and Vincent Carpentier (eds) 2010

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This a timely and most welcome book by a group of critical, well informed, and articulate scholars from several different parts of the world. It originated as a collection of papers from a conference held in London at the Institute of Education in 2007. The focus of the 2007 conference, 'Learning Together', was on understanding whose interests' universities are serving in a world marked by vast inequalities. As the editors note however, the global economic crisis of 2008 still in evidence in 2010 has served to reveal new dimensions of inequality and dramatically new challenges for those who would seek to address the multiple layers of inequality. The central question that the book examines concerns, "whose interests are served by the nexus of relations associated with a globalized higher education system and whether relationships formed largely 'going with the flow' of economic globalization can be recast" (p 3). The book is structured in three parts: mapping inequalities conceptually; some dimensions of inequalities and the struggle for equality.

The introduction offers a useful framework for understanding at least some of the contesting and complex nexus of problems within which Higher Education operates. Moving beyond the discourse of dilemma to capture the tensions, Unterhalter and Carpentier suggest that we are facing a 'tetralemma' of challenges that pull in at least four different manners or directions. Economic growth or capital accumulation, equity, democracy and sustainability are critical elements of global policy formation if equality is a goal. They note that economic growth during the past 30 years has not been a factor in the reduction of poverty except in some parts of the wealthiest countries and parts of East Asia. The proportion of people living on less than $1.25 a day in Africa was the same in 2006 as in 1997. When one looks at the numbers of people living below the FAO minimum level of dietary energy consumption we have seen a global increase from 826 million people in 1990 to 873 million in 2006.

The chapters open with a piece by Alan Luke, an Chinese-American by birth who has worked in Canada, Australia and Singapore. His chapter is an extremely fresh look at how internationalization is working in several of the global hot spots in East Asia and the Pacific in the capture of students from majority world communities into Anglo/European university settings either through recruitment to Anglo/European locations or through partnership agreements where franchises of the metropole are set up in East Asia. Luke writes from his race, class and gender location, and from

his experiences recruiting students to Australia and from a senior administrative position in Singapore receiving proposals from wealthy country emissaries. He offers three insights about the workings of the Anglo/European university: "(1) that governance lays principally in and works through the practices of patriarchal masculinity; (2) that these systems of governance are principally institutional representations of White/Anglo/European standpoint; and (3) that the unmarked norm of Western rationality provides a 'naturalizing' device for its regulation of Others of all sorts and kinds" (p 45). If I might be allowed a hearty cry of 'Hurrah" for this framework as it applies equally to the contexts that those of us in Canada face vis a vis the opening up of our White Anglo/European Universities to Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Teaching in recognition of the historic and continuing presence of all Indigenous peoples in our land. Luke then goes on to ask: "Who is theorizing and positioning whom, on what grounds, with what historical precedents, and with what educational and material consequences all those part of the higher education process and experience" (p 45).

Rajani Naidoo offers a critique of the dangers of seeing the neo-liberal university as the tool for addressing issues of development and equity in majority world countries. Elaine Unterhalter offers three very useful ways of understanding teaching and learning or pedagogies in Higher Education: pedagogies of consequence (the current dominant approach); pedagogies of construction (linked to struggles for equity and justice) and pedagogies of connection (engagement). Saleem Badat, the Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University in South Africa tackles the issues of 'League Tables'. Bluntly he says, "No value can be attached to the SJTIHE and the THE-QS rankings. They are incapable of capturing either the meaning or the diverse qualities of a university..." (p136). Vincent Carpentier's chapter is a well-crafted political economic treatment of the interaction of the market, the state and Higher Education in the context of international student mobility. Diana Leonard and Maryam Rab share a study the use made by Pakistani women of their UK post-graduate degrees upon return home. They conclude that unless changes are made, HEIs will continue to reinforce dominant patriarchal patterns rather than do much for women and their roles in their society. Juan Carlos Barron-Pastor's chapter persuasively demonstrates the way that Higher Education in Mexico excludes the rich culture of the indigenous peoples. His piece illuminates and builds on what Allan Luke says earlier in the book. So what is to be done?

Melanie Walker posits a pedagogy for becoming and being richly human drawing in part on the work of Amartya Sen's lens of 'capability' and the thoughts of Paulo Freire. She underscores the emergence of a new range of global networks such as the Global University Networks for Innovation. She might well have added the Talloires Network and the Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research. Andrea Abbas and Monica McLean share a study of UK sociologists teaching approaches and make an argument that, "It should be possible to explore the extent to which in different settings higher education is contributing to transformation in society, rather than to benefitting the already rich and comfortable" (p262). Douglas Bourn and Alun Morgan make the links between the worlds of citizen's

education and development education and Higher Education. Harry Brighthouse in the final chapter speaks to the need of those of us who work in HEIs that continue to confer unequal benefits to the already privileged to intentionally take up an ethic of individual and collective responsibility. He feels that the liberal conception of higher education is a good starting point for this ethic.

The strengths of this book are substantial and the book fills a most useful space in the Higher Education literature. It should be an essential text in today's HE classrooms. The promise of the editors has been wonderfully fulfilled in the contextualizing and describing of the challenge. In terms of the proverbial 'What is to be done' question, I would suggest that readers might well delve into the very rapidly expanding literature on Higher Education and community engagement as well as to take a look at the web sites of some of the emerging global networks such as GUNI (http://www.guni-rmies.net) , Talloires Network (http://www.tufts.edu/talloiresnetwork)or the Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research (www.communityresearchcanada.ca)

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