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Challenging the Politics of the Teacher Accountability Movement: Toward a More Hopeful Educational Future

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Challenging the Politics of the Teacher Accountability Movement: Toward a more hopeful educational future

Preface

Gail M. Boldt

Introduction

William Ayers

Contributors:

Greg Dimitriadis & Marc Lamont Hill

Jeff Duncan-Andrade

Celia Genishi & Anne Haas Dyson

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Coda

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College of Education

OCCASIONAL PAPERS 27 SPRING 2012

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Preface

Gail M. Boldt

In January, President Obama went to the University of Michigan to announce new measures designed to battle the rising costs of college tuition. Speaking to an enthusiastic crowd of students, the President promised: "We are putting colleges on notice—you can't keep, you can't assume that you'll just jack up tuition every single year. If you can't stop tuition from going up, then the funding you get from taxpayers each year will go down. We should push colleges to do better. We should hold them accountable if they don't" (*Huffington Post*, 2012).

For anyone who has worked in pre-kindergarten through high school public education over the past decade, the significance of the President's use of the term "accountable" could not be missed. By now, ten years after the passage of No Child Left Behind and three years into Race to the Top, the carrot and stick approach—"Do what we say and hope to be rewarded; fail to do what we say and expect punishment"—has become entrenched in the consciousness of American educators. The rise to prominence of the accountability discourse has been a part of a drive to privatize a once public sector, supported by a nation-wide adoption of the belief that 1) the private sector is effectively regulated by mechanisms at play in the marketplace and that 2) this model provides an ideal for the reformation of public education.

Central to the drive for privatization has been the assumption that teachers need to become subject to the rigors of empirically determined approaches for increased efficiency, best practices, and quantifiable measures of effectiveness to assure that every penny of funding was well spent and that nothing was wasted (Shore and Wright, 2000). Of course, such an approach required reducing what counts as worthwhile education to a standardized list of measurable goals determined by outside experts which also, not coincidentally, allowed for the scaling of commercial curriculum and training that made education an ever more attractive field for corporate and venture capitalist investment (Ash, 2012).

It has not escaped the notice of those of us who work in university-level teacher education programs that thus far, our K-12 colleagues have borne the brunt of demonization and deprofessionalization, of the dehumanizing effects of standardization in their relationships with students and the impoverishment of curriculum. Still, because the work of university-level teacher education is tied to state departments of education for teacher licensure, teacher educators have not escaped assaults on our professional judgment or academic freedom when it comes to the ways we teach and assess our students. The President's announcement that universities will increasingly be subjected to the same kinds of accountability measures that we have seen applied to primary and secondary school educators sends chills down our spines; many of us have long feared that it was only a matter of time until we suffered a similar loss of control over our professional lives and the things we hold most dear that our K-12 colleagues have already faced.

I was an elementary school teacher in the decade of the 1990's, in a time and place where I had not only substantial control over the daily curriculum, but also real support and mentoring as I struggled with the incredibly difficult and incredibly rewarding task of becoming the best teacher I could be for the unique group of children who year after year came into my classroom. The principal of the school where I taught called the teachers her "brain trust." She simultaneously held us to high expectations for what our students could accomplish and queried us about what we needed to achieve those things with our students. I remember my years in that school as the best kind of exhausting and all-consuming challenge. For me and other teachers at that school, the reward for our investment of blood, sweat and tears and the reward to the administration for the investment of respect, resources and time, came in our ability to work individually and collegially toward the creation of classrooms in which both students and teachers could often find their best selves.

Despite everything that has changed in the years I have been out of an elementary classroom, I continue to work with my teacher education students as if expert teacher knowledge and passion still matter. My students are smart and talented and they long to create rich and meaningful classrooms where all children can succeed in ways that exceed what is imagined and valued in many of the standardized curricula and tests that they must implement as teachers. Still, I worry with them about how to navigate the demands for teaching to measures of market efficiency and impoverished proofs of effectiveness and yet still find the support, commitment and imagination to rise above the current deadening state of education. The President's speech simply compounds that worry for me, as I wonder how my classroom practices may be forced to change in the brave new world "value added" university education.

In the spring of 2011, just as the protests over Wisconsin governor Scott Walker's assault on public sector unions were in full force, I met Bill Ayers at a discussion held among teachers and university faculty at Park Forest Elementary School in State College, Pennsylvania. Under the leadership of Principal Donnan Stoicovy, Park Forest teachers work deliberately with students to create a school community in which all members are thoughtful and active participants in a democratic approach to education. Not surprisingly, the relationship between the state of American democracy and the deprofessionalization of teachers was a frequent topic of conversation. At one point, our talk turned to the need for high profile efforts to take back the discourses about teachers and education.

This was the conversation that was on my mind when I proposed this special issue of the Bank Street Occasional Papers, *Challenging the Politics of the Teacher Accountability Movement: Toward a More Hopeful Educational Future*. I was delighted that Bill Ayers agreed to join me as co-editor. In this issue, we present a series of short essays by eleven leading American educators. We invited each contributor to submit what we envisioned as expressions of concern, conviction, passion, and even anger over the discourses currently at play and the impact of the teacher accountability movement on the future of education. We hope that readers will share our excitement about reading the commentaries of these educators who agreed to write this issue with us.

To maximize the impact of these essays, we are releasing them in three groups (authors and titles below). The first group, released with this preface, includes Bill Ayers' introduction and three essays that lay out analyses and criticisms of the languages and logics that have framed the accountability movement. The second group, to be released two weeks later, includes reports from classrooms, schools and districts—dispatches from the field. The third group primarily addresses the future, calling for a different set of values and priorities and a different understanding of educational reform. We will release this group two weeks after the second group. When completed, the entire collection will be found as a single journal issue on this website.

Our goal is that this collection, available as free on-line content, will serve as an electronic manifesto. It is intended as a resource for anyone concerned with re-framing and taking back the educational conversation, moving toward meaningful school reform that is based in a commitment to creating conditions under which teachers can develop the kinds of complex and sophisticated professional knowledges and practices that support authentic student learning. We imagine the focused brevity and strong language of these pieces lending to their usability. We invite anyone who wishes to join us in taking back the discourses of teaching and education to use these essays promiscuously and with the same passionate abandon you will find within them.

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Introduction:

Diving into the Wreckage: Our Schools, Education Reform, and the Future Society

William Ayers

Multiple Choice Questions:

A typical American classroom has as much to offer an inquiring mind as does:

- A) a vacant lot
- B) a country road
- C) a street corner
- D) the city dump
- E) the custodian's closet
- F) none of the above

Analogy Test:

High-stakes, standardized testing is to learning as:

- A) memorizing a flight manual is to flying
- B) watching an episode of Hawaii Five-O is to doing police work
- C) exchanging marriage vows is to a successful relationship
- D) reading Gray's Anatomy is to practicing surgery
- E) singing the national anthem is to citizenship
- F) all of the above

Education is a perennial arena of struggle as well as hope: struggle because it stirs in us the need to look at the world anew, to question what we have created, and to wonder once again what's worthwhile for human beings to know and experience; and hope because it gestures toward a possible future, toward the impending, toward the coming of the new and the strange. Education is where we ask how we might engage, enlarge, and change our lives; it's where we confront our dreams and fight out notions of the good life; it's where we try to comprehend, apprehend, or possibly even transform all that we find before us.

What does it mean to be human in the 21st Century? What are we? Where have we come from, and where are we headed? Education raises these most fundamental questions again and again. It's a yeasty and combustible brew and a contested space, an essential and natural site of conflict—sometimes restrained, other times in chaotic eruption—and it was always so. In this special issue of the Bank Street [Occasional Papers](#), we will dive into the wreckage, engage the fight, and hope to reclaim the ground of education in and for democracy.

In the U.S. today, we are insistently encouraged to think of education as a product like a car or a refrigerator, a box of bolts or a screw driver—something bought and sold in the marketplace like any other commodity. The controlling metaphor for the schoolhouse is a business run by a CEO, with teachers as workers and students as the raw material bumping along the assembly line while information is incrementally stuffed into their little up-turned heads; within this model it's rather easy to think that “downsizing” the least productive units, “outsourcing” and privatizing a space that was once public is a natural event; that teaching toward a simple standardized metric, and relentlessly applying state-administered (but privately-developed and quite profitable) tests to determine the “outcomes,” is a rational proxy for real learning; that centrally controlled “standards” for curriculum and teaching are commonsensical; that “zero tolerance” for student misbehavior as a stand-in for child development or justice is sane; and that “accountability,” that is, a range of sanctions on students, teachers, and schools—but never on law-makers, foundations, corporations, or high officials—is logical and level-headed. This is in fact what a range of wealthy “reformers,” noisy politicians, and their chattering pundits in the bought media call “school reform.”

The magic ingredients for this reform recipe are three: replace the public schools with some sort of privately-controlled administration; destroy teachers' ability to speak with any sustained or unified voice; and sort the winners relentlessly from the losers—test, test, TEST! The operative image for these moves has by now become quite familiar: education is an individual consumer good, neither a public trust nor a social good, and certainly not a fundamental human right. Management, inputs and outcomes, efficiency, cost controls, profit and loss—the dominant language of this kind of reform doesn't leave much room for doubt, or much space to breathe.

The forces fighting to create the new common-sense—school-reform-normal—are led by a band of dilettante billionaires—Bill Gates, Michael Bloomberg, Sam Walton, Eli Broad, the Koch brothers—who work relentlessly to take up all the available space. Preaching, persuading, and promoting, they often spread around massive amounts of cash to make their points. When Rupert Murdoch was in deep water in the summer of 2011, it came to light that Joel Klein, a leading “reformer” as head of the New York City public schools (and whose own kids attended private schools with small class size, well-resourced classrooms, opportunities for the arts, and more), was on Murdoch's payroll. Apparently the two saw eye to eye on a core set of education principles: that charter schools needed to expand; poor instructors (the now-famous “lazy incompetent teachers”) should be weeded out; and the power of the teachers union must be curtailed. These new “marketeers” aim to create a certain kind of schooling aligned with a particular social vision.

Those of us who resist that narrow vision—who enter the contested space intent on fighting for more democracy, more joy and justice, and more diversity of thought and desire—and who hope to live in a more emancipated society, struggle to create and nurture robust schools. In a vibrant and liberated culture, schools would make an iron commitment to free inquiry, open questioning, and full

participation; access and equity and simple fairness; a curriculum that encourages independent thought and judgment; and a base-line standard that recognizes the humanity of each participant. As opposed to obedience and conformity, the foundational curriculum would promote initiative, courage, imagination, and creativity. Schools in an authentic and animated democracy would put the highest priority on fostering free people oriented toward enlightenment and liberation.

Schools for compliance and conformity are characterized by passivity and fatalism and infused with anti-intellectualism and irrelevance. They turn on technologies of control and normalization—elaborate schemes for managing the mob, knotted system of rules and discipline, exhaustive machinery of schedules and clocks, laborious programs of sorting the crowd through testing and punishing, grading, assessing, and judging—everyone in a designated place and a place for everyone. Knowing and accepting one's pigeonhole on the towering and barren cliff becomes the only lesson one really needs, and all of this offends a robust sense of schooling for participatory democracy; it conforms more easily to schooling for a society at the end of empire, bent on permanent war and experiencing the fatal eclipse of the public square.

By contrast, teaching toward freedom and democracy is based on a common faith in the incalculable value of every human being, and acts on the principle that the fullest development of all is the condition for the full development of each, and, conversely, that the fullest development of each is the condition for the full development of all.

We expect schools in a democratic society to be defined by a spirit of cooperation, inclusion, and participation, places that honor diversity while building unity. Schools in a realized democracy resist the overspecialization of human activity—the separation of the head from the hand, the heart from the brain, and the creative from the serviceable.

On the side of a liberating and humanizing education is a pedagogy of questioning, an approach that opens rather than closes the process of thinking, comparing, reasoning, perspective-taking, and dialogue. It demands something upending and revolutionary from students and teachers alike: Repudiate your place in the pecking order. It urges, remove that distorted, congenial mask of compliance: You must change!

The ethical core of teaching toward tomorrow is necessarily designed to create hope and a sense of agency in students. The big lessons are these: history is still in-the-making, the future unknown and unknowable, and what you do or don't do will make a difference; each of us is a work-in-progress—unfinished, dynamic, in-process, on the move and on the make—swimming through the wreckage toward a distant and indistinct shore; you don't need anyone's permission to interrogate the world.

When the aim of education is the absorption of facts, the acquisition of knowledge becomes exclusively and exhaustively selfish, and there is no obvious social motive for learning. The measure of success is always a competitive one. People are turned against one another, and every difference becomes a

potential deficit. Getting ahead of others is the primary goal in such places, and mutual assistance, which can be so natural in other human affairs, is severely restricted or banned.

On the other hand, where active work is the order of the day, helping others is not a form of charity, something that impoverishes both recipient and benefactor. Rather, a spirit of open communication, interchange, and analysis becomes commonplace. In these settings there is a certain natural disorder, a certain amount of anarchy and chaos, as there is in any busy workshop. But there is a deeper discipline at work, the discipline of getting things done and learning through life.

Knowledge is an inherently public good—something that can be reproduced at little or no cost, and, like love, is generative: the more you have, the better off you become; the more you give away, the more you have. Offering knowledge and learning and education to others diminishes nothing. In a flourishing democracy, knowledge is shared without any reservation or restrictions whatsoever. This points us toward an education that could be, but is not yet, an education toward complete human development—humanization—enlightenment and freedom.

This is the urgency: “Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witness they have,” writes the dazzling James Baldwin (1985). “The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out” (p.393). This is the burning imperative for school people, parents, and all citizens today, and might become the measure of our determination now.

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Accountability and the Contemporary Intellectual

Greg Dimitriadis & Marc Lamont Hill

In his magisterial *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963) Richard Hofstadter marked a powerful distinction between intelligence and intellect. While intelligence is highly specific, delimited and connected to narrow or limited goals, intellect is open, creative, and less bound to particular domains. “Whereas intelligence seeks to grasp, manipulate, re-order, adjust, intellect examines, ponders, wonders, theorizes, criticizes, imagines” (p. 25). For Hofstadter, the increased focus on “intelligence” was linked to the “rise of the expert”—the collective fetishizing of technical expertise so much a part of anti-intellectualism in American life. In the realm of education, teacher accountability and school reform movements reflect these twinned tendencies—the valorization of specific kinds of technical expertise and a more general distrust of the intellectual and intellectual life. These tendencies are evident across the academic spectrum—from elementary through higher education. They bear down upon those of us in tertiary and non-tertiary education alike. They demand responses from us all.

Accountability and reform efforts in the US and around the world have been linked to a particular kind of evidence-based research. This research relies largely on the use of large-scale, randomized control trials. The goal of this research is to find the most seemingly “effective” pedagogical strategies, which can then be applied by teachers in the classroom. Teachers can then be judged, measured, and evaluated by their results, which are typically determined through student performance on standardized high stakes tests.

Presumably, if teachers simply did “what works,” students would learn (and test) more effectively. The ultimate goal of evidence-based research and reform is the goal of many such technical exercises—the eradication of individual judgment and, ultimately, the individual. The goal of these deskilling processes is to banish teachers as intellectuals, to replace their individual and context-driven forms of intellectual production with “proven techniques” that can presumably be applied by a rotating set of functionaries.

It is impossible to understand these tendencies without understanding the deep, anti-intellectual tendencies at the heart of the contemporary American psyche. While pervasive in the 1960s, Hofstadter noted that anti-intellectualism “can rarely be called dominant” and that “the most malign forms are found mainly among small if vociferous minority groups” (p. 20). What was emergent in Hofstadter’s time has become dominant in our own. Anti-intellectualism today is no longer confined to small circles. It has run rampant. Gathering, manipulating, and reordering information has come to replace thinking as the dominant mode of intellectual activity.

Indeed, the practice of thinking is often distrusted as (at best) impractical or (at worst) elitist. These tendencies are reflected in the field of education writ large—from K-12 classrooms where teachers are routinely subjected to reform efforts that rob them of their autonomy, to university hallways where

faculty are operating under audit logics that privilege narrow, technical competence in specific areas over broader kinds of intellectual engagement.

All of this points to a central project—rethinking the nature of intellectual work today for all of us in education. This project is aided by Edward Said, who drew a powerful and useful set of distinctions in his *Representations of the Intellectual*. Here, he separated the work of the intellectual into three roles and responsibilities. First, the intellectual is responsible to his or her discipline. That is, he or she is responsible to the accumulated knowledge in his or her specialty. This means both understanding that history, contributing to it, and passing it down to students.

Second, the intellectual is responsible to the broader social context in which he or she works. That is, he or she is responsible for responding to larger social and political issues. For Said, this was sharply underscored in his public intellectual work on the plight of Palestine, for which he was a tireless advocate.

Third, the intellectual is responsible to the larger (and limitless) body of knowledge outside of his or her specialty. That is, he or she should proudly remain in part an “amateur.” This means avoiding narrow specialization and maintaining a love for intellectual exploration across multiple domains.

Said gives us another way to think about our “accountability” that stretches beyond the narrow, scientific notions currently in vogue. This alternative vision does not signal a turn away from our responsibility to students. Rather, it means widening the scope of such accountability to give educators a more expansive vision of what it means to do intellectual work today. In addition to our specialized knowledge, we are responsible for responding to larger social and political issues as we resist the lure of narrow “expertise” and its closures.

The latter was a central concern for Said as it was for Hofstadter, as intellectuals can easily become “experts” in service only to narrow power elites, whether on the Left or Right. Hofstadter wrote, “An acute and paradoxical problem of intellect as a force in modern society stems from the fact that it cannot lightly reconcile itself to either its associations with power or to its exclusion from an important political role” (p. 229). Negotiating these tensions is difficult and forces several challenges upon educational workers. Ultimately, these tensions demand an engagement with transgressive intellectual work that is informed by a pragmatic assessment of the current intellectual, political, and cultural landscape.

Such a project requires us to deploy modes and methods of resistance and transformation within increasingly anti-intellectual educational spaces. We must stretch (and, at times, blur) the [epistemological](#) boundaries of our respective fields and disciplines, thereby allowing new possibilities for locating, measuring, and validating knowledge claims. We must articulate a vision of accountability that underscores both the intrinsic and practical value of individual judgment and action. We must also expand our vocabulary of reform by separating “standards” from “standardization,” “practice” from

“procedure,” and “science” from “scientism.” This has implications for us all—again, from elementary through higher education.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the importance of attending to the technocratic demands of the current moment, as they allow us to sustain our presence within the dominant spaces of knowledge production. This need is particularly significant now, as opposed to the early and middle part of the 20th century, because most intellectuals operate within the very institutions that they aim to challenge and change. Consequently, as we confront the limitations of “disciplinary decadence” (Gordon, 2007), we must consider institutional and disciplinary demands for tenure and promotion.

At the same time that we challenge the use of randomized control trials and high stakes testing, we cannot ignore the material impact of such measures within the punitive No Child Left Behind policy environment and its legacies. We must acknowledge the paradoxical condition of needing to deploy the vocabulary of power in order to challenge its fundamental legitimacy within particular spaces.

In essence, we must locate ways (both literally and intellectually) of being in institutions but not of them. As Said argues, such a position forces us into a posture of self-imposed marginality, a position from which we can challenge the dominant logic of the day and engage in new (or renewed) forms of knowledge production and concrete resistance. In doing so, we allow for the possibility of effecting a shift away from stifling conceptions of “intelligence” and back to richer, more ennobling, and more humanizing notions of “intellect.”

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The Teacher Accountability Debate

Diane Ravitch

In January 2012, the debate about value-added assessment broke through to the general public with the release of a new study by Chetty-Friedman-Rockoff. Although not yet peer reviewed, the study received page one coverage in the *The New York Times*, where it was presented as clear evidence that “Students with top teachers are less likely to become pregnant as teenagers, more likely to enroll in college, and more likely to earn more money as adults.” The authors of the paper were quick to draw the policy implications of their work. As one of them said, “The message is to fire people sooner rather than later” (Lowrey, 2012). Bloggers were quick to reply, providing spontaneous, if unauthorized, peer review (Ferlazzo, 2012).

The CFR study reinforced the message of the film *Waiting for “Superman”* and of the corporate-style reformers who have commanded the national media in recent years: Teachers are to blame for the ills of American society. Bad teachers are the ones whose students don’t get higher test scores year after year. If we fire bad teachers, they will be replaced by average or better teachers. If we fire bad teachers, our economy will gain trillions of dollars in productivity. If we fire bad teachers, our schools will rise to the top of international rankings. If we fire bad teachers, all students will be prepared for college or careers. If we fire bad teachers, we can eliminate poverty.

What an alluring set of promises! What utopian dreams, all within our reach! Now editorialists and pundits who have been looking for easy answers have the easiest of answers: Use test scores to identify bad teachers and fire them. Why waste billions on anti-poverty programs, on early childhood education, on health clinics, or anything else? Now we know who the culprits are and we can solve our problems by firing them.

The CFR study supports the claims of Eric Hanushek (quoted in *The New York Times* story about CFR), who has advocated “deselection” of teachers for several years. Hanushek has argued that by firing the bottom 5-10 percent, our nation would rise to the top of international testing. He assumes that these “bad teachers” would be replaced by average teachers, thus improving test scores.

This narrative has powerful bipartisan support. Not only is it embraced by Republicans, but by the Obama administration. No one has been more outspoken in advocacy for teacher accountability than Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who hailed the mass firing of teachers in Central Falls, Rhode Island (without any evaluations) and who applauded the public release of value-added ratings of thousands of teachers (and their names) by the Los Angeles Times in 2010. The Obama administration’s Race to the Top encouraged dozens of states to pass legislation decreeing that student test scores would count for a significant part of teachers’ evaluations, determining their tenure, promotion, and job security. Buoyed by the efforts of the Obama administration to hold teachers accountable, conservative

governors took the narrative to the next level and promoted legislation to eliminate tenure, seniority, and collective bargaining, even to cut teachers' benefits.

The teacher accountability narrative is part of a larger effort to restructure the teaching profession by turning it into a market-based activity. The teachers whose students get higher scores will get big bonuses as those who falter are fired. Over time, the theory goes, the profession will change as it attracts new people who want to earn big bonuses. Currently, people become teachers out of a sense of idealism and purpose; the goal of the corporate reformers is to change the motivation to the desire to earn a large salary, making teaching more like business.

There are so many assumptions embedded in this narrative that it is hard to know where to begin to deconstruct them.

First is the assumption that there is a long line of people eager to replace those teachers who were fired. It seems equally reasonable to assume that test-based accountability will reduce the status of teaching and diminish teacher professionalism. Teachers will be testing technicians, honing their skills by teaching students to pass a test, rather than teaching students to think for themselves and ask questions.

Second is the assumption that these policies will make teaching more attractive to ambitious young people. But as public derision and scorn are directed towards teachers, they become the public scapegoats (like Leon Goldstein in 1984), the ones we can all blame for whatever is wrong. Why would anyone with ambition and brains enter a job with so little social prestige, a very difficult job with few perks, where only a small number can expect to win the big bonuses for higher scores?

Third is the assumption that the tests are scientific instruments that measure what matters most in education. Very few testing experts would agree. They would be quick to point out not only that standardized tests are subject to statistical error, but should be used for the purpose for which they were designed. A test of fifth grade reading measures student performance, not teacher performance. What is more, standardized tests are designed and normed so that there is always a bottom 50 percent.

Fourth is the assumption that teachers alone can right the ills of a deeply unequal society. This is simply ludicrous. It is obvious why this narrative appeals to those who are tax-averse, to those who see personal advantage in blaming teachers for our increasingly unequal society.

Fifth is the assumption that raising test scores is the same as improving education. By now, everyone should realize that scores can be raised by intensive test preparation, by cheating, by excluding or avoiding low-performing students and by other clever strategies for gaming the system. Once upon a time, educators frowned upon test prep, realizing that it led to short-term gains but sacrificed larger goals, such as critical thinking, creativity, originality, and conceptual understanding. But today, after a decade of No Child Left Behind, the nation spends billions of dollars on testing and test prep activities and considers it a good investment of money and time.

Decisions have consequences, not all of them intended. As its assumptions became embedded in federal and state policies, we can expect to see a narrowing of the curriculum only to what is tested. We can expect to see some districts and states develop tests for every subject, pumping billions more into assessment, since most teachers do not teach subjects that are tested. We can expect to see increased demoralization of teachers, as they lose the last vestiges of professional autonomy.

And we can see politicians using the teacher accountability narrative as their justification for doing little or nothing to reduce poverty or to increase taxes on the wealthiest and on corporations.

These outcomes will not improve the quality of education or the prospects for our society.

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Educational Reform Revolution

Peter Taubman

No one can doubt anymore that we are in the midst of the most massive transformation in public education since its creation. The question is whether there is anything we teachers can do to reclaim the conversation and turn back the on-going privatization and corporatization of public schools.

Given how far discussions of education have been pushed to the right; given the complicity of mainstream media in bashing teachers, unions and schools of education; given the assaults on the public sector; given the stigma attached to taxes and government; and given the acquiescence of so many educational organizations and leaders in so-called educational reform, it may be too late. I hope it isn't. But if we are to succeed, we must take more drastic action, and we must hold to a principle that until now has been given only lip service, a principle that, if truly embraced, would lead not to more educational de-forms but to educational revolution. What we must not do is rely on the usual strategies.

It is no longer enough to list the mind-numbing effects of high stakes tests or reveal how teachers' hard-won knowledge about kids, schools and curriculum has been replaced with a fanatical faith in the free market and the bottom line. Scholarly research, numerous studies, and reasoned argument have not prevailed over those who scream crisis, substitute test scores gaps for income gaps, and blame unions, teachers and non-charter public schools for the nation's ills. Nor have we halted the transformation by exposing the profit motive behind so many of the educational reforms. And although we must persevere, it's not enough to describe how these reforms have turned public education into a grim, wasteland littered with mediocre charter schools, a wasteland where teaching, at least in the hands of "innovators" like Doug Lemov, author of *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College*, resembles dog training, and curriculum and learning are reduced to test prep. These strategies are not working. We need to be more ruthless in our resistance.

We must start by calling out those educators and organizations that, however well-intentioned, have sold us out. That means acknowledging how the language and practices advocated by a great many teacher educators and education leaders, such as Arthur Levine, Les Sternberg, Deborah Ball, David Steiner, Lee Shulman, and John Bransford and organizations like the [Association of Colleges for Teacher Education](#) (AACTE) and the [National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education](#) (NCATE), have paved the way for the corporatization of education.¹

¹ Arthur Levine is past president of Teachers College and author of *Educating School Teachers*, a scathing critique of teacher education programs. Les Sternberg, Dean of the College of Education at the University of South Carolina told the House of Representatives in 2005 that educators should be seeking more accountability not less. Deborah Ball, University of Michigan's Dean of Education, has emphasized the need to define a standard skill set beginning teachers must acquire before they are allowed to teach. David Steiner, the previous NY State Commissioner of Education, has been fond of telling audiences that schools of education needed to teach less theory, not more. Lee Shulman has been president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and of the American Educational Research Association. He has described teacher education as chaotic.

As I documented in *Teaching by Numbers*, educators and organizations such as these promoted the view that school administration and teaching should emulate business and medical models, that there was a “sure-fire” quantifiable way to teach, that teacher education, a purported “wild west” of irrelevant theories, needed more accountability, and that the new language of the learning sciences, which turned knowledge into information and study into performance outcomes, would lend an aura of scientific certainty to our work and thus make us professionals. Mesmerized by numerical data, technology, and the assumed efficiency of the boardroom, and believing accommodation would stave off privatization, these organization and individuals helped create the educational nightmare that is the present.

Pointing out such complicity, however, is not enough. We must, in our own places of work and in our professional lives, organize to resist “reforms” that turn teachers into bureaucrats, place us under surveillance, digitize students, and soft-soap the loss of jobs, tenure, extra-curricula programs and whole departments. We must reject the scripted curriculum and the data systems, whose sales line the pockets of CEOs. We must resist or sabotage accreditation efforts that operationalize teaching and curriculum, rendering them vulnerable to packaging and outsourcing. We must resign from professional organizations, such as NCTE and AERA, that show more interest in standards and outcomes than in the blight of poverty and discrimination and that refuse to take a public stance against the assaults on public education. And we must take to task our unions for not demanding attention be paid to the re-segregation of American schools. We need unions, but we don’t need unions that confuse political expediency with principle.

Above all, we must commit to one principle. In response to whatever mandate or critique comes next, we must silence it with the demand that all the nation’s children deserve equal educational opportunity. Not educational outcomes or national standards; these lead us back to tests and the educational de-forms we are experiencing. Not some new technological innovation or “best practice,” or more detailed assessment system; these distract us and render us expendable. We must demand equal educational opportunity. Equal educational opportunity. And that means that we should take a lesson from the very rich, so many of whom seem bent on destroying public education.

Let us demand that all our nation’s children be given the educational resources that Sasha and Malia Obama get at Sidwell Friends, that John Kerry, John McCain and George Bush received at their prep schools, and that the sons and daughters of the CEOs at Goldman Sachs receive at Hotchkiss and Lawrenceville Academy. The fact that all these schools are expensive should prompt skepticism of

John Bransford, a leading force in the learning sciences, has helped turn the language of teaching, curriculum and study into a language of behavior, cognitive skills and performance. All of these individuals, as well as the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education have argued that the most important factor in a student’s success is the teacher, that teachers must be held accountable for student learning, defined as test scores, and that schools of education must be held accountable for their graduates’ successes in raising student scores.

claims that the level of school funding doesn't matter. This is clearly not what the rich and powerful believe when their own children's futures are at stake.

Don't all our nation's children deserve small classes like those at Horace Mann or Deerfield? Don't they all deserve a rich curriculum with AP courses and electives, fabulous extra-curricular programs with school newspapers, drama clubs, arts programs and sports teams, safe facilities, tutoring opportunities, and a strong college counseling program—and even, yes, test prep, not as a substitute for curriculum, but as an after-school program? Don't all our children deserve a college education that is fairly priced and offers what elite institutions, which ironically remain immune to demands for accountability, offer? Those who argue such an education is only for the gifted are mistaken: it is for those who can afford it. Even this radical change, however, would not guarantee academic success; zip codes, desire, and ability still matter. But it would certainly do more than the “reforms” advocated by those who plunder and lay waste the education of our nation's youth. It would not be educational reform. It would be educational revolution.

Racing to the Top: Who's Accounting for the Children?

Celia Genishi & Anne Haas Dyson

The optimism following the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States in 2008 enveloped intense hopes that we would soon see humane policies in place to support young children, their families, and their teachers. Alas, many liberal advocates are embittered as these hopes go unfulfilled: where there was No Child Left Behind legislation, there is now Race to the Top (cynically described by some as “Bush on steroids”), which defines accountability as meeting the reductionist benchmarks of standardized tests. To use a well-worn and tiresome phrase, one size is supposed to fit all—all children, all teachers. But is racing toward reductionist benchmarks a worthy goal for the education of the very young? Is it an apt metaphor for the professional endeavors of skilled teachers? Is it, in the end, what we as a society want for our children—that they make a beeline for slim academic pickings?

We argue against the Race to the Top metaphor with its goal of standardization and for shifting the spotlight from teachers straining to be accountable to the group we are to educate, children in early childhood settings. Indeed we urge a change in the cast on the classroom stage, along with a change in scripts. Let us explain.

In the areas of language and literacy, the curricular areas we know best, there is a stunning disconnect between the diversity of schoolchildren, especially in cities around the globe, and the regimentation and homogenization of classroom practices, from prekindergarten forward. We are struck by the growing number of prekindergartens where teachers use worksheets to teach early literacy and math, as they try to respond to parental and societal pressure to “educate.” We are depressed by the number of kindergarten classrooms that adhere to a schedule—posted for all to see—that features 90 minutes of “literacy” per day. These are often prolonged minutes of seat-work that push play times off the classroom stage entirely. We feel defeated by the “basics” of primary-grade children, which pull written language conventions, like letter names and sounds, from their intention-driven communicative use to sterile lists of hierarchically organized skills. We are, finally, despondent about the conditions of children and childhood in classrooms where every teacher shares the curricular stage with a monitor, perhaps an invisible expert in surveillance. This is someone who keeps time with a stopwatch and checks to see that mandated, sometimes scripted, language and/or literacy curricula are being enacted with an acceptable level of fidelity to a published script.

Yet we know that in a universe parallel to the one we have just described there are early childhood educators whose classroom stage is inhospitable to a monitor, resistant to the single-minded goal of producing young academics—children who read and “do math” before they enter first grade. These educators desire to hold themselves accountable to young children, placing the needs of children before

those of parents and/or policymakers. While these teachers acknowledge that parents deserve a role on the classroom stage (certainly in lieu of surveillance monitors), it is not a starring role.

Children in this parallel educational universe live a complex life because their teachers often offer situated choices: in this moment to play or not to play, and to play at what, with whom, and where; to communicate or not; to be interested in books and the conventions of print or not; to participate in a community of peers and their teachers or not. In short, there is space on this curricular stage for children to be, just for instance (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 10):

- Resistant to structured lessons
- Physically but not linguistically gifted
- Informed by experiential resources other than those deemed middle class or mainstream white
- Able to become bilingual or multilingual over time
- Boys that choose to wear skirts in the dress-up area, or girls who refuse to wear skirts ever
- More interested in gerbils than letters of the alphabet
- Mastering a “nonstandard” dialect of English by the age of 3
- Behaving more like an artist or expert player than a reader.

Children with these preferences or characteristics—children who can thrive in a classroom where the boundaries between school, home, and self are permeable—are endangered in narrowly focused classrooms where becoming academically skilled, through the medium of “standard” English, is the dominant goal.

In the choice-laden classroom of our parallel universe, teachers still want children to become readers, writers, and numerical problem solvers; but academic purposes are not at the top of a rigid schedule. Along with space for diverse children with diverse interests, teachers allow individuals’ own timelines. For example, in a study of a Head Start center with a play-based curriculum (Genishi & Dyson, 2009), we observed a classroom of four-year-olds populated by a number of children becoming bilingual in Spanish and English. In that setting Luisa, who has been known for over a year to be very quiet, declares herself to be ready to play:

(Luisa has found a button and brought it to the sand table.)

Luisa: Lookit, I found it.

Josué: Dame, dame. (Give me, give me.)

Luisa: I want to play.

Josué: You want to play? (sounding surprised) Someone stop [that is, let her have a turn]. Luisa wants to play...

Luisa: I play, I play! (said with animation and some adamance).

(Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 35)

Indeed Luisa became a player, not always as animated as she just was, but a player nonetheless in Head Start and beyond. Fast forwarding in this longitudinal study to the primary grades, Luisa was observed to become a successful student of reading and writing. Her play, though, was muted in favor of a mandated curriculum, which dominates many a U.S. classroom.

Luisa's experience of the decreasing time and space for imagination and play as she moved through the grades is one shared with many children in these times of curricular mandates driven by a time table of to-be-mastered skills. Indeed, in some primary classrooms, imaginative storytelling is explicitly prohibited in children's early composing (Dyson & Genishi, in press).

We believe that, in the complex worlds children inhabit, linguistic flexibility, individual agency, collaborative play with ideas, and imaginative rethinking itself will all be critical to our shared thriving on this precarious planet. We, therefore, call for an end to metaphors of races and pinnacles of success that are, in truth, way too narrow to support children's growth. Moreover, we argue that teachers are accountable not to some narrow "top" but to the rhythms and rhymes of their developing students. We imagine the classroom stage, not as a race, but as a dance hall, where teachers and children adapt to each other, even as they sometimes move to a rhythm all their own. The teacher responds, leads, and sometimes lets go to observe more carefully the rhythms of children in motion. Then teachers and children come together and, rather than racing to a top, spread their skilled, responsive movement across times and spaces, dancing their way into the future.

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“If We Look to Buy the Cheapest Paper, Why Not the Cheapest Teachers?”

Fred Klonsky

Around 1972 I was working at the UniRoyal Tire and Rubber factory in the City of Commerce, an industrial suburb of Los Angeles. The front of the factory faced the Santa Ana freeway. For some odd reason it was designed to look like an ancient Egyptian temple.

Behind the Disney-like façade of pharaohs and slaves was a grime-filled, malodorous factory turning out thousands of automobile tires a day.

In 1972 the making of a tire went something like this: Two women, usually African-American, worked on a belt behind the tire making machine. They cut pieces of rubber ply and put them on the belt. Two men, usually white, were in front. One of the men pulled the rubber barrel off a rack and slid it on to a metal arm. One of the guys hit a button and the ply rolled onto the rubber barrel. They hit a second button that swung the barrel into a position to attach the rubber that later became the tread. Button three quickly spun all the tire components until you hit the brake pedal. The barrel broke loose and you slid it off onto another rack.

A tire came off the machine and a counter would flip a number. In 1972 there was not much that was digital.

I was a member of the United Rubber Workers union. Our contract allowed tire making to be piecework. I was paid a minimal base salary. To make any real money I had to make a rate. The rate was adjusted each week. If you made rate for five days, they raised the rate.

It didn't take long for me to realize that controlling—as opposed to making—the rate was most important. I wanted to hit my target most days. But I needed to fall short on others. If I didn't, they would constantly raise the rate. I soon came to understand the simple economics of this process.

I also realized that if I smacked the counter with the palm of my hand just at the moment that my partner was pulling a tire off the machine, the counter would flip twice.

Four decades later I am about to retire from 27 years of teaching. I began my teaching career at the same time as *A Nation at Risk* came out. I retire just as it seems that The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as No Child Left Behind, is about to be trashed and replaced by some form of a more extensive Race to the Top.

As I exit the classroom, life in schools resembles my days at UniRoyal Tire and Rubber.

I teach in a school in a suburb of Chicago. Park Ridge is an upscale town. It usually has voted Republican and it is white. But that is changing. The town elected its first Democratic State Senator several years ago and voted for Obama by a thin margin.

Compared to when I started teaching in 1984, our K-8 school district is now consumed by assessments. Weeks and weeks of instructional time have been replaced by a world of testing initials: Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy (Dibels).

In spite of this, and despite the fact that the time spent on these assessments angers and demoralizes almost every one of my colleagues, our school does very well on all of these assessments. Ninety-seven percent meet and exceed state standards on the state mandated ISAT. This year 100% of our 4th graders did the same on the reading portion of the ISAT.

In a school district that is primarily white and privileged, it's not surprising that our students do well on these tests. But it also doesn't matter.

In schools this is called *continuous improvement*. It's not much different than UniRoyal's piece rate system. Do well and they simply raise the rate. The only thing they want to improve are the scores. It is the extension of Lake Wobegonism, where all children are above average. In this brave new world, all children must meet and exceed 100%. In districts like Atlanta and Philadelphia, continuous improvement has meant taking the palm of your hand and smacking the counter. Cheating scandals are breaking out like a contagious disease.

As the comedian Chris Rock likes to say, "I don't approve. But I understand." Just like a tire builder at UniRoyal, it is a matter of both teachers and school administrators coming to understand the simple economics of the process. Those who demand that schools be run more like a business are now getting what they asked for. There are those in the profit sector who have become expert at knowing how to game the system. Why be surprised when those in the public sector, like principals, order their staff to do the same?

This year a small Tea Party-ish group has begun attending our board meetings. They number two, sometimes three. Some have children in the district's schools. Some do not. They are openly hostile to the teachers and our union. They are either amazingly misinformed, or they are purposefully lying based on the theory that a lie told often enough gets believed as the truth.

At the heart of their attack is the issue of student performance and teacher accountability. Only a few years back we would spend our time discussing issues of teaching and learning. Now we spend the bulk of our team planning time discussing assessments and interventions.

Still, the lies continue about student performance results. They continue to lie about teacher salary and benefits and the language that is in our bargaining agreement about the alleged inability to dismiss poor teachers.

I have been told that Tea Party groups are doing the same thing throughout Illinois. They have organized small groups to attend community board meetings. Some are paid, with the money coming from those like the Koch brothers, multi-billionaire right-wing funders. There are plenty of deep pockets operating here.

Going right after our collective bargaining agreement, they ask, “If we look to buy the cheapest paper, why not the cheapest teachers?”

And our board, pressed by growing financial concerns, must be asking themselves if that isn’t a good point. How much should you have to spend to find someone to prep for and administer a test?

Schooling of and for Democracy

Deborah Meier

Walk into any school in any town or community in the country and observe for a day or a morning or just for a couple of hours; check out the hallways and poke into the lunchroom; get a feel for the tone and the temperament of a few classrooms. Notice whether or not students are treated—habitually—with the kind of respect every citizen and resident deserves; whether teachers are afraid and timid, working secretly behind closed doors, or bold and thoughtful, taking delight in guests (even parents and colleagues) dropping in for a visit; whether or not students feel powerful in their purposes and pursuits. You are noticing something fundamental about what makes a good school.

It's time for us to “measure” schools by the values we believe in for public life in general, and to “measure” our students, then, by the long-term impact they will have on our larger society and the vitality of our democracy. In a democracy we want every student to build an understanding of both independence and interdependence, a sense of being entirely unique and yet a part of the larger community. We want students to develop dispositions of initiative, courage, creativity, and curiosity; the capacity to question and wonder, invent and create. I know dozens and dozens of schools—some more “traditional” and some more “progressive” in their curriculum, their seating arrangements, their codes of dress and behavior—where these dispositions are acknowledged and practiced.

There is neither a single model nor a neat blueprint to follow in order to create excellent classrooms or outstanding schools of this kind in our democracy. But surely it requires us—as a citizenry—to think about what habits of mind and practice are required of adults who can make and participate in the kind of society we together treasure. We've chosen an idea of governance—democracy—that rests on presumptions that are complex and yet fundamental. These presumptions are undermined when we rely exclusively on standardized tests, because we assume, unwittingly or not, that what we want are adults who can get a lot of right answers after reading short passages completely out of context. Ditto for math.

There are surely some precocious six-year-olds who can accomplish this, but no one would argue that the future of the world should rest upon the judgment of precocious six-year-olds. Part of our mission as educators is to protect and nourish democracy and all those preconditions that make it possible (even if not guaranteed).

A school can't teach the values and dispositions of democracy to the young if students don't encounter an adult community that exhibits, day in and day out, the habits of a democratic community. We can argue all we want about how we'd do this, but it's a far different argument than we're having now.

It requires a flat governance structure—or surely a much flatter one than we have grown accustomed to—and a transparent one, and ways for every voice, including the novices, to get heard by the other

constituents. It should be possible for any adult to walk into a school and ask, “Who is it that knows Jack well?” and find at least one, ideally many adults, who can be pointed to—not to mention many of Jack’s peers.

Parent should be delighted to go to family conferences because they have thoughts to impart that will be valuable to the school folks, and stuff to learn that will help them and their child. And the child needs to be there to take responsibility for him or herself. Secrets are inimical to democracy and the fewer the better.

So put interesting adults together—in appropriate ratios of experts to novices—and trust their judgment. Yes, adults, *plural*, because we need to trust, not the imagined super-hero individual teacher, but the community of adults whose *most-of-the-time* good judgment we are depending on. In the best of schools there is sufficient stability and time for the experts to work alongside the novices in order to observe and dialogue with them over time. And every single year the adults involved—and students too—should have a chance to review their “contract” with each other, and revise or renew it in an established and accepted way.

Finally, good data is useful, including so-called “hard” as well a “soft” data, and the way the school appears to the larger public upon which it rests must also be taken into account, plus the regard of its peers—other schools. In the early 90s a group of nearly one hundred New York City public schools tried to create such a “system”—under the close scrutiny of researchers at New York University and Columbia University. It was called *Networks for School Renewal*. It was meant as an “experiment” from which all could learn about recreating a very different sense of what a “system” could be like—one that learns as it goes. The hundred volunteer schools would, by agreement, be freed of most (but not all) provisions of the labor-management contract and selected other regulatory city and state rules. In return the schools would form themselves into smaller networks—maximum seven schools—that would be required to hold each other accountable through a jointly agreed upon plan in return for having greater autonomy over finances as well as operations. A foundation agreed to provide each network with funds to hire necessary staff to conduct the network’s business and to create an accountability review board to attest, not to the quality of the schools, but rather whether they were carrying out the approved accountability plan.

It never got off the ground. The networks lasted for a while, as did the money, but none of the freedoms promised in return. Why? A new chancellor was not prepared to release these schools from his direct control. This is not ancient history, so, I wonder, where were all those hot-shot business folks when we needed them?

Will it be easy to build the kind of trust that such schools rest on? Not “faith,” but trust and verify, as conservatives like to put it. No, it will not be easy, any more than the building of a democracy at large has been easy anywhere in the world. It would be a work-in-progress, perhaps forever. But just as we

haven't given up on democracy because it's such a flawed and fragile idea everywhere it's been tried, we need to bring the same attitude to our schooling for democracy. It's a work of generations. Fortunately, under better circumstances than the ones we've settled for—with all their built-in institutionalized distrust—schools can be wonderful places to work (and play) in, for all. Every time I return to Mission Hill or Central Park East and others like it, I'm reminded about how the most serious-minded places can also be joyous ones. And I am reminded that uncovering the world together with novices is the best way to parent and to teach, and makes “lifelong learning” more than an empty slogan but a daily reality.

The New Orleans Reformed Public School System: National Model?

Raynard Sanders

The New Orleans reformed public school system is being hailed as the national model for turning around urban school districts. The internationally televised devastation of New Orleans from Hurricane Katrina attracted more than three billion dollars to rebuild the public schools and help students who were suffering in a failed locally elected school district. This massive influx of funds came from the philanthropic community, charter school proponents, foreign countries, and the federal government.

Following Hurricane Katrina, the public school system drastically changed when local and state education officials decided, without public input, to convert all public schools in New Orleans into charter schools. In November 2005, the Louisiana Department of Education successfully lobbied the state legislature to pass ACT 35, shrewdly crafted for schools just in New Orleans, which allowed it to take over 107 schools. In this legislation these 107 schools were identified as failing, despite the fact that many of them received awards for academic progress from the state department of education in May, 2005.

Within one school year after Act 35 was passed officials from the Louisiana Department of Education began boasting of “unprecedented” student performance on standardized tests and improved high school graduation rates as a result of creating a school choice system with the largest percentage of charter schools in the country. However this heralded success of the reformed New Orleans Public system plays out much differently when evaluated by external researchers and when observed on the ground. While critics of the reforms are commonly dismissed by state education officials as proponents of the failed local school district, the reality is that just a cursory examination of test scores released by the Louisiana State Department of Education tells a totally different story.

Pre-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans looked like any other urban city in America struggling to provide good learning environments for its large number of poor and minority students with a two-tier system. There was a small cadre of schools, most of which had admission requirements, that provided quality learning environments for students, while the majority provided poor learning environments for the remaining students. With that, New Orleans had the highest performing schools in the state of Louisiana; however, for the majority of our students, mostly poor and minority, the educational experience was less than adequate in school buildings that were grossly inadequate.

Now, six years after the hurricane, the state run schools in New Orleans have been cited by several external researchers as one of the lowest academically performing districts in Louisiana. In one study, Michael Deshotel (2011) found that the high poverty schools in New Orleans scored lower on the state mandated standardized test than the high poverty schools in numerous districts across Louisiana. It should be noted that none of these other districts were part of the educational reform model nor did

they receive the billions of dollars afforded the state run school district in New Orleans. The problems with the reformed district in New Orleans unfortunately extend beyond poor academic performance:

- The University of Minnesota Law School’s Institute on Race and Poverty (2010) found that the rebuilding of the public school system in post-Katrina New Orleans produced a five “tiered” system of public schools in which not every student in the city receives the same quality education. This “tiered” system sorts white students and a relatively small share of students of color into selective schools while steering the majority of low-income students of color to high-poverty non-charter schools.
- The Southern Poverty Law Center filed a class action suit against the state for operating charter schools that were not servicing or admitting students with special needs.
- The reformed school district has allowed charter schools to have full autonomy without accountability. It has revoked only one charter’s operator’s license despite widespread lack of performance. Last January the state department of education renewed the licenses of two charter schools that had recently received “D” and “F” ratings on academic performance. Meanwhile it closed non-charter schools for their lack of performance (Harper-Royal, 2010).
- Many charter schools are run like private schools by self-appointed boards without any parent, community, or teacher representation. One charter school board president resides outside the state. There is no transparency in charter school operations, finances or hiring while they receive public money and operate rent free in public school buildings. Charter school operators recently successfully lobbied the BESE Board (the state board that oversees public education) to allow a selective admission process and to exclude neighborhood students.

The education reforms in New Orleans for the past six years have not had all the obstacles that the reformers continually describe as a hindrance to improving public schools in America. With that New Orleans has provided the country with a valuable lesson about improving public education. The original legislation to create the reformed school district in New Orleans described the takeover of schools as an experiment. The New Orleans school system has been decentralized with no local elected board and no teachers’ unions with collective bargaining agreements; all the “supposedly” terrible teachers have been fired and replaced with Teach for America recent college graduates and the schools run by privately managed charter boards. The reformed school district in New Orleans proves, once and for all, that the public education privatizers and so-called reformers are WRONG.

The reality is that New Orleans is a national model, but not for success. It tells us what NOT to do with our schools and our most precious resource, “our children.”

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Silver Linings

Gil Schmerler

Looking for rays of sunshine amidst an educational landscape that has taken a particularly horrific beating in the last decade or two is a difficult—maybe quixotic—undertaking.

It may have taken the political success of the most pernicious forces for over-simplification, quantification, privatization, and self-interest to get many of us thinking and communicating more clearly about the substance and structure of an education we hold to be meaningful. The most promising recent developments remain locked in a death struggle with the narrowest of “accountability” reforms and will emerge as common practice only if the will to resist or persevere is strong enough. Most of all, we need faith that the total dominance of testing in these years will—not quite yet, but soon!—begin to die under the weight of its own increasingly obvious inadequacies.

In fact, there are some transformative things happening that can lead to positive changes in the way daily business is conducted in schools. Some of these are practices many of us have promoted for years: peer collaboration, small schools, shared leadership, differentiation, and constructivist professional development. Others come with language of which we are instinctively wary: common core curriculum, learning outcomes, rubrics, and teacher evaluation.

These transformations appear in the midst of an unprecedented assault on the teaching profession, which has threatened job security, tenure, academic freedom, and effective working conditions. States and municipalities, with heavy-handed federal encouragement, have in many ways narrowed the scope and agency of teachers’ practice and made them more vulnerable to economic, political, and ideological currents.

Nevertheless, we are seeing small signs of change, including:

- teachers making their practice more public
- collaboration becoming the expectation for faculties
- schools understanding they must serve neglected sub-groups more vigorously
- principals’ involvement in instructional supervision increasing
- expectations for teacher practice, including differentiation and inquiry, heightening significantly.

Many of these approaches are being written directly into professional development and assessment frameworks. Moreover, major efforts are in motion to find ways to gauge student achievement and effectiveness of teachers that don’t rely on standardized tests.

Take, for example, the recent preoccupation with “frameworks” created by Charlotte Danielson and others to examine teaching. Many of us begin with grave concerns about checklists and rubrics - they

lead to quantification and narrow the possibilities of constructive analysis. Danielson herself has repeatedly warned that her approach is designed for professional development and not evaluation. The danger of these frameworks becoming one more tool in a punitive evaluation process is ever-present. Nevertheless, there is significant value in corresponding efforts—joined by unions and many progressive scholars - to identify the most enlightened components of teaching. These emphasize learner engagement, inquiry, and independent thought, broaden the categories of analysis to reduce the possibilities of facile quantification, and place the primary focus on self-assessment.

The boom in Common Core Standards might yield some virtue, as well. Progressives have historically been suspicious of anything that might lead to greater standardization of curriculum or teaching methods and deny the differentiation and individualization so critical for student learning. The Common Core needs to be carefully watched for just these tendencies. But it appears that many of the elements that seem to be surviving the political vetting process for the Common Core include the principles of active learning, experimentation, and inquiry central to progressive philosophy. In a country where much of education will undoubtedly remain in the hands of generally centralized systems, this focus on student-centered pedagogy might well be viewed as a step forward.

We worry a lot about the role of charter schools in a privatizing, anti-union, anti-public school agenda. We note with great caution that charters have been, in the eyes of many in the educational establishment, a singular hope for school “reform.” We worry about the proliferation of for-profit networks, and the privileged status charters so often are awarded by educational authorities at the expense of neighborhood schools. Less noticed in the clamor, however, but highly meaningful, is the significant shift in public acceptance of small schools as a prominent way to bring about real change in education.

Those of us associated with the alternative and small schools movement over the past four decades have never seen such a strong consensus that small is more effective, and that greater school-level autonomy is critical. Most charters do not have the dedication to student voice and independent thinking that characterized many alternative schools, but some do, and most charters accept it as critical that individual students get the attention they need from teachers who know them well. It is unlikely, as we emerge from this wave of “reform,” that there will be much stomach for a return to the large, impersonal, bureaucratized institutions of the past century.

Teacher evaluation—and tenure—may be more sensitive issues. A process designed for both professional development and quality control - and honored for generations more in the breach than in actual practice—evaluation has suddenly found itself in the eye of the storm. The overwhelming focus of the school reformers is, of course, to harness evaluation directly to student scores. At the same time, it is increasingly clear that the fragility of test data (narrowness of intellectual focus, unreliability from year to year, susceptibility to manipulation and cheating) will render it ultimately non-viable as a primary measure of teacher success.

Meanwhile, unions and school administrations are negotiating far more thorough processes of observations, broadening the pool of people involved in evaluation, and, for good measure, throwing more professional development, coaching, and peer support into the assessment mix. It is, one trusts, these latter processes that will survive at the end of this wave, when the dominance of test scores recede.

At the same time, and here is where someone with respect for the history of hard-won protections of job security and academic freedom wants to tread lightly, there is potential for positive movement in the quality control arena as well. Frankly, virtually every educator with open eyes and a conscience has spent time worrying about the treatment some children receive at the hands of teachers without the skill, sensitivity, or motivation to do them justice - and wondered why there was not a more sustained, professional supervisory effort to help these teachers improve their craft or find another field.

But, because we have seen the obvious damage to a faculty when administrators with biases and other questionable motives abuse or neglect their evaluation responsibilities, we have generally stood firmly behind whatever organization sets itself up to assure due process. The result is a system that can make it excessively challenging to remove even the most unsuccessful and harmful teachers, often requiring extraordinary persistence and courage (qualities not always possessed in abundance by administrators).

Now, as politicians look for scapegoats and with the nightmare scenario of Michelle Rhee-like purges of teachers, states and districts are beginning to legislate and negotiate tougher—but sometimes fairer and more consistent—evaluation processes, and unions are showing signs of a newfound readiness to engage and, possibly, to open up the dismissal process. This issue is far from settled, but prospects are increasing for both more supervision and support for teachers.

Pollyanna? I could be! I sat in on a public school faculty meeting the other day where teachers reflected bitterly about being “Danielson-ed,” New York City’s latest cold-hearted implementation of a well-meaning approach to formative classroom assessment. As I write, the Common Core is being worked over by textbook and testing companies to standardize approaches across the country. Meanwhile, toward very different ends, cells of progressive educators are extracting nuggets of authentic and flexible pedagogy from the Core to use as centerpieces in dynamic, child-centered classrooms. The potential for abuse is there—we see it all around us, all the time. But so, too, still hidden but slowly gaining traction, is the potential for creativity and renewal.

Addendum

In the 6 months between the writing of this desperately hopeful piece and its publication, New York City has publicly posted teacher ratings based exclusively on test scores; New York State has upped to 40% the portion of a teacher's evaluation based on students' standardized test results (making it impossible to "pass" if you cannot show formal value-added score improvement); and the federal Race to the Top

has made it virtually impossible for states and municipalities to use anything other than student test scores to determine the professional fates of teachers, principals, schools, and school systems.

In this context, my confident assertion that test-dominated accountability will die of its own increasingly obvious inadequacies "not yet, but soon!" seems not only Pollyanna-ish, as I anticipated, but, arguably, completely out of touch! The "soon" is undoubtedly now a number of years in the future, the indeterminacy of that number just one more monumental challenge to be overcome by anyone yearning for meaningful change in schools. It thus becomes ever more crucial that educators exploit these "silver linings" wherever they can in the schools. I know it will happen—it is happening!—but I also want to acknowledge here how sustained and difficult—and heroic—that struggle will be.

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Creating the Schools We Need

Pedro A. Noguera

We are in the midst of a major struggle over the future of American education. A new cohort of education “experts” such as New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, former Chancellors Joel Klein and Michelle Rhee, CEOs such as Bill Gates and Eli Broad, and Education Secretary Arne Duncan, have developed plans for “fixing” America’s schools. Though none of these reformers are experienced educators their ideas matter because they have money and power behind them, and consequently, education policies across the U.S. are being shaped by what they believe.

The so-called reformers are not the only ones with ideas or an interest in redesigning American education. Throughout the country educators, often led by their unions, have organized themselves largely in opposition to the mandates issued by the new reformers. Fierce battles are being waged over school governance, merit pay for teachers, high stakes testing, the expansion of charter schools, the closure of “failing” schools, and the content of the curriculum itself. Though not as powerful as the “reformers,” these groups are nonetheless formidable because they represent many of those who do the work in America’s schools.

The stakes are high. The outcome of these struggles will have far reaching impact, not only on schools but on society as a whole. Both sides know that a great deal is at stake, and for this reason the conflict has taken on an intensity not seen in education since the struggles over bussing in the 1970s.

Left in the middle and sometimes on the sidelines, are the parents, students, and communities who stand the most to lose or gain from this conflict. Particularly in the communities where poverty is concentrated and school failure is chronic, these debates are particularly poignant. This middle group has interests that differ from both sides. Unlike the unions, they are more open to change, even radical, far-reaching change, because they have experienced the consequences of years of school failure. They know from experience that in too many schools failure has been normalized, and they know from direct experience that not all teachers or principals are dedicated to seeing their students succeed. However, they are also skeptical of billionaire reformers who make changes on their behalf but without their involvement or input, and who see them as consumers of market-based reform rather than as partners in change and revitalization. Their voices and the concerns have been most often drowned out in the debate over the future of public education.

The parents, students and communities are aware that there are a growing number of high performing, high poverty schools that are proving what decades of social science research could not: poor children of color can excel and thrive intellectually and developmentally when they are in schools that nurture and support them. Some of these are charter schools like Excellence Academy for Young Men in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn and Nuevo Camino in East Los Angeles. Others are traditional public schools like PS 28 in Brooklyn and Kingsview Middle School in Montgomery County, Maryland. Years ago, Black

scholars like Ron Edmonds, Barbara Sizemore and Asa Hilliard wrote about the existence of schools where poor, African American and Latino children excel; schools that provide undeniable proof that “the problem” is not the children but our inability to create more settings that can meet their needs. Their words went unheeded. For too long America has been mired in a debate over whether or not its most disadvantaged children are educable at all, while generation after generation suffer the consequences of failure.

The “middle group” is not waiting any longer. They are demanding new schools and they are refusing to wait passively for policy makers to “fix” America’s schools. They have taken up the work themselves and, as a result of their efforts, real change is occurring. Across the country, groups like the [Coalition for Educational Justice](#) in New York, [Inner City Struggle](#) in Los Angeles and the various groups that have organized in the Little Village section on the Westside of Chicago, have organized to demand that their interests be taken into account when reforms are implemented, and that schools become accountable and responsive to the communities they serve. They are challenging policies that have tolerated gross inequities between schools, and they are calling for an end to policies that may result in their children being suspended and pushed out of schools, feeding the school to prison pipeline.

This new generation of education activists recognizes that if indeed the fight for educational justice is the Civil Rights issue of the 21st century as so many “reformers” claim, then it must include them and be rooted in a genuine a commitment to develop relationships of reciprocal responsibility between parents and teachers, teachers and administrators, and students and schools. They are not waiting for Superman or anyone else. They are creating schools now where these values and commitments are practiced.

In the fight for the future of American education, this “middle group” is a sleeping giant with a vested interest in progressive change, but it has largely been marginalized in the current debate. While the “reformers” and the unions fight to define and direct the future of public education, those who have suffered the consequences of failure are willing to defend public education while simultaneously insisting that it be reformed.

They understand that public schools, even those that fail at educating the children they serve, are indispensable to the health, well-being, hope and aspirations of their communities. They understand that no other institution in American society is as open and accessible to their children, but they realize that too often the schools their children attend are consistent at the wrong things. This is why they are clamoring for new schools, some of which may be charter schools, because they are tired of promises, and frustrated with the indifference and incompetence they too frequently encounter in the schools they have known. They are ready to embrace something new and are insisting to be part of the process of creating it.

It is too early to tell whether or not this movement will succeed but it is clear that the future of American society will be determined to a large degree by what happens to it. The struggle for education remains vital to the struggle for democracy, equality and justice. The only question is who will align themselves with those who must be integral to making this possibility a reality.

A Glass Half Full

Jeff Duncan-Andrade

A few weeks before finishing this essay, and just two days before my parents' 62nd wedding anniversary, my father was killed in a car crash outside my parents' home.

"What now?" I asked my 82 year-old mother.

"I just have to remake myself son. I will take each day as it comes and focus on what needs to be done. My glass is still half full," she replied.

She was simply repeating a lesson she taught me as a child when she ordered me to the kitchen table and placed a half-filled glass of water between us. Pointing at the glass, she asked, "half full or half empty?" I refused the bait and stared blankly at the glass.

"Son," she continued, "how you choose to answer that question, is how you will live your life. Your glass will always be both half full and half empty. If you choose to see your life as half empty, focusing on the things you don't have, then you will never fill your cup. But, if you learn to see your life as half full, seeing all the things that you do have, then you will fill your cup, it will overflow, and you can share that with others."

The education of poor and working people in this country has often been treated as a glass half empty. For generations, we have rationalized why we haven't, why we won't, and why we can't serve "these" families. But, as my mother's lesson suggests, this is a choice that we make. It is not inevitable. We could, if we so desired, choose to see all children for their potential and invest in them accordingly. Were our nation to become serious about such an effort in education, two things would need to happen.

First, we would have to meet every child's basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, and safety). There is substantial research evidence that the absence of these basic needs increases exposure to toxic stress, dramatically impacting educational and life outcomes. If we are not willing to meet this challenge, then we should admit our society values children in poverty less than wealthy children and stop these absurd discussions of meritocracy and accountability inside a system that is profoundly inequitable.

Second, educators would have to address the issue of teacher quality. As a veteran urban classroom teacher—19 years and counting—I agree wholeheartedly that many of the federal and state regulations for teachers and schools are deeply problematic. Every day, I navigate ill-conceived policies and ludicrous working conditions. There are real political and economic powers responsible for these conditions. These powers designed, and now maintain, an unequal system and everyone knows it—kids, parents, politicians, and pundits alike. Nary a person in this country would have the gall to say that educational opportunities are equal among the rich and poor. Progressives have amply illuminated this point, and rightfully so.

However, while we have been busy pointing our fingers at the injustice of these inequities, we have mostly avoided the fact that under these same conditions, there are teachers that consistently get high levels of engagement and achievement. This fact alone suggests there are other contributing factors to widespread school failure and we must add that discussion to our visions for change. The truth is that even if the daily reality of teaching were more ideal, we would still have far too many colleagues in urban schools who are unwilling and/or unable to meet the social and academic needs of students. Some of these colleagues have been mired in mediocrity for years and they have no clear path out of it. Others, earlier in their teaching careers, will not stay long enough to become good teachers because there is no clear path to excellence.

Either way, defining, assessing, and developing high quality teaching is an unmet challenge in education. The good news is that there are enough excellent teachers in our ranks for us to say definitively what works, how it works, and why it works. Our path forward should acknowledge this knowledge, harness it, and let it drive our approach to teacher recruitment, pre-service education, assessment, and development.

Rethinking Recruitment

Teacher education continues to fail to recruit and attract students of color, particularly candidates from racial groups that struggle the most in our schools. Oddly enough, this same challenge does not seem to present itself to the athletic programs on our college and university campuses. Teacher education would do well to learn from sports programs that have successfully recruited from communities of color for decades. Borrowing from their model would require us to get into schools, as early as elementary school, to start forming relationships with young people, families, and educators, encouraging and incentivizing their matriculation into teaching.

Rethinking Pre-Service Education

Teacher educators should have first-hand knowledge of teaching practices that are responsive to the conditions of the neighborhoods and schools where they are sending teachers. They should also be exceptional teachers themselves. This means universities will need to change faculty recruitment criteria, prioritizing successful K-12 practice as a primary requisite for positions in teacher education.

If teacher educators are active and effective educators themselves, the curriculum will be more relevant, based on the faculty's practical experiences in the field. Teacher training should also include cutting edge research from germane fields such as public health, neuroscience, and law. This knowledge base will better prepare educators to design classroom pedagogy and support systems that are responsive to students' lives. Finally, teacher education should involve regular discussions with community members, students, parents, and effective teachers that come from the communities and schools where these novice teachers are headed.

Rethinking Development and Assessment

As teachers transition from their university education to the K-12 classroom, they should be apprenticed in classrooms of exceptional teachers (as we see in the trades, law, business, medicine, and the martial arts). To identify the educators to lead these apprenticeships, we could utilize evaluations based on a teacher quality index.¹ This approach positions excellent practitioners at the vanguard of the profession and cultivates a more meaningful professional community based on extended mentorships between early career and veteran teachers in the community—something that is sorely lacking, the absence of which contributes to high rates of early career teacher turnover.

Visions of a Cup That Overflows

My willingness to go on record with an admission that our nation and our profession has failed to meet the needs of poor children does not place me in agreement with the current regime's "commitment to accountability." From the ground, it is clear that their models of social and school accountability are procedural commitments to scapegoating; a not-so-sophisticated smoke and mirrors game that will never change outcomes in the aggregate. Entire neighborhoods and schools are surely "too big to fail," so bring on the radical influx of resources to bail them out. If teachers are the problem, bring on the national commitment to recruitment and competitive compensation packages that put teaching on par with every other profession our society values. Alas, these resources do not appear to be forthcoming anytime soon; for that, many will see our glass as half-empty.

There is another option. We can take the advice of my 82-year-old mother. We can remake ourselves, addressing the basic needs of all children and defining, assessing, and developing high quality teaching. We can see the communities that our society blames for a glass half-empty, as the places that actually make our glass half-full. Were we so bold, we might actually give all our nation's young people the quality of education and life that they deserve.

¹ A group of scholars from San Francisco State developed the Urban Teacher Quality Index, an evaluation tool for teachers that identifies excellence and supports improvement.

Flip the Script

Kevin K. Kumashiro & Erica R. Meiners

In Chicago, after much speculation, in July 2011 our new mayor Rahm Emanuel stated that his three teenaged children would attend the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. Emanuel buffered criticism with the hetero-patriarchal family screen. This was a father's decision, he stated, and "politics can't play into the decisions he makes for his family" (Associated Press, 2011).

Karen Lewis, the president of the Chicago Teachers Union, called it "wonderful" that Emanuel has the option to choose a school with small class sizes, vibrant curriculum, and a teacher and an assistant in every classroom. The UC Lab Schools are apparently fabulous. President Obama's daughters attended before transferring to Sidwell Friends School in Washington, DC, where the 2011-2012 tuition for high school is \$32,960 but this includes a hot lunch. Some of our best friends laud the UC Lab Schools for the massive resources at their children's disposal, the diversity of the faculty and student body, and the positive learning environment created by the staff. Teachers are unionized, earning among the highest teaching salaries in the state, and student rates of graduation and attending post-secondary education are enviable. The 2011-2012 price tag at the UC Lab Schools: \$24,870 a year for a grade 9-12 student (Tuition, n.d.). Money matters.

Money—and naming the impact of massive wealth differentials in the United States—often gets trivialized or disappeared in debates about how best to reform public schools (Gilson & Perot, 2011). And therein lays a central contradiction about school reform: a high tuition bill is logical and a father's choice for restrictive-admission private schools, but the impact of poverty and equalizing access to resources is generally off the table in discussions about struggling public schools. This contradiction is reflected in the work of Penny Pritzker, whose children attended UC Lab Schools where she now serves as a board member, and she is also a member of Chicago's appointed, not elected, public school board. In the summer of 2011 Pritzker, also the national finance chair in the 2008 Obama presidential campaign, led the charge to raise millions of dollars to support the anti-union advocacy group, Stand for Children, in its successful initiative to advance legislation that, among other things, scapegoated teachers and teachers' unions and weakened collective bargaining rights in Illinois (Long, 2011).

Organizations like Stand for Children are at the forefront of a movement of wealthy Americans to drum into public consciousness the notion that schools and student performance, always measured by standardized tests, would improve if we just held those bad, overwhelmingly female, teachers accountable. Media coverage of evil unions that protect veteran teacher's rights while stamping out the light of better (and often whiter) newer (and cheaper) teachers has catapulted teachers' unions to public educational enemy number one.

Why should we squander money on those lazy teachers, protected by corrupt unions, who are not doing their job? Scapegoating teachers and teachers' unions conveniently legitimates less public fiscal

investment in education and distracts us from challenging our nation's priorities and redistributing wealth.

We push back on the seductive rhetoric of the fiscal crisis that continues to justify all kinds of restructuring. While state educational coffers stagnate, decrease, or are tied to more punitive accountability regimes, other publicly financed industries grow. While violent crime rates continued to decrease, between 1984 and 2000, across all states and the District of Columbia, spending on prisons was 6 times the increase of spending on higher education (Justice Policy, 2002). In Illinois, between 1985 and 2000 the state's budget for higher education increased by 30% while the budget for corrections increased more than 100% (Clark, Janicheck, & Kane-Willis, 2006). The United States also deports more people a day than ever before, at a cost of \$18,310 per apprehension, a figure that does not include detention and other processing costs (Fitz, Martinez, & Wijewardena, 2010). The federal government spends 58% of the discretionary budget on military-related expenditures (National Priorities, 2011). The nation's priorities are clear.

Propelled by federal policy, anti-union legislation, and the demonization of unions and teachers in the media, the current dismal state of affairs almost reads like a recipe: How to Dismantle Public Education.

First, produce failure

The goal in No Child Left Behind of achieving 100% proficiency in reading and mathematics by the year 2014 is a rate that has not been achieved by any other nation. The goal may purport to raise standards, but by raising the bar to unachievable levels, and then punishing those who fail, NCLB actually sets up schools to fail.

Second, blame teachers

If students are not learning, it is because teachers are not teaching, right? Common sense tells us that education is all about the teacher, hence the media's love-affair with the stand-out teacher, and the unchallenged presumption that there are too many incompetent teachers, protected by unions, and prepared by mediocre teacher-certification programs. Are some teachers ineffective? Surely, just as in any other profession. But this focus on the individual masks the bigger picture, especially the more structural aspects of public education that can help to explain why disparities persist.

Third, force competition

If teachers are not trying hard enough, then we should introduce more competition from the private sector, because like grocery stores in a neighborhood, competition will force innovation and effort, and only the best will profit. The result is a dramatically increasing amount of public funds going to the private sector, giving the haves even more, and the have-nots, even less. Privatization, in other words, exacerbates educational disparities.

Where there is power there is always resistance. We write as the “occupation” of Wall Street hits its third week and the motley crew camped out is joined daily by unions, students, anti-poverty, queer and faith groups, and spreads across the nation. Whether this flourishes or not, the message is loud and clear: we must flip the script. What is the real crisis? According to the most recent U.S. Census, 1 in 6 Americans lives in poverty (Tavernise, 2011). Communities and cities are hyper-segregated (Population Studies, 2011). We have money for a permanent war, border policing, and Wall Street bailouts, but empty hands and cutbacks for schools and healthcare.

Our national myopic obsession with individuated school failure distracts us from the bigger pictures. Emanuel and Pritzker made the choice to send their children to school where the sticker price exceeds what the federal government thinks a family of four should be able to live on for a year. What is the real message? Excellence is available for those who can afford to participate in the tax-free and publicly subsidized educational privatopias (but, even if you could pay the tuition bill, admission is restricted, not guaranteed, as in public education). The political choice those in power suggest for other families across Chicago is not to fight for the redistribution of these resources and the life pathways associated with this wealth. Instead, the working-poor majority are instructed to keep Waiting for Superman.

We push back, like all social movements, because we know that the work to build a participatory and non-punishing democracy must be done again. And again. And again. In the past few months, from Argentina to Canada to the Dominican Republic to Egypt to France to Honduras to India to Kenya to Mexico to the UK, teachers and other workers have gone on strike, demanding that we see the bigger picture, insisting on flipping the script. In the United States, teachers join with activists from all walks of life, on Wall Street and beyond, to call attention to the warped priorities of our nation’s leaders and policies.

Three lessons from the Wall Street protests:

Name the problem. Draw connections to the bigger picture and challenge the constructedness of the fiscal crisis. Refuse to scapegoat the “usual suspects” and raise critical questions about the official explanations or the common sense. (see Image 1, “Name the Problem”)

Rethink the solution. Rather than dismantle the public sector or support our continued transformation into a punishment state, we must invest in, and work to strengthen, the welfare and supportive arms of the state, not the carceral tentacles. Why continue to naturalize the prison and military industrial complexes? Why not build the educational-justice, flourishing-wage, art-and-peace-garden complexes? (see Image 2, “Rethink the Solution”)

Jump into the movement. Collectivize. Consolidate sectors. Build coalitions and a broader social movement. (see Image 3, “Jump into the Movement”)

We must flip the script about public education. The problem is not the unavailability of funding or the rabid incompetence of all teachers, but rather, our flawed priorities and our unwillingness to name and address the significant and underlying causes for educational inequity. The solution is not the marketizing and privatizing of public education and the punishment of teachers, parents and children when they fail to perform well on narrow standardized tests. We require a redistribution of wealth and access to resources. We need authentic investments in just and researched educational transformations that don't leave anyone, including those who qualify as children, behind. The people who will make this happen are not supermen, billionaire hedge funders, philanthropic educational do-gooders or charismatic politicians. Each one of us must understand education reform as inseparable from our concurrent struggles in other sectors, including labor and healthcare, and the movements to secure full human and civil rights for all. We need to Occupy our classrooms, our PTAs, our boards of education, our legislatures, our chambers of commerce, our faith communities, and our media, to insist on ethical and just support to rebuild public education. Now.

Image 1: "Name the Problem"



Image 2: "Rethink the Solution"



Image 3: "Jump into the Movement"



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Coda

Gail M. Boldt

In the four weeks since we published the first essays of this series, there has been a new wave of articles about teacher accountability published in a variety of media outlets. Spurred by the New York City Department of Education's release of individual teacher ratings based on "value added measures," the authors of these articles have debated: the economic politics of the accountability movement; the validity of value added measures; the question of whether what is measured is really at the heart of a good education; and how best to capture, evaluate and promote effective teaching practices. I found three articles particularly compelling.

Low Morale

Fernanda Sanders reported in *The New York Times* (March 7, 2012) that the Annual Met Life Survey of the American Teacher found teacher morale to be at its lowest point in more than twenty years. One in three teachers surveyed planned to leave the profession within five years. Among the many reasons teachers cited for wanting to leave: increasing class sizes, layoffs, the loss of services such as aides and counselors as well as programs such as art and music, and out of date technology and materials. They believed that the already acrimonious discourses surrounding teaching would only worsen in the face of the impossible goal of continuing to improve test scores in order to meet the Annual Yearly Progress requirement of No Child Left Behind.

Value Added Measurement as "Mathematical Intimidation"

In a 2011 *Washington Post* blog currently making the rounds on Facebook, Dr. Valerie Strauss reprinted an article originally published by mathematician John Ewing in the *Notices of the American Mathematics Society*. Ewing warns that the selling of the value added model is a form of "mathematical intimidation" and that the claims that value added measures can predict which teachers will be most successful at supporting student learning are unsupported. He cautions his readers:

Making policy decisions on the basis of value-added models has the potential to do even more harm than browbeating teachers. If we decide whether alternative certification is better than regular certification, whether nationally board certified teachers are better than randomly selected ones, whether small schools are better than large, or whether a new curriculum is better than an old by using a flawed measure of success, we almost surely will end up making bad decisions that affect education for decades to come.

Alignment Gone Wild

Huffington Post education blogger Alan Singer (February 28, 2012) reported on the efforts of the Pearson Corporation to create a system that unites the creation of standardized assessment, curriculum (called instructional modules), teacher certification exams, teacher development workshops, teacher assessments and multimedia digital textbooks. The perniciousness of this sell-out of children's education to a corporate giant is only made more staggering when we consider that the most

measurably successful teachers in the proposed system may well be those who are little more than Pearson consultants. Clearly the Pearson vision of teaching would obviate the need for university-based teacher education, with its attempts to encourage critical thinking, professional knowledge and independent judgment.

Toward a More Hopeful Educational Future

In creating *Challenging the Politics of the Teacher Accountability Movement*, it has been easy to find reasons for anger and despair. Realizing the second half of our title, *Toward a More Hopeful Educational Future*, has been harder. And yet there are islands of promise.

The New York Times' Michael Winerip has been reporting on efforts of school principals to fight back against attacks on teacher professionalism as well as their own. Since November, 1400 principals in New York State have signed a letter protesting the use of test scores and what the principals experience as low quality and deprofessionalizing trainings in teacher assessment (Schoolbook, 2012). One principal, cited in Winerip's November 27, 2011 article, noted that one good thing about the new evaluation system was that it united principals and teachers. This assertion was borne out in more recent reporting (Winerip, March 4, 2012) on Brooklyn's P.S. 146, a school that sounded to my teacher education sensibilities like a strong learning environment with smart and talented teachers. When some of her faculty did not fare well in the release of the teacher ratings, Winerip describes the principal coming to the teachers' defense, calling the scores "invalid value-added." He also describes the efforts of Maribeth Whitehouse, a top scoring Bronx teacher, to circulate a letter of protest among the other top 1% teachers. Whitehouse says their desire to show unity with fellow teachers is a reflection of "our profession and professional disdain for this nonsense."

Indeed, the teachers identified by Winerip as well as the teachers with whom I spend time in my hometown of State College, Pennsylvania are a source of hope. My colleagues and I recently completed a free, digital archive (edtap.psu.edu) featuring K-8 State College teachers working with their students in project-based learning. I show videos from this archive to my teacher education students in order to inspire them, to demonstrate what children are capable of in great classrooms.

Of course we also want this special edition of the Bank Street [Occasional Papers Series](#) to be a source of hope. The essays have already garnered strong responses. One reader sent the link for the issue to all her state legislators. It is being widely shared on Facebook. Teachers have reported that they are forwarding essays to colleagues and administrators, and university faculty have communicated plans to use the issue in teacher education and educational leadership classes. We are making new connections with educators across the country. And most importantly, readers are saying that they feel encouraged by essays that match their own experiences and support their efforts to deliver high quality education for all children.

We hope that this is just a beginning. With the release of Part III, the issue is now complete. It will continue to be hosted [here](#) and can be downloaded individually or as one complete volume. If you find any of the essays helpful or provocative, we urge you to use them, to spread them and to add to them with your comments.

Author Biographies

William Ayers, formerly Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior University Scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), founder of both the Small Schools Workshop and the Center for Youth and Society, has written extensively about social justice, democracy and education, the cultural contexts of schooling, and teaching as an essentially intellectual, ethical, and political enterprise. He has authored 6 books, co-authored 3 books, most recently (with Ryan Alexander-Tanner) *To Teach: The Journey, in Comics*, and co-edited 3 volumes.

Gail M. Boldt is an Associate Professor in the College of Education at Penn State University. She teaches in the undergraduate literacy education program and is the Professor in Charge of the Ph.D. program in language, culture and society. Her research interests include analyses of constructions of identity in school settings, the emotional dimensions of reading difficulties, literacy curriculum and children's subjectivities, children's popular culture, and narrative research.

Greg Dimitriadis is Professor of Sociology of Education in the Graduate School of Education at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is author or editor (alone and with others) of over 10 books and 50 articles and book chapters. His books include *Critical Dispositions: Evidence and Expertise in Education*, *Performing Identity / Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice*, *Friendship, Cliques, and Gangs: Young Black Men Coming of Age in Urban America*, and *Studying Urban Youth Culture*. He edits the book series *Critical Youth Studies* and co-edits *Key Ideas and Education*, both published by Routledge.

Jeff Duncan-Andrade is Associate Professor of Raza Studies and Education at San Francisco State University and Director of the Educational Equity Initiative at the [Institute for Sustainable Economic, Educational, and Environmental Design](#) (ISEEED). In addition to these duties, he continues as a high school teacher in East Oakland where for the past 19 years he has practiced and studied the use of critical pedagogy in urban schools (see www.rosesinconcrete.org). Dr. Duncan-Andrade has authored two books and numerous journal articles and book chapters on the conditions of urban education, urban teacher support and development, and effective pedagogy in urban settings.

Anne Haas Dyson is a former teacher of young children and, currently, a professor of education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Previously she was on the faculty of the University of Georgia, Michigan State University, and the University of California, Berkeley, where she was a recipient of the campus Distinguished Teaching Award. She studies the childhood cultures and literacy learning of young schoolchildren. Among her publications are *Social Worlds of Children Learning to Write in an Urban Primary School*, which was awarded NCTE's David Russell Award for Distinguished Research, *Writing Superheroes*, and *The Brothers and Sisters Learn to Write*.

Celia Genishi is professor of education and chair of the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University. She is a former secondary Spanish and preschool teacher and now teaches courses related to early childhood education and qualitative research methods. She is co-

author (with Anne Haas Dyson) of *Children, Language, and Literacy: Diverse Learners in Diverse Times*. Her research interests include collaborative research and assessment with teachers, childhood bilingualism, and children's language use in classrooms. One of her cherished awards is called Advocate for Justice, presented to her in 1998 by the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education.

Marc Lamont Hill has been on the faculty of Columbia University as Associate Professor of Education, Teachers College, since 2009. He also holds an affiliated faculty appointment in African American Studies. Dr. Hill is the author of two books: *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life* and *The Classroom and the Cell*. In addition, Dr. Hill has lectured widely and provides regular commentary for media outlets like NPR, *Washington Post*, *Essence Magazine*, and *The New York Times*. He is the host of the nationally syndicated television show *Our World With Black Enterprise* and provides regular commentary for CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News Channel.

Fred Klonsky began teaching art to elementary school students in 1984. He teaches in a suburban school district outside of Chicago. Fred is a long-time teacher, union, and political activist. From 2000 to 2010 he was President of the Park Ridge Education Association. Fred blogs daily at FredKlonskyblog.com. He retires from teaching in June of 2012.

Kevin K. Kumashiro is professor of Asian American Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he was formerly chair of Educational Policy Studies and interim co-director of the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy. He is the award-winning author of nine books on education and activism, including *Bad Teacher!: How Blaming Teachers Distorts the Bigger Picture* (Teachers College Press, forthcoming in spring 2012). He is the founding director of the Center for Anti-Oppressive Education, and the president-elect of the National Association for Multicultural Education (2010-2012).

Deborah Meier has spent 45 years in urban public schools as a kindergarten teacher and principal, K-12; she is also author of *The Power of Their Ideas* and many other books, a founding member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, and a MacArthur Fellow.

Erica R. Meiners lives in Chicago and teaches, writes and participates in justice work. She is the author of *Flaunt It! Queers Organizing for Public Education and Justice* (2009), *Right to be Hostile: Schools, Prisons and the Making of Public Enemies* (2007) and numerous articles. A 2010 Lillian J. Robinson Scholar at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, a 2011-2012 Visiting Research Faculty at the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago, she is Professor of Education and Gender and Women's Studies and a member of the University Professionals of Illinois, local 4100, at Northeastern Illinois University.

Pedro A. Noguera is the Peter L. Agnew Professor of Education at New York University. He holds tenured faculty appointments in the departments of Teaching and Learning and Humanities and Social Sciences at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Development at NYU. Dr. Noguera is also the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education and the co-Director of the

Institute for the Study of Globalization and Education in Metropolitan Settings (IGEMS). In 2008, he was appointed by the Governor of New York to serve on the State University of New York Board of Trustees.

Diane Ravitch is Research Professor of Education at New York University and a historian of education. She is the author of ten books including *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education* (2010). She is also an editor of 14 volumes and has written more than 500 articles and reviews for scholarly and popular publications. She shares a blog called [Bridging Differences](#) with Deborah Meier, hosted by Education Week. She also blogs for [Politico.com/arena](#) and the [Huffington Post](#).

Raynard Sanders has served as professor and Interim Director in the Master of Arts in Urban Education Program at Southern University at New Orleans. He also served as the Executive Director of The National Faculty at New Orleans, a professional development agency designed to improve the quality of teaching in poor performing schools throughout the Mississippi Delta. He hosts *The New Orleans Imperative*, a weekly radio show on public education. Dr. Sanders received his B.A. from Dillard University, a Masters of Educational Administration from Southern University, and his Doctorate from Teachers College, Columbia University.

Gil Schmerler is director of the Leadership for Educational Change program at Bank Street College. He has been a teacher, administrator, staff developer, and new school designer in K-12 schools in NJ, MD, NY, and RI. His recent work and writing have focused on teacher leadership, small schools, and constructivist teacher supervision. He is co-author with Mary Anne Raywid of *Not So Easy Going: The Policy Environments of Small Urban Schools and Schools-within-Schools* (2003), and editor of *Teacher Leaders: Transforming Schools from the Inside* (2009).

Peter Taubman is professor of education in the School of Education at Brooklyn College. He is a co-founder of the Bushwick School for Social Justice, in Brooklyn, New York. His book, *Teaching by Numbers: Deconstructing the Discourse of Standards and Accountability in Education*, published by Routledge Press, received the 2010 Outstanding Book Award from AERA's Division B, the 2010 Critics Choice Book Award from the American Educational Studies Association, and the OL Davis, Jr. Outstanding Book Award from AATC. His most recent book, *Disavowed Knowledge: Psychoanalysis, Teaching and Education*, was published by Routledge Press.

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