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# Teacher Education, Common Purpose and the Forging of Multiple Publics in South Africa<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In an important scholarly intervention on African publics, Raufu Mustapha argues that the multiplicity of publics is not an obstacle but instead a creative resource that can be used to forge common purpose through public deliberation. However, he does not elaborate how common purpose operates and to what effect. In this article, we examine the dynamics of common purpose among student teachers in South Africa. Teachers inculcate the dispositions and habits of public deliberation in young people. How teachers are trained and where they teach is therefore crucial to understanding the constitution of publics. We analyse data from a cohort of student teachers regarding their reasons for becoming teachers, their future plans and their anxieties about their profession. We find little evidence of race and class differences among student teachers. Instead, the evidence suggests that student teachers shared a common purpose informed by hyper-particularistic notions of the public, which was not only raced and classed, but also limited to a narrow understanding of their own community. In light of this, we seek to explain how policy contributes to the conditions under which common purpose leads to segregated publics, closing off the generative possibilities of multiple publics.

**Keywords:** common purpose, multiple publics, South Africa, teacher education

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## Résumé

Dans une importante intervention scientifique sur les publics africains, Raufu Mustapha soutient que la multiplicité de publics n'est pas un obstacle, mais plutôt une ressource créative qui peut être utilisée pour forger, par la délibération publique, un objectif commun. Cependant, il n'explique pas comment fonctionne l'objectif commun et son but. Dans cet article, nous examinons la dynamique d'objectif commun chez les élèves-enseignants d'Afrique du Sud. Les enseignants inculquent aux jeunes les dispositions et les pratiques de délibération publique. La formation des enseignants et le lieu où ils enseignent sont donc cruciaux pour comprendre la constitution de publics. Nous analysons les données d'une cohorte d'élèves-enseignants sur leurs motivations à devenir enseignants, leurs projets d'avenir et leurs inquiétudes face à leur profession. Nous trouvons peu de preuves de différences résultant de la race et de la classe. Par contre, ces preuves suggèrent que les élèves-enseignants partagent un objectif commun éclairé par des notions hyper-particularistes du public, qui ne sont pas uniquement de race et de classe, mais également limitées à une compréhension étriquée de leur propre communauté. À la lumière de ceci, nous tentons d'expliquer comment la politique contribue aux conditions d'un objectif commun qui mène à des publics ségrégatifs, restreignant ainsi les possibilités génératives de publics multiples.

**Mots-clés :** objectif commun, publics multiples, Afrique du Sud, formation des enseignants

## Introduction

Education is widely viewed as a public good, in the sense that that it offers not only private benefits to an individual, but also broader benefits to a group of people – a public. While the *goods* of education have been subject to extensive critique by African scholars (perhaps most recently in response to student protests for decolonisation), there has been comparatively little debate around the idea of the *public* in Africa. Recent scholarship has therefore sought to rekindle theoretical and empirical enquiry into African publics (Mustapha 2012a; Awasom 2012; Manganga 2012; Singh 2014). In counterpoint to older work, this more recent work does not approach the multiplicity of publics in African societies as an inherent obstacle to forging a unified polity. Instead, it tries to show that multiple publics could also function as an untapped creative resource for forging common purpose within society through public deliberation.

This article contributes to this line of enquiry by investigating the dynamics of common purpose in teacher education in South Africa. We use the term 'common purpose' to mean the goals that people come to share as

a result of engaging in public deliberation. Seen this way, teacher education is a site where future teachers can potentially enter into deliberation with one another and thereby come to forge a common purpose. South Africa offers a test case of the deliberative potential of teacher education, because its highly segregated education system is characterised by multiple publics – different schools and universities continue to serve different groups of people according to their race and class. In this article we ask: what are the dynamics of common purpose in teacher education in this context?

To answer this question, we draw on a cohort study of student teachers at one university, which provides survey and focus group data. We examine their reasons for becoming a teacher, their future plans and their anxieties regarding their chosen career path. This allows us to construct a picture of their teaching goals after nearly a year of studying to become teachers. It provides an indication of the extent to which they have come to share a common purpose as prospective teachers and a guide to the ways in which they might constitute and reproduce particular publics as fully qualified teachers.

In the first section, we situate recent theoretical work on African publics within the context of South African education. In the second section, we explain the methodology of the study and its limitations. In the third section, we examine sample characteristics, focusing on the ways in which participants' education histories are inflected by race and class. In the fourth section, we examine data on the proxies of common purpose and consider how these differ with regard to race and class. In our concluding remarks, we reflect on how policy casts light on the findings.

When we began the analysis, we expected that student teachers' reasons, future plans and anxieties about teaching would differ by race and class, given these strong cleavages in the South African education system. However, we find little evidence of differences in purpose. Instead, the evidence suggests that student teachers share a common purpose, but this purpose is informed by hyper-particularistic notions of the public, which are tied not only to their own race and class, but also to the particular community in which they grew up. Moreover, this common purpose appears to have been shaped by highly individualised understandings of how teaching and learning should occur. Their future choices about where and how to teach might therefore reproduce increasingly finely segregated publics, even as they share a common purpose. This suggests that common purpose is necessary but not sufficient for forging a united polity. It must also be undergirded by an expansive social imagination, which has instead been narrowed by post-1994 education policymaking.

## Theorising Education Publics

### *Theorising the public*

The point of departure for our discussion is Raufu Mustapha's theoretical work on African publics (Mustapha 2012a; 2012b). The political impetus for this work, as he makes clear, is the emergence of neopatrimonial views of African societies around the period of structural adjustment. Neopatrimonial theories view African societies as characterised by profound power inequalities between an elite and a citizenry who are hermetically sealed off from each other (Mkandawire 2015). The interests of these two groups invariably conflict, and while citizens may try to get these interests to coincide by becoming clients of elites, they do so in vain. Elites always act in their own interests and dispossess citizens. As a result, civil society is required to stave off the worst excesses of political elites. Mustapha (2012a:2) argues that these are caricatures with a specific discursive function: they leave 'little room for an African whole; no common purpose or collective interests bound the disparate groups together .... Where there is no notion of a collective will or social solidarity, there cannot be a public or a "public sphere".' The elision of concepts of the public sphere and the public good in scholarly discourses about Africa, he implies, is no accident: it reflects the historical project of structural adjustment. To retrieve and rework the notion of the public, then, is an act of creative intellectual resistance.

Mustapha situates this work of creative retrieval between two theoretical traditions on the continent: the Nigerian tradition that engages with Ekeh's work on *Colonialism and the Two Publics* (1975) and the South African tradition that engages with Habermas's work on *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962).

For Ekeh, as Mustapha explains, colonialism is to Africa what feudalism was to Europe: the context for the emergence of the public as distinct from the private. But colonialism led to a unique historical configuration: the emergence of *two* publics – the primordial and the civic. The primordial public has its roots in precolonial institutions and therefore has legitimacy in the eyes of citizenry. The civic public, on the other hand, has its roots in colonial institutions and therefore fundamentally lacks any legitimacy. Africans who had been educated in colonial schools were able to access both publics, but they did so from a precarious and psychologically conflicted position. As a result, they came to belong to the civic public 'from which they gain materially but to which they give only grudgingly' and simultaneously to the primordial public 'from which they derive little or no material benefit but to which they are expected to give generously and do give materially' (Ekeh

1975: 108). This dialectic between the two publics, marked by conflicting notions of rights and obligation, promotes ethnic fragmentation, corruption and primordial attachments. Here, Western education institutions are seen as one of the primary drivers of this dialectical tension, insofar as they provide access to both publics and serve as an ideological tool by which a precarious African bourgeoisie attempts to legitimise their authority.

In contrast, the Habermasian conceptualisation of the public emphasises its role as a space for open talk and reasoned engagement, which was developed by the European bourgeoisie as a tool for moderating the worst excesses of modernising states. The South African tradition has been influenced by critics of Habermas, such as Fraser (1990), who focus on the dynamics of exclusion and oppression in the public sphere. Fraser traces the ways in which oppressed people respond to their political situation through an act of creative resistance – they carve out counter-publics. These counter-publics function as spaces in which oppressed groups develop their struggles for meaning, recognition and redress as a means of resisting the dominant public. As a result, there is not one public, but many publics riven by contestation and asymmetrical power relations. In South Africa, this has been most clearly articulated in questions around which public is served by education institutions, and searching analyses of the ways in which ‘publics are not self-evidently progressive and cannot be presumed automatically to have emancipatory interests in contradistinction to private constituencies’ (Singh 2014: 5). These concerns have been shaped by the country’s history of racial capitalism, in which institutions for economic exploitation have been deeply bound up in racial oppression (Alexander 1979). The resulting state has produced acute race, gender and class hierarchies, such that the dominant public sphere has been the preserve of white people.

As Mustapha notes, although these are two distinct traditions of theorising the public, they both espouse an understanding of the public as multiple and contested. Yet each is open to critique. In response to Ekeh, Mustapha argues that ethnicity is co-constructed by many different actors, not just Western-educated elites. By implication, the sharp distinction between the primordial and the civic is unwarranted. In response to Fraser, Mustapha argues that multiplicity does not in and of itself constitute a negation of common purpose and not all multiplicity is a function of inequality.

This is critical, for as Mustapha argues, African societies are characterised by a multiplicity of publics, constituted not only through the colonial dynamics of racial or ethnic inequality, but also more positively defined by the multiplicity of soundscapes and cultures in each society. In coming to terms with and negotiating the counter-publics and systemic exclusion,

Mustapha cautions, we must not lose sight of the possibilities of more equal and generative multiplicities. For this reason, he argues, the lack of debate around the notion of the public misses a critical opportunity to explore the ways in which different publics not only counter each other, but may also be mutually constitutive of shared identities and play a central role in forging common purpose through public deliberation.

Here, Mustapha holds to a Habermasian notion of public deliberation as being open to all members of a given society and as a form of reasoned communication in which 'Reason ... is not opposed to passion, but to tradition and authority, to coercion, and finally – because we are dealing here with communicative and not instrumentalist rationality – it is opposed to the strategic pursuit of ends that are not themselves subject to dialogue' (Hallin 1994, cited in Mustapha 2012b: 39) This is not a thin view of public deliberation as simply a consideration of the views of others. Instead, it is a deeper understanding of public deliberation as the process of submitting our political interests to public questioning, in part by debating fundamental policy agendas. The multiplicity of publics in turn offers a rich array of perspectives on policy agendas and therefore the potential for more holistic political decision-making. That is, it offers the possibility of forging a common purpose, and through this, a united polity. In this sense, Mustapha's argument has theoretical affinities with the work of Neville Alexander (1994) who sought to demonstrate that the multiplicity of languages on the continent was not an obstacle, but instead an epistemic resource. Similarly, for Mustapha, multiple publics are potential endogenous social arrangements for forging common purpose through the mechanism of public deliberation.

This is a theoretically attractive proposition. In the South African context, schools and universities have not only functioned as a mechanism for the reproduction of racial capitalism, but also as a site for resistance. The forms of public deliberation that emerged through these contestations, such as the Black Consciousness movement in the 1970s and the more recent student protests around decolonisation, illustrate the capacity of multiple publics to generate a powerful common purpose.

But Mustapha's theoretical work does not tell us how common purpose operates and to what effect. Indeed, the concept of common purpose, which lies at the heart of his argument, is never explicitly defined. We use the term to mean the goals that people come to share as a result of engaging in public deliberation. It combines a common-sense interpretation of the term with Mustapha's emphasis on deliberation. This definition allows us to conduct an empirical investigation into common purpose in teacher education in South Africa.

### *Multiple publics, a feature of the South African education system*

The schooling sector in South Africa offers a test case of multiple publics, for it continues to be marked by apartheid planning. Government schools in South Africa are divided between fee-paying and no-fee schools. Fee-paying schools are historically white and typically serve a multiracial elite. No-fee schools overwhelmingly serve impoverished black communities (we use the term ‘black’ to mean people classified as ‘native’, ‘coloured’ or ‘Indian’ under apartheid).<sup>2</sup> As there is no absolute cap on the fees that historically white schools can charge, some charge fees comparable with private schools, rendering them ‘semi-private’ (Motala & Carel 2019).

These race and class inequalities are complicated by decentralised governance at both provincial and school level. Fiscal and administrative powers over the schooling sector are primarily located in provincial authorities rather than in national authorities. A number of provinces are largely contiguous with the authoritarian ethnic ‘homelands’ created by the apartheid state. Under this form of ethnic federalism, resources, infrastructure and institutional capacity remain unevenly distributed among provinces (Kota et al. 2017). Schools in former ‘homelands’ not only have the highest level of poverty and institutional backlog stemming from apartheid-era planning, but also receive the least institutional support from the state (Department of Basic Education 2013).

A second form of decentralisation occurs at the level of the school. Each public school is required to appoint a school governing body, which is mandated to make decisions over the hiring of teachers, the language of instruction, religious practices and admission policy. Historically white fee-paying schools are effectively empowered to establish and maintain school communities that are contiguous with apartheid cultural norms. This is, in part, because school fees typically constitute a substantially greater proportion of financial inflow to the school than the state subsidy does and, as such, historically white schools have become sites where elites are able to capture a disproportionate share of national education spending (defined as the sum of public and private spending on education). Thus, despite the rationalisation of government funding across the education system, historically white schools are able to use school fees to capture the highest per capita expenditure (Motala 2009).

Faced with an increasingly inequitable institutional context, families have engaged in a form of ‘quintile-hopping’ in which they attempt to move their children up the race, class and regional hierarchy of schools (Fataar 2015). Thus, historically black schools lose an important source of black middle-class funding, while fee-paying schools crowd in greater resources and exercise



more freedom over their governance and budgets. This phenomenon likely contributes to the fracturing of inter-class allegiances among black communities and strengthens the perception that historically white schools are the standard of excellence to which black learners and schools should aspire.

Drawing on the preceding theoretical discussion, education publics in South Africa have several important characteristics. The first is that they are multiple, and this multiplicity is defined not only by race and class, but also increasingly by ethnic region. Second, these publics are in competition with each other, each jostling to gain greater proximity to whiteness, which is understood to constitute *the* standard of excellence (De Kock et al. 2018). Third, these publics interpenetrate one another. They are not as hermetically sealed off from one another as might first appear, insofar as families attempt to move between schools and therefore up the race, class and regional hierarchy. Fourth, white publics depend upon black publics, for they are increasingly reliant on the resources of black middle-class families.

This fragmented, unequal landscape persists into the higher education system, which is characterised by significant inter-institutional cleavages based on race, class, location and institutional type. The social and material effects of these cleavages were thrown into sharp relief during the FeesMustFall and RhodesMustFall student movements in 2015–2017, when the research for this study took place. These student movements highlighted the many ways in which universities harm black students and staff and brought into sharp relief the imperative to imagine freely (Gamedze 2015; Naidoo 2016). They asked us to consider what universalism and democracy look like within our education system (Dlakavu, Ndelu & Matandela 2017), and to examine who counts as an intellectual and what counts as intellectual work (Department of Black Imagination 2015). In short, their intellectual and political work posed first-order questions about who the public is and how it is constituted.

Teachers and their navigation of this complexity matter. Not only are they products of the education system they later enter as professionals, but how they are educated as student teachers significantly influences their capacity to interrupt, challenge or reinforce the social function of education. Teacher education is arguably central to the reproduction of the publics that emanate from education institutions. As Sayed et al. (2017) and Chisholm (2020) describe, the colonial and apartheid provisions for teacher training formed part of an enduring system of structural underdevelopment that would ensure intergenerational inequality.

Given this context, the ways in which student teachers understand their goals as teachers provide critical insights into their conceptions of education publics and how they intend to engage with them. Their reasoning provides

an important guide to how education publics might be reproduced and transformed. In line with deep race- and class-based cleavages in the schooling system, we expected that the student teachers' reasoning would mirror these cleavages as they would likely have had different education experiences and economic histories. We anticipated that this would reflect in different understandings of the role of education and the purpose of teaching.

## Methodology

In this article, we examine data from a cohort study of Foundation Phase student teachers at a South African university, which tracked them from their first year of admission (2015) into their final year (2018). This university, one of the largest providers of teacher education in the country, was created out of the merger of historically white and black teacher training colleges as well as technical colleges. Such mergers were introduced by the post-1994 government to desegregate universities, cut costs and improve the quality of teacher education.

The cohort study aimed to understand how student teachers develop their knowledge and practice over the course of their studies. For this reason, the study adopted a mixed-method design, gathering both questionnaire and focus group data.

We focus on data collected towards the end of the student teachers' first year of studies, since this period elicited their reasoning regarding their chosen profession. We first asked the entire cohort of student teachers to complete a self-administered questionnaire in English. We then conducted a focus group discussion with a purposive sample of eight student teachers to probe more deeply into their reasons for becoming teachers.

In this article, we use the term 'common purpose' to mean the goals that people come to share as a result of engaging in public deliberation, where we take their first year of university education to include a minimally deliberative element. As such, we use three pieces of information collected from the study to draw conclusions about common purpose: (1) student teachers' reasons to enter the profession; (2) their future plans regarding teaching; and (3) their anxieties about teaching. Each of these provides information on student teachers' reasoned objectives regarding their profession.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university concerned. All respondents provided informed consent to participate in the study and were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

There are two important limitations to the survey component of this study. First, since the survey was voluntary, it was difficult to realise a high response rate. In the absence of randomisation, the survey is likely affected by sampling bias. We discuss this in greater detail below. Second, this study as a whole is especially sensitive to the historical context in which it was designed and conducted. The study commenced in 2015, the year in which national student protests began and during which a nascent student movement emerged. While the national character of the student protests appears to have subsided since 2017, the impacts of mass political protest are still unfolding and have yet to be thoroughly understood. It appears to have been an important turning point in higher education financing insofar as the student movement compelled the government to announce tuition-free higher education for working-class and lower-middle-class students in 2017. As a result, the race and class composition of students has likely changed since 2015. As such, our cohort study offers an insight into teacher education on the cusp of change.

### **Sample Characteristics**

The study aimed to survey all student teachers in the 2015 BEd foundation cohort and achieved an 85 per cent response rate. The pattern of responses reveals two important limitations.

First, there was a noticeable difference in the response rates across races, where this difference is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (Table 1). If these response rates are correlated with student teachers' reasons for becoming a teacher, then these significantly different response rates may be a source of sampling bias. For this reason, the results from this survey should be interpreted with caution and might not generalise to the population of student teachers at this university. In addition, the sample sizes for 'Africans', 'Indians' and those declining to provide a racial identification are too small to identify meaningful statistical patterns. Consequently, we do not discuss results for them. Thus, while data from 211 respondents was gathered, the survey analysis is limited to data from 193 respondents.

Second, the racial distribution of student teachers in this university does not mirror the population of student teachers across all universities. 'African' and 'Indian' student teachers are considerably under-represented within this university. This is because there are racial clusters within cities and provinces. As such, the results might not be a reliable guide for the population of student teachers across South African universities.

In line with the feminisation of primary schooling in South Africa, nearly all the questionnaire respondents, or 97 per cent, identified as women. As a result, we do not report on gender differences in the sample.

In terms of their families' educational background, 44 per cent of the respondents had at least one parent with a post-school qualification, ranging from a technical diploma to a postgraduate degree (Table 2). Consistent with apartheid educational planning, 34 per cent of 'coloured' respondents had at least one parent with a post-school qualification compared with 57 per cent of white respondents. These differences are, to a limited extent, reflected in the respondents' tuition source (Table 3). At the time of this study, government (NSFAS) loans and bursaries were typically provided only when financial need was dire. Such funding was especially limited in the context of teacher education in order to reduce the supply of teachers (Le Roux & Breier 2012). In this respect, 1 per cent of white respondents indicated that they had received a NSFAS loan or a government bursary, compared with 16 per cent of 'coloured' respondents.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to their own schooling history, 82 per cent of the respondents had attended a fee-paying government school of some type, whereas just 7 per cent of the respondents had attended a no-fee government school and 4 per cent had attended a private school of some type (Table 4). The predominance of government schooling in the sample is reflective of the current structure of schooling in South Africa, where government schools continue to be the provider of first choice and are therefore central to the reproduction of the schooling system. Since government schools are characterised by de facto race and class segregation, it is not surprising that 56 per cent of the white respondents had attended a former model C school (historically white fee-paying government school) compared with 33 per cent of the 'coloured' respondents.

Indeed, the very low proportion of respondents who had attended historically black no-fee schools is consistent with broader national trends. Across South Africa, learners at fee-paying schools, which are for the most part historically white, are two to four times more likely to qualify for university than learners attending no-fee schools, which are historically black (Spaull 2013). However, attending a fee-paying school should not be taken as a definitive indication of students' wealth, since there are a substantial number of poor 'coloured' and 'African' schools that charge nominal fees.

Overall, there is evidence of racialised differences in parental qualifications, tuition sources and the type of high school the student teachers attended. While these are imperfect proxies of class, they are nevertheless suggestive of the ways in which race and class intersect in education. In the next section, we examine whether the student teachers' reasons, future plans and anxieties about teaching differed by race and by class, with the latter proxied by their parents' educational background.<sup>4</sup>

## **Investigating Common Purpose**

This section draws on questionnaire and focus group data to examine the student teachers' reasons for becoming a teacher, their future plans and their anxieties about teaching. Two key themes emerge in this discussion. The first is that the student teachers appeared to conceptualise their role as facilitating the change of children within an unchanging framework. The second is that they intended to pursue this role within schools similar to the ones they attended as learners – not only in terms of the race and class of the school, but also in terms of the school's location in the same community from which they came. There was limited evidence of any race or class-based differences among respondents.

## **Reasons to teach**

Respondents were asked to indicate why they chose to become a teacher by rating seventeen statements on a Likert scale: 'no importance', 'low importance', 'moderate importance' and 'high importance'. These items were designed to correspond with intrinsic, extrinsic or altruistic reasons. In some instances, items could be classified in more than one category.

An analysis of the internal consistency of the Likert scale indicates that the items have an overall Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  of 0.93 (Table 11 in Appendix), meeting a commonly accepted threshold of internal consistency.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, across all items, removing an item from the scale had little to no effect on the value of  $\alpha$  suggesting that the items may be closely aligned with the same underlying construct(s), such that there is no reason to remove any items from the question in the analysis.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of responses for each statement across the entire sample. Dominant themes relate to four broad categories: (1) the beneficial role teachers play in society; (2) the social status of teachers; (3) the material benefits of the profession, such as job security; and (4) the importance of relatives either as role models for entering the profession or encouraging students to pursue teaching as a career.

Grouping reasons of high or moderately high importance together, the overarching motivating reasons related to their perception of the beneficial role of teachers in society. These reasons included helping their community, being important to the country's future and contributing to social cohesion and reconciliation. A second set of reasons, emphasised by fewer respondents, related to the social status of the profession, while a small minority reported being motivated by extrinsic factors, such as salaries, the scope of programme options or funding availability.

In general, the differences in response between 'coloured' and white respondents were not statistically significant (Table 5). The only exception regarded the presence of a teacher in the family, which was an important motivating factor for 47 per cent of the 'coloured' respondents in contrast with 27 per cent of the white respondents, where this difference was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

With regard to parental education levels, there were four statistically significant differences (Table 6). The presence of a teacher in the family was a motivating reason for a larger proportion of respondents with tertiary-educated parents, while those without tertiary-educated parents tended to emphasise the presence of a teacher who had inspired them to teach.

In addition, more respondents without tertiary-educated parents emphasised their ability to foster reconciliation and underscored community respect for teachers. This suggests that the perceived social benefits and social status of teaching may have been important for more working-class respondents than middle-class respondents.

In general, however, the pattern of responses across both groups is largely similar. In particular, nearly all respondents in both groups reported that helping their community as a teacher was an important motivation, together with teachers being important to the future of the country.

Taken together, there is limited evidence of differences in race and class. In general, the respondents tended to have similar patterns of response. The overarching motivating reasons related to their perception of the beneficial role of teachers in society. A second set of reasons, emphasised by fewer respondents, related to the social status of the profession and their ability to find secure work as teachers. These two reasons are plausibly interrelated on grounds that finding secure work as teachers is in part a function of the social importance allocated to the teaching profession and contributes to the social status of teaching. Very few respondents emphasised factors that typically motivate people to enter the teaching profession in South Africa in public discourse – teacher salaries, funding or the lack of other options.

Qualitative data supports these findings as student teachers across all focus groups emphasised the desire to work with children as an important factor. Sentiments such as the following emerged strongly in nearly every focus group: 'I've always had a love for children and so I wanted to take that into education' (Student Teacher, FG1). However, focus group data also suggested that these motivations came into tension with the low social esteem of teaching. For example, for the participant in the extract that follows, a desire to work with children was not sufficient to pursue teaching as her first choice. She explained:

Teaching was initially my first choice .... But then because teachers get paid so little, my parents wanted me to do law. So, I did that for two-and-a-half years, hated every second of it and then I sat in a school for about two weeks just to see ... and then I realised okay this is what I want to do, and then I should apply to do, switch over next year to teaching. (Student Teacher, FG1)

In the face of opposition to a teaching career, some participants found that experiencing teachers' work first-hand strengthened their resolve. This participant, for instance, was provided an opportunity to experience teachers' work by her cousin, who was a teacher. She observed her cousin's class and found that she 'loved being in a classroom' (Student Teacher, FG1).

Participants not only stressed a personal preference for working with children but indicated a shared belief that teaching was deeply socially beneficial. One participant, for instance, expressed gratification in choosing to teach:

I've always had an immense passion for working with children and I believe that education is one of the most important tools that us human beings need to have. And I know that I can make a difference. (Student Teacher, FG 3)

Here, the participant's reference to education as 'one of the most important tools' illustrates a belief that teaching is among the most socially beneficial professions. This was often explained via recourse to personal experience. One respondent explained that when she was still in primary school teachers would ask her to supervise younger classes, so she experienced how teaching could enable one to 'make a difference' (Student Teacher, FG 2).

This framing of the social benefits of teaching as 'making a difference' occurred repeatedly across focus groups: participants could facilitate learning the national curriculum so that children could eventually enter the labour market successfully. Only one participant mentioned systemic challenges in education, and no participant reflected critically on labour market outcomes as the main criterion of learning achievement. To the extent that student teachers were intent on making a difference, their range did not appear to encompass ends outside of labour market participation and did not stretch towards fundamental change within the classroom, school or education system.

This individualised emphasis on 'making a difference' was shared across race groups. The participants did not report a desire to change the established classroom dynamic or to help children reimagine and change society as reasons for entering teaching. Rather, increased exposure to existing classroom experiences provided the impetus for many respondents to enter the teaching profession. The student teachers appear to have been motivated to facilitate children's individual change within an unchanging social framework.

### *Future plans*

This interpretation is reinforced by the participants' discussions of future plans oriented around learners' attitude deficits and home backgrounds and how these negatively impact their future prospects, regardless of whether the participants planned to teach in their own communities or outside them. One student teacher (FG1) explained, 'Some people live in a home where they have parents who don't work, and they see that from young ... and you normally follow in your parents' footsteps'. Similarly, another student teacher (FG2) explained, 'I thought, if I were to become a Foundation Phase teacher, I could develop a love for school at that early age' (Student Teacher, FG2). These responses are premised on the belief that many learners do not conform to the 'correct' attitude towards school, so the role of student teachers is consequently to foster attitudinal change among learners. This suggests a particular view of learning: that 'incorrect' learner attitudes are responsible for poor learning outcomes. Participants may have therefore viewed their prospective role in terms of inculcating an ethos of personal responsibility in their learners. This is consistent with their individualised understanding of aiming to 'make a difference' in children's lives.

Moreover, it appears that many participants intended to 'make a difference' in schools that are similar to the ones they attended as learners. When asked where they planned to teach after qualifying (Table 7), 46 per cent of the respondents indicated that they planned to teach at their old school or a school in their community, followed by 19 per cent who indicated that they wanted to teach overseas; 13 per cent planned to teach in a no-fee school in an urban or rural area; while 9 per cent planned to teach at a fee-paying former model C school; and 1 per cent planned to teach in a private school.

Examining this distribution in terms of the education history of the respondents shows a distinction between (1) teaching at a school similar to the one they had attended in terms of its socio-economic profile, and (2) teaching at a school that was in the same community they had grown up in. For those who had attended a fee-paying school, 45 per cent wanted to teach at their old school or in their community, and an additional 10 per cent wanted to teach at a fee-paying former model C school. Taken together, 55 per cent wanted to teach at a school that had similar socio-economic characteristics as their own. For those who had attended no-fee schools, 60 per cent wanted to teach at their old school or in their community, while an additional 27 per cent wanted to teach at a no-fee school – a total of 87 per cent.



There is no statistically significant difference in the pattern of responses by race (Table 8) or class as proxied by parental educational levels (Table 9).

Across race and class categories then, it seems that the majority of respondents planned to teach at a school with a similar race and class profile as their own school. For many, however, learners also had to be acculturated within *the same community*. This suggests a hyper-particularistic conception of the public. It includes race and class, but also language, region and community. By implication then, for many respondents, their beliefs about the socially beneficial nature of teaching are likely oriented towards these fine-grained publics.

This interpretation is strengthened when examining the student teachers' anxieties about teaching. The respondents were asked an open-ended question: 'What are your anxieties with regard to your chosen career path in the year ahead?' The answers were coded according to the most prominent theme that emerged in their responses. Table 10 shows a breakdown of these coded anxieties.

The questionnaire was administered after teaching practice completion, so the question provides some evidence about the extent to which the participants' teaching experience corresponds with their beliefs about the teaching profession. The primary concern for student teachers was their ability to cope with the academic workload in the coming years of their degree (27 per cent), followed by worries that they would not enjoy teaching (10 per cent) and that they would not benefit learners (9 per cent). These anxieties seem to reflect concerns with their own agency and personal responsibility.

More telling, perhaps, is that only one respondent provided an answer interpreted as a concern about the language of instruction, writing, 'The children won't understand anything I teach them'. Given linguistic diversity and a policy commitment to mother-tongue instruction at Foundation Phase, the lack of evidence about language concerns is consistent with the respondents' plans to teach at schools similar to those where they received their education, particularly since linguistic anxieties would presumably be heightened by teaching in a school with a different linguistic profile to their own.

## **Conclusion And Discussion**

We expected that student teachers' reasons, future plans and anxieties about teaching would differ by race and class, given these cleavages in the education system. However, we found limited evidence of these differences. Instead, we found evidence that student teachers shared a common purpose in two senses.

In the first sense, they appeared to share a normative commitment to learners, which was underpinned by individualised notions of teaching in which teachers need to correct learners' deficits in attitude. Comments about the predisposition of poor learners to 'mimic' their parents' life choices and life paths suggest that they view education as an individualised responsibility: that education best enables learners to escape poverty and 'make a difference' in their communities, and that reasons for non-completion are rooted in learners' attitude deficits. Across race and class lines there appeared to be a common view of poverty as a pathology and limited attentiveness to the systematic underdevelopment of black working-class schools in the country.

Second, we found evidence that student teachers were committed to very specific learners: not only those who shared their race and class, but also those who came from the same community in which they grew up. This suggests that student teachers shared a hyper-particularistic conceptualisation of the public, defined in terms of not only race and class, but also language, region and community. So, while student teachers shared a common purpose, the nature of this purpose is such that their future choices might reproduce very finely segregated publics. This is consistent with a recent study of three universities in South Africa, which identified a large degree of circularity between student teachers' own schooling backgrounds and the schools in which they did their teaching practice (Sayed & McDonald 2017).

We must caution, however, that the full range of class and race positions in South Africa is not captured in our study. As discussed above, the sample probably excludes the views of those who are deeply impoverished as well as the views of wealthy students, and the analysis of racial differences is limited to white and 'coloured' student teachers. Furthermore, the study was undertaken towards the end of the first year of the student teacher programme. It is possible that student teachers might have come to hold different views by the end of their four-year degree.

In our concluding remarks, we reflect on the ways in which policy creates the conditions under which student teachers from different race and class backgrounds could come to share a common purpose which reflects hyper-particularistic, narrow conceptions of the public. To do this, we examine three policy moments for teachers. The first policy moment concerns university student recruitment. Policy could, as it has in other countries such as Tanzania (Mbilyini 1982) and Zambia (Mwalimu 2014), focus on randomly allocating student teachers to different universities to disrupt race, class or regional segregation. However, in South Africa, policy is largely silent on this issue. Prospective student teachers can apply to any university of their choice, while universities can set their own fees and accept their own

students. The result is that race, class and linguistic patterns are reproduced within the university system (Le Roux & Breier 2012).

The second policy moment concerns student teachers' choice of school for teaching practice. Here, policy could allocate student teachers to schools to break the raced, classed and linguistic reproduction of teaching practice experiences. Again, in South Africa, policy is silent on this issue. Universities have therefore allowed student teachers in the past to choose their own schools for teaching practice, with predictable patterns of reproduction in terms of race and class (Sayed et al. 2018).

The third policy moment concerns teacher recruitment. In this respect, the national government has a strong policy voice for choice. The Employment of Educators Act (1996a) explicitly gives teachers the right to choose where to apply for a position. The South African Schools Act (1996b) gives schools the right to be involved in the recruitment of teachers. The result is that teachers tend to apply to schools that are similar to their education history and schools tend to hire teachers that have a similar race, class and linguistic profile to the school (Sayed 2016).

These three policy moments reflect the dilemmas of a post-apartheid government caught in the trade-off between equity and choice. Rather than redistributing resources throughout the education system, it elected to position a pro-poor policy-making and resourcing model within a broader commitment to educational choice (Woolman & Fleisch 2006). This commitment to choice means that, at each step along the path of teacher education and recruitment, the experiential basis of prospective teachers is not expanded. Instead, it is maintained along narrow lines that reflect not only race and class identities, but also the linguistic and regional identities that are salient under an ethnic federal state. In this way, policy in fact *restricts* the set of meaningful choices that education actors can make, because they have limited experience with which to imagine choices that disrupt centuries of segregation. On this reading, a commitment to choice emerges as an instrument for limiting the social imagination.

If this is correct, then common purpose is not sufficient to build a polity from multiple publics. It must also be accompanied by an expansive social imagination, one rooted in lived experience. For without this, common purpose can reproduce segregation and inequality, closing off the generative possibilities of multiple publics. This suggests perhaps a more hopeful role for policy. The past is sometimes invoked as something that weighs down policy, which burdens it and compels it to fail. Yet seen from a different light, policy has the ability to bring actors into confrontation with substantively different historical realities. In doing so, it can contribute to expanding their imaginations, expanding the *set* of choices that actors can imagine for themselves.

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## Notes

1. This article is a product of a Meaning-making Research Initiative (MRI) grant from CODESRIA supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY).
2. The state uses these terms for the purposes of redress. These categories have no biological basis.
3. However, the total proportion of respondents on NSFAS and government funding was very low – 12% of the entire sample. This is consistent with post-1994 education planning at the time, which sought to reduce the supply of new teachers in the education system by reducing funding for initial teacher education (Le Roux & Breier 2012). As a result, students who were economically needy may not have received government funding at the time.
4. We do not examine differences in respondents' school histories and tuition sources, since the number of respondents who had been to no-fee schools ( $n=15$ ) and the number who had received government funding of some sort ( $n=16$ ) are too small to generate reliable results.
5. A Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.9 and above suggests a high level of similarity in what the items are measuring. We can interpret this to mean that the items are coalescing around something to do with the reasons to become a teacher. However, this does not mean that these items are measuring a single underlying construct. To determine this, a factor analysis would be necessary.

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## Appendices

### Tables

**Table 1:** Student teachers' response rates by race

	<b>Intended Sample</b>	<b>Realised Sample</b>	<b>Response Rate %</b>
African	25	11	44
Coloured	127	118	93
White	92	75	82
Indian	3	1	33
Other/missing	-	6	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>85</b>

$\chi^2 = 844$ ;  $df = 16$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.000,  $n=211$

**Table 2:** Respondents whose parents have a post-school qualification

	<b>Coloured</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Total</b>
No	62	33	56
Yes	34	57	44
Missing	4	9	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

$\chi^2 = 15.1223$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.001,  $n=193$

Source: Authors' own

**Table 3:** Respondents by tuition source

	Coloured	White	Total
I am paying my own tuition	1	7	3
I have received a government bursary	3	0	2
I have received an NSFAS loan	13	1	10
I have received a private bursary or scholarship	4	7	5
I took out a student loan from the bank	8	13	9
I am working part time	2	1	1
My family is paying for my studies	47	68	53
Missing	22	3	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

$\chi^2 = 31.0143$ ;  $df = 7$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ,  $n=193$

*Source:* Authors' own

**Table 4:** Respondents by high school type

	Coloured	White	Total
No fee government school	8	0	7
Fee paying government school	49	33	42
Fee paying government school (former model C)	33	56	40
Low fee private school	1	1	1
High fee private school	3	4	3
Other	4	0	3
Missing	2	5	4
Total	100	100	100

Pearson's Chi-squared test:  $\chi^2 = 20.3270$ ;  $df = 6$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.002$ ,  $n=193$

*Source:* Authors' own



**Table 5:** Respondents who identify items as moderate to high importance in becoming a teacher disaggregated by race

<b>Reasons For Becoming A Teacher</b>	<b>Coloured</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>P-Value</b>
I can help my community as a teacher	97	96	0.05	0.83
Teachers are important to the future of our country	95	92	0.67	0.41
Teaching is an admirable profession	91	87	0.76	0.38
I can influence social cohesion in my school	89	84	1.01	0.32
I can contribute to enhancing reconciliation	81	73	1.36	0.24
I had a teacher who inspired me to teach	70	69	0.02	0.88
Teachers have good job security	67	67	0.00	0.97
Teachers can always find a job	68	59	1.66	0.20
Teachers are in leadership positions	61	69	1.38	0.24
Teachers are respected in my community	57	51	0.69	0.41
Someone in my family is a teacher	47	27	7.68	0.01
Teaching gives me more freedom than other jobs	27	29	0.11	0.74
Teachers are well paid	28	20	1.56	0.21
I could not get into my first choice of degree	15	9	1.43	0.23
My family pushed me to become a teacher	10	5	1.41	0.24
I received funding to study to be a teacher	8	7	0.06	0.80

\*Note: results from an mtest in Stata

Source: Authors' own

**Table 6:** Respondents who identify items as moderate to high importance in becoming a teacher disaggregated by parents’ qualifications

Reasons For Becoming A Teacher	Parents Have A Post-School Qualification		Chi-Square	P-Value
	No	Yes		
I can help my community as a teacher	97	98	0.04	0.84
Teachers are important to the future of our country	95	95	0.08	0.77
Teaching is an admirable profession	87	91	0.66	0.42
I can influence social cohesion in my school	86	90	0.53	0.47
I can contribute to enhancing reconciliation	84	72	2.88	0.09
I had a teacher who inspired me to teach	76	65	3.20	0.07
Teachers have good job security	66	69	0.20	0.66
Teachers can always find a job	69	61	1.30	0.26
Teachers are in leadership positions	59	67	1.32	0.25
Teachers are respected in my community	61	49	2.87	0.09
Someone in my family is a teacher	26	56	17.60	0.00
Teaching will give me more freedom than other jobs	27	34	1.08	0.30
Teachers are well paid	28	25	0.25	0.62
I could not get into my first choice of degree	18	10	2.47	0.12
My family pushed me to become a teacher	8	11	0.57	0.45
I received funding to study to be a teacher	8	10	0.25	0.62

\*Note: results from an mtest in Stata

Source: Authors’ own

**Table 7:** Respondents' future plans by school type

Where do you Plan to Teach?	Fee-Paying	No-Fee	All
My old school or a school in my community	45	60	46
A no-fee school in a rural area	7	20	8
A no-fee school in an urban area	5	7	5
Private school	1	0	1
Former model C	10	0	9
I want to leave and teach overseas	20	7	19
Other	10	7	10
Missing	3	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

$\chi^2 = 7.3222$ ;  $df = 7$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.396$ ,  $n=193$

Source: Authors' own

**Table 8:** Respondents' future plans by race

Where do you Plan to Teach?	Coloured	White	All
My old school or a school in my community	44	51	47
A no-fee school in a rural area	9	1	6
A no-fee school in an urban area	4	3	4
Private school	1	3	2
Former model C	5	11	7
I want to leave and teach overseas	21	21	21
Other	11	11	11
Missing	4	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

$\chi^2 = 7.8525$ ;  $df = 7$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.346$ ;  $n=193$ .

Columns do not always add up to 100% due to rounding off

Source: Authors' own

**Table 9:** Respondents’ future plans by parental qualifications

Where do you Plan to Teach?	Parents Have Post-School Qualifications		All
	No	Yes	
My old school or a school in my community	46	44	45
A no-fee school in a rural area	11	3	8
A no-fee school in an urban area	5	5	5
Private school in a city	1	1	1
Former model C in a city	5	11	8
I want to leave and teach overseas	17	22	19
Other	10	13	11
Missing	4	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

$\chi^2 = 11.5763$ ;  $df = 7$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.115$ ;  $n=193$ .

Columns do not always add up to 100% due to rounding off

Source: Authors’ own

**Table 10:** Frequency of anxieties

Anxieties	Frequency	Per Cent
High academic workload	58	27
No response	28	13
Won’t enjoy teaching	22	10
Won’t benefit learners	19	9
Won’t find job	15	7
Difficult learner behaviour	15	7
Personal psychological wellbeing	12	6
No anxieties	8	4
Won’t be able to teach well	8	4
Won’t be able to pay student fees	7	3
Lack self-confidence	4	2
Won’t succeed as teacher	4	2
Being placed in a school that scares me	3	1
Unsure about my anxieties	3	1

Racist lecturers	2	1
Worried about language of instruction	1	0
Low teacher salary	1	0
Low teacher status	1	0

Source: Authors' own

**Table 11:** Internal consistency of Likert scale

ITEM	Item Test Correlation	Item-Rest Correlation	Average Inter-Item Covariance	Cronbach's Alpha
I had a teacher who inspired me to teach	0.156	0.062	60.242	0.941
Someone in my family is a teacher	0.959	0.952	51.397	0.919
Teaching is an admirable profession	0.814	0.778	51.592	0.922
Teachers are respected in my community	0.635	0.546	51.713	0.932
Teachers are well paid	0.964	0.957	51.376	0.919
I can influence social cohesion in schools	0.729	0.672	51.650	0.925
Teachers have good job security	0.785	0.738	50.757	0.923
Teachers can always find a job	0.961	0.954	51.466	0.919
My family pushed me to become a teacher	0.959	0.951	51.379	0.919
I can contribute to enhancing reconciliation	0.402	0.306	56.591	0.936
I received funding to study to be a teacher	0.785	0.737	50.626	0.923
I could not get into my degree of first choice	0.540	0.481	55.974	0.930
Teachers are in leadership positions	0.963	0.956	51.440	0.919
Teaching gives me more freedom than other jobs	0.959	0.952	51.412	0.919
Teachers are important to the future of our country	0.709	0.680	56.075	0.927
I can help my community as a teacher	0.089	0.084	60.997	0.934
Test scale			53.418	0.930

Note: Cronbach's coefficient reported for total scale; the effects of removing an item from the scale are not reported for the sake of brevity.

Source: Authors' own

Figure

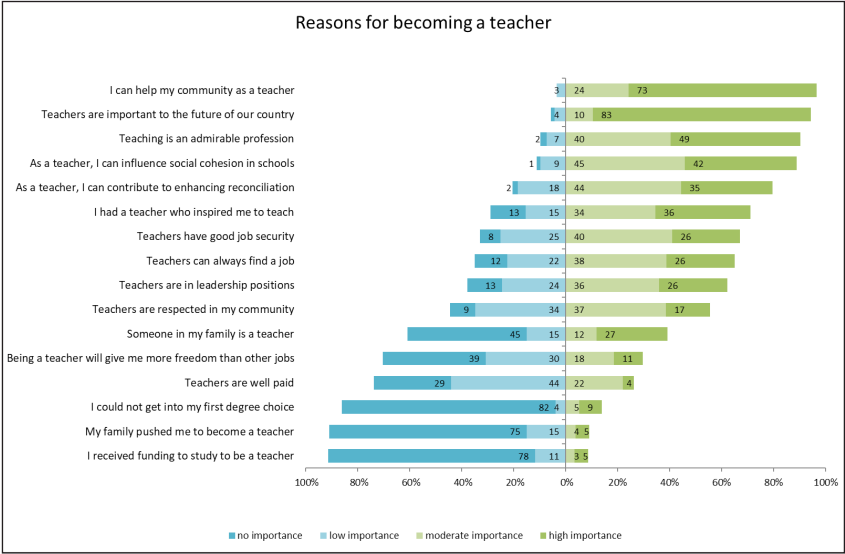


Figure 1: Reasons for becoming a teacher

Source: Authors' own

