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Assessing No Child Left Behind and the Rise of Neoliberal Education Policies

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No Child Left Behind and other education reforms promoting high-stakes testing, accountability, and competitive markets continue to receive wide support from politicians and public figures. This support, the author suggests, has been achieved by situating education within neoliberal policies that argue that such reforms are necessary within an increasingly globalized economy, will increase academic achievement, and will close the achievement gap. However, the author offers preliminary data suggesting that the reforms are not achieving their stated goals. Consequently, educators need to question whether neoliberal approaches to education should replace the previously dominant social democratic approaches.

KEYWORDS: NCLB, high-stakes testing, education policy, neoliberalism

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) passed with large majorities in both the Senate (87-10) and the House (381-41) and was signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002. How do we explain the rise of and overwhelming support for NCLB as policy? One explanation focuses on the political process in which NCLB became law: the role of the executive and legislative branches and the influence of lobbying groups (DeBray, 2006). However, another kind of explanation, and the approach I take here, sees NCLB as part of a larger shift from social democratic to neoliberal policies that has been occurring over the past several decades; a shift accompanied by both discursive and structural changes in education and society. When NCLB is seen within a broader context of sociopolitical changes, it becomes apparent that reforming NCLB requires more than voting out those who currently hold political power. Reforming NCLB begins with changing the way in which we conceptualize the purpose of education and of society itself.

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This helps explain why the recent shift from Republican to Democratic control of the federal legislature may have little effect on education legislation. Democratic leaders, including Representative Miller and Senator Kennedy, remain "steadfast supporters of the testing and accountability requirements" of NCLB (Hoff, 2006, p. 27).

Accordingly, I begin by describing my analytical approach, focusing less on the political process in which NCLB became law and instead examining NLCB for how it exemplifies the transformation in the dominant discourses on education and society, as societal institutions are recast as markets rather than deliberatively democratic systems (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Young, 2000). I show how NLCB, like other recent education policies promoting standardized testing, accountability, competition, school choice, and privatization, reflect the rise and dominance of neoliberal and neoconservative policy discourses over social democratic policy discourses. Furthermore, neoliberals, who range from those who endorse the rationale of competition and accountability without appreciating the larger shift in societal discourses to those who aim to remove government from any responsibility for social welfare, argue that increased globalization gives us no alternative to focusing on increasing efficiency through testing, accountability, and choice. Moreover, many neoliberals argue that standardized testing will increase educational opportunity and ensure greater assessment objectivity than teachers provide (see e.g., NCLB, 2002; Paige & Jackson, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Press Secretary, 2006). However, using evidence from test scores in New York, Texas, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), I suggest that reforms focusing on high-stakes testing are unlikely to achieve their stated goals. Furthermore, the evidence from New York and Texas regarding the process and outcome of high-stakes testing raises doubts about whether test scores tell us very much about student learning, something we must keep in mind as reports evaluating the success of NCLB are made public. Last, I show that these policies undermine our capacity to maintain a democratic educational system and society.

Situating NCLB Within the Rise of Globalization and Neoliberal Policies

How do we understand the passage of NCLB? Elizabeth DeBray (2006), in *Politics, Ideology, and Education*, revealed how much of the groundwork for passing NCLB was laid by Democrats before Bush's election. Although for my purposes this historical analysis usefully demonstrates that accountability, choice, and privatization are not exclusively Republican policies, it does not adequately explain why these policies have dominated the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries. Furthermore, it is not enough to examine a particular policy's stated purpose. Instead, like Olssen, Codd, and O'Neill (2004), I argue that "language itself is a sphere of social process," shaping and being shaped by material conditions, which are intimately related to power. "If," they wrote,

> official policy texts are political, cultural, economic as much as they are educational treatises, the meanings of the discourses embedded in these texts await decoding so as to reveal the real relations that this specifically cultural form of official discourse helps to construct, reconstruct, and conceal. (p. 2)

NCLB is part of a larger change in social policies, in particular, the rise of neoliberal economic and social policies that have become dominant over the past few decades (Harvey, 2005; Hursh, 2007; Lipman & Hursh, 2007; Tabb, 2002). We cannot understand NCLB without understanding the changing historical context of education and in particular how education is positioned differently within a globalized economy.

The presidency of George W. Bush has solidified neoliberalism as the dominant approach to policy making in the United States. Neoliberalism emphasizes "the deregulation of the economy, trade liberalization, the dismantling of the public sector [including education, health, and social welfare], and the predominance of the financial sector of the economy over production and commerce" (Tabb, 2002, p. 7). The consequences for education were similar to those for all public goods and services. Tabb (2002) wrote that neoliberalism stresses

> the privatization of the public provision of goods and services—moving their provision from the public sector to the private—along with deregulating how private producers can behave, giving greater scope to the single-minded pursuit of profit and showing significantly less regard for the need to limit social costs or for redistribution based on nonmarket criteria. The aim of neoliberalism is to put into question all collective structures capable of obstructing the logic of the pure market. (p. 29)

Neoliberalism replaces the social democratic policies that prevailed from the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt through to the election of Ronald Reagan. Social democratic liberalism, which is what the public commonly thinks of upon hearing the word *liberal*, endorsed Keynesian economic policies in which the government shared some responsibility for safeguarding the conditions that could enable people to flourish. During the Great Depression, President Roosevelt implemented government spending, taxation, and welfare policies to rebuild the country and to support the military effort in World War II. In 1944, Roosevelt called for a Second Bill of Rights, arguing that freedom demanded that individuals be provided with such basic human needs as a "useful and remunerative job . . . a decent home . . . medical care . . . a good education . . . and social security" (Sunstein, 2004, p. 13). The United States emerged from the war victorious, but corporations resisted Roosevelt's Second Bill of Rights. It was never implemented. Nonetheless, after the war, workers, women, and people of color struggled for and were able to extend their personal and political rights to education, housing, health care, workplace safety, and the ballot box (Bowles & Gintis, 1986).

The early postwar decades were marked by the "historic compromise" between capital and labor by which, in exchange for improving wages, labor consented to capital's right not only to control the workplace but also to capitalist control of investment and growth, primarily through multinational corporations. In part fueled by workers' growing wages, the period was marked by unusually rapid and stable economic growth. The majority of Americans experienced improved standards of living as the middle class expanded and race and gender inequalities decreased (see Hacker, 1993). School desegregation proceeded (de jure desegregation, if not always de facto), states expanded public postsecondary education, and workplace safety regulations and welfare benefits improved.

However, efforts to expand personal and political rights were not uncontested. For example, social security benefits were denied to many African Americans when Congress yielded to southern politicians' demands to exclude agricultural and domestic household workers, jobs typically filled by African Americans (Katznelson, 2005). Even the now venerated G.I. Bill "roused the ire of all but the most moderate business leaders . . . [who] disliked the liberal agenda" (Fones-Wolfe, 1994, p. 7).

Corporate profits began to fall in the late 1960s due to deficit spending by the federal government (to fund the Vietnam War), the formation of OPEC and rising oil prices (Faux, 2006), and the inability of corporations to pass the cost of wage increases on to consumers in the increasingly competitive and open world economy (Parenti, 1999). To restore higher rates of profit, the United States and other developed countries implemented monetarist and neoliberal policies that supported corporations over workers (Gill, 2003). In the United States, monetarist policies restored the power of capital by raising interest rates. This produced a recession that increased job scarcity and deflated wage demands and reversed gains in social spending. These policies were designed to reduce the standard of living of all but wealthy Americans. Paul Volcker, Federal Reserve Board Chairman in 1979, pushed for a recession, asserting, "The standard of living of the average American has to decline. I don't think you can escape that" (Parenti, 1999, p. 119). Such monetarist policies were soon linked with neoliberal policies such as deregulation, repealing of social democratic controls, and elevation of the free market above the public interest.

Neoliberalism transforms how we conceptualize the role of government and the relationship between the individual and society. Neoliberalism denounces social democratic liberalism as a recipe for an interventionist government that threatens individual liberty through taxes and other regulations. Neoliberalism promotes personal responsibility through individual choice within markets. The individual is conceived as an autonomous entrepreneur who can always take care of his or her own needs. Lemke (2002) described neoliberalism as seeking

> to unite a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational individual. It aspires to construct responsible subjects whose moral

> quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts. (p. 59)

For neoliberals, those who do not succeed are held to have made bad choices. Personal responsibility means nothing is society's fault. People have only themselves to blame. Furthermore, the market becomes central within such a conception of the individual.

> Every social transaction is conceptualized as entrepreneurial, to be carried out purely for personal gain. The market introduces competition as the structuring mechanism through which resources and status are allocated efficiently and fairly. The "invisible hand" of the market is thought to be the most efficient way of sorting out which competing individuals get what. (Olssen et al., 2004, pp. 137–138)

Under neoliberalism, individuals are transformed into equally competent, equally privileged "entrepreneurs of themselves" (Foucault, 1979, p. 198), operating within a marketplace that now includes services such as education, health care, and pensions. David Harvey (2005) defined neoliberalism as

> a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate for such practices. . . . Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, *education* [italics added], health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. (p. 2)

Moreover, proponents of neoliberalism assert that not only is it preferable to social democratic liberalism but also, under globalization, it is inevitable. Neoliberals, observed Dean (2002), portray themselves as powerless to choose any other path. He wrote,

> Those who use a discourse of economic globalization can simultaneously hold "there is little (or, at least, less) [they] can do to exercise national sovereignty" and it is imperative to engage in comprehensive reforms of the public sector, welfare, higher [and lower] education, finance, and labor market control. (p. 55)

Similarly, Fairclough (2003) demonstrated how globalization discourse represents global economic change as inevitable,

> as a process without human agents, in which change is nominalized ("globalization") and so represented as itself an entity which can act

> as an agent (it "imposes deep and rapid adjustments"), a process in a general and ill-defined present and without a history (it is just what it "is") which is universal (or, precisely, global) in terms of place, and an inevitable process which must be responded to in particular ways—as "is," which imposes an "ought", or rather a must. (p. 45)

Over the past several decades, neoliberal policies have become so dominant that they seem to be necessary, inevitable, and unquestionable. Bourdieu (1998) concluded that "Everywhere we hear it said, all day long—and this is what gives the dominant discourse its strength—that there is nothing to put forward in opposition to the neoliberal view, that it has presented itself as self-evident" (p. 29). Neoliberalism is presented as if there is no alternative.

By examining the efforts over the past quarter century to increase educational efficiency through standards and standardized testing, we can see how neoliberal ideas led to recent educational reforms, including NCLB. As I will show, these reforms are presented as necessary to increase educational efficiency within a world in which goods, services, and jobs easily cross borders. Increased efficiency can only be attained, argue neoliberals, if individuals are able to make choices within a market system in which schools compete rather than the current system in which individuals are captive to educational decisions made by educators and government officials. Furthermore, if individuals are to make decisions, they must have access to quantitative information, such as standardized test scores, that presumably indicate the quality of the education provided. Neoliberals believe competition leads to better schools, and hence better education for all students, closing the achievement gap between students of color and White students. However, as I will show, we can question not only whether standardized testing provides the objectivity claimed and whether educational achievement has improved but also the effect that neoliberalism has on our schools, our democratic ideals, and our social practices.

Neoliberal Education Reforms

Neoliberal ideals, although rarely explicitly stated, form the basis for most of the education reform proposals since *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* began by blaming schools for the economic recession of the early 1980s, which was caused not by schools but by the policies of the Federal Reserve Board and by multinational corporations exporting jobs to low-wage countries:

> Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justified pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its

> people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. . . . We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (p. 5)

The fear of falling economically behind other countries continues under NCLB. President Bush, in reviewing the alleged achievements gained under NCLB, stated that NCLB

> is an important way to make sure America remains competitive in the 21st century. We're living in a global world. See, the education system must compete with education systems in China and India. If we fail to give our students the skills necessary to compete in the world of the 21st century, the jobs will go elsewhere. That's just a fact of life. It's the reality of the world we live in. And therefore, now is the time for the United States of America to give our children the skills so that the jobs will stay here. (U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Press Secretary, 2006)

For Bush, that "we're living in a global world" cannot be questioned, "that's just a fact of life" requiring educational reforms focusing on job skills. Similarly, best-selling author Thomas Friedman (1999), in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, asserted that globalization requires free market capitalism:

> The driving force behind globalization is free market capitalism—the more you let market forces rule and the more you open your economy to free trade and competition, the more efficient your economy will be. Globalization means the spread of free-market capitalism to virtually every country in the world. Therefore, globalization also has its own set of economic rules—rules that revolve around opening, deregulating and privatizing your economy, in order to make it more competitive and attractive to foreign investment. (p. 9)

Many of the state and federal education reforms of the past two decades therefore parallel T. Friedman's argument, asserting that globalization requires free market capitalism, including deregulation and privatization. In states that have adopted high-stakes testing and accountability requirements, such as New York and Texas, and at the federal level with NCLB, advocates have promoted the reforms as necessary under globalization to increase efficiency, accountability, fairness, and equality. Almost all of these themes are encapsulated in Paige's (Bush's first secretary of education) description of how NLCB will increase our educational efficiency, ensuring that all children will learn and closing the achievement gap between the United States and other countries. Paige, in response to an Organization of Economic and Cooperative Development report, said,

> This report documents how little we receive in return for our national investment. This report also reminds us that we are battling two achievement gaps. One is between those being served well by our system and those being left behind. The other is between the U.S. and many of our higher achieving friends around the world. By closing the first gap, we will close the second. (Education Review, 2003)

A second component of neoliberal discourse focuses on standardized testing as a means of providing both a "quality indicator" to the consumer and "objective assessments" of student learning within education markets. In *NCLB: A Parents Guide* (U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 2003), parents are told that standardized tests are a valid and reliable means of assessing students' learning, superior to teacher-generated assessments. The guide advises parents that NLCB "will give them objective data" through standardized testing (U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 2003). Furthermore, objective data from tests are necessary because "many parents have children who are getting straight As, but find out too late that their child is not prepared for college. That's just one reason why NCLB gives parents objective data about how their children are doing" (U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 2003). Teachers, NCLB strongly implies, have not rigorously enforced standards or accurately assessed students, therefore covering up their own and their students' failures. Furthermore, test scores are useful to parents because "parents will know how well learning is occurring in their child's class. They will know information on how their child is progressing compared to other children" (U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 2003). Because teachers, NCLB claims, have relied too often on their own assessments, standardized test scores will also benefit them. NCLB "provides teachers with independent information about each child's strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge, teachers can craft lessons to make sure each student meets or exceeds standards" (U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 2003).

Standardized testing is promoted as a means of assessing the quality of students, teachers, and schools, thus ensuring that all children are treated fairly. Such a sentiment is reflected in Bush's recent statement that NCLB prevents "children from being shuffled through our schools without understanding whether or not they can read and write and add and subtract. . . . That's unfair to the children" (U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Press Secretary, 2006).

Because standardized testing ostensibly provides educators with objective information about students' learning and enables families to choose schools that are successfully educating children, NCLB supports a third central discourse in neoliberal efforts to transform education. Neoliberal reforms are touted for improving educational opportunities for all students and closing the achievement gap between White students and students of color. Paige, who as an African American lends credibility to these claims, argued that NCLB improves education for all children, especially African Americans.

> We have an educational emergency in the United States of America. Nationally, blacks score lower on reading and math tests than their white peers. But it doesn't have to be that way. We need to collectively focus our attention on the problem. . . . We have to make sure that every single child gets our best attention. We also need to help African-American parents understand how this historic new education law can specifically help them and their children. (U.S. Department of Education, 2003)

On other occasions, Paige explicitly connected NCLB to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, building on the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.:

> Forty-four years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "The great challenge facing the nation today is to solve segregation and discrimination and bring into full realization the ideas and dreams of our democracy." The No Child Left Behind Act does that. The law creates the conditions of equitable access to education for all children. It brings us a step closer to the promise of our constitution. It fulfills the mandate in Brown v. Board of Education. It honors the trust parents place in our schools and teachers, with a quality education for all children, every single one. (Paige & Jackson, 2004)

But, as I will show in the next section, whether NLCB and similar reforms emphasizing high-stakes exams and accountability were actually designed to increase fairness and equality can be questioned. First, some neoliberal and neoconservative organizations have stated that their real goal is to use testing and accountability to portray public schools as failing and to push for privatizing education provided through competitive markets. Second, evidence suggests that our educational system is becoming more, not less, unequal, with a higher drop-out rate for students of color and students living in poverty, who are also more likely to be subjected to curricula and pedagogical practices that are less demanding, such as Success for All and America's Choice (Kozol, 2005).

Undermining Public Education and Promoting Markets and Privatization

For many neoliberals, the ultimate goal of the recent reforms is to convert the educational system into markets and, as much as possible, privatize educational services (Johnson & Salle, 2004). Organizations including the Manhattan Institute for Public Policy Research, The Heritage Foundation, The Fordham Foundation, The Hoover Institution, and the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation have attacked public schools and teachers with the goal of replacing public education with private education. For many of them, vouchers and charter schools are the first step toward privatizing schools. For example, Milton Friedman (1995), in *Public Schools: Make Them Private*, advocated vouchers as a way "to transition from a government [used pejoratively by neoliberals] to a market system." M. Freidman stated,

> Our elementary and secondary education system needs to be totally restructured. Such a reconstruction can be achieved only by privatizing a major segment of the educational system—i.e. by enabling a private, for-profit industry to develop that will provide a wide variety of learning opportunities and offer effective competition to public schools. (cited in Johnson & Salle, 2004)

Others call for the immediate elimination of public education. Richard Eberling (2000), president of the Foundation for Economic Education, in "It's Time to Put Public Education Behind Us", wrote,

> It's time, therefore, to rethink the entire idea of public schooling in America. It's time to consider whether it would be better to completely privatize the entire educational process from kindergarten through the PhD. . . . The tax dollars left in the hands of the citizenry would then be available for families to use directly to pay for their child's education. The free market would supply an infinitely diverse range of educational vehicles for everyone. (cited in Johnson & Salle, 2004)

Some privatization advocates specifically anticipate that the high number of schools designated as failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) will lead to calls for privatizing schools. Howard Fuller, founder of the pro-voucher organization Black Alliance for Educational Options, in a 2002 interview with the National Governors Association, said, "Hopefully, in years to come the [NCLB] law will be amended to allow families to choose private schools as well as public schools" (cited in Miner, 2004, p. 11).

The Bush administration has provided both policy and monetary support to privatization efforts. A voucher program was initially included in NCLB but removed when members of both political parties objected (DeBray, 2006). Failing to include vouchers in NLCB, the administration imposed a $50 million experimental voucher program on Washington, D.C., over objections from residents and the U.S. Congress and granted $77.6 million to groups dedicated to privatization through voucher programs (Bracey, 2004). As we enter the early stages of reauthorizing NCLB, the Bush administration has again proposed that vouchers be part of the solution to improving public education, proposing $250 million for vouchers, called "Promise scholarships," in the education budget for fiscal year 2008 (Klein, 2007).

Privatization also plays a role in other aspects of NLCB. Schools failing to achieve AYP lose federal funding for tutors. Instead, tutoring is provided by for-profit and nonprofit community organizations, some of which have religious affiliations. The U.S. Department of Education earmarked $2.5 billion for private sector tutoring in 2005–06. But one analysis concludes that many corporations did not have a "viable business plan" and that there is great difficulty in providing private tutoring services (Borja, 2006). Furthermore, under NCLB, schools face the prospect of having their administrations taken over by outside private for-profit organizations, such as the Edison Corporation.

Moreover, the administration has not been shy about supporting charter schools. The president and administrators in the Department of Education frequently use public appearances to promote charter schools as a solution to public school problems. In press conferences, when Paige defended NCLB, he also spoke out for largely unpopular charter schools (Shaw, 2004). At a conference I attended in spring 2004 on the relationship between the environment and human health, the Department of Education's director of interagency affairs exclaimed that he "knew nothing about education or science" and then devoted his talk to the virtues of charter schools, citing as evidence an unnamed report that he had not yet read.

Most tellingly, after Hurricane Katrina, the Bush administration and the Louisiana Department of Education replaced most of the New Orleans public schools with charter schools. First, they put all of the Orleans Parish public school employees on forced leave without pay; then, they voted to fire all the employees ("Educational Land Grab," 2006). As described in the publication *Dismantling a Community* (Center for Community Change, 2006),

> Over the past twelve months, buoyed by the support of the federal government, a network of conservative anti-government activists have moved with singular intensity to patch together a new vision for K-12 education that they hope will become a national model.
>
> It is a vision that disdains the public sector and those who work within it. It is a vision based on competition and economic markets. It is a vision of private hands spending public funds.
>
> Most disturbing, it is a vision that casts families and students as "customers," who shop for schools in isolation from—and even in competition with—their neighbors. It is a vision that, like the game of musical chairs, requires someone to be left without a seat. (p. 1)

Reed (2006) recently placed the transformation of schools and other public services in New Orleans within the context of the neoliberal project:

> The goal of this change is acceptance, as the unquestioned order of things, that private is always better than public, and that the main functions of government are to enhance opportunities for the investor class and suppress wages for everyone else. (p. 26)

The push for markets, choice, and competition has become dominant in policy making. Robertson (2000) noted that proponents of choice and markets argue "efficiency and equity in education can only be addressed through 'choice' and where family or individuals are constructed as the customers of educational services" (p. 174). Thrupp and Willmott (2003) added that by "the mid-1990s . . . the market solution (to just about everything) currently holds politicians in thrall" (p. 13) in the United States and elsewhere.

Preliminary Evidence on the Results From High-Stakes Testing Reforms

The aim of NCLB and other high-stakes testing reforms therefore may be less about improving student learning and closing the achievement gap than it is about undermining public education to introduce a market-based system. In the next section, I provide evidence from New York, Texas (McNeil, 2000; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001), and the National Assessment of Educational Progress that suggests the reforms are not achieving their stated goals of improving education for all and closing the achievement gap. Instead, at least as the evidence from these states provides (and except for the NAEP, we only have specific and in-depth information at the state and district levels), educational inequality is worsening.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, under a new commissioner of education, New York State began implementing standardized exams in math and English in the fourth and eighth grades, science in the sixth, and social studies in the fifth grade. It became 1 of 18 states (Amrein & Berliner, 2002) to require that students pass one or more standardized exams, in this case one exam each in English, science, and math, along with exams in global studies and U.S. history, to graduate from high school. The graduation requirement has met with some resistance, in particular because of hardships the exams place on English language learners and from innovative schools that had implemented an interdisciplinary project-based curriculum and used portfolio assessments in lieu of the previously optional Regents exams.

Like the NCLB requirements that were to follow, the reforms in New York were promoted on the grounds that they were necessary in an increasingly globalized economy and as a means of ensuring valid assessments and a rigorous education. New York's Chancellor of Education Carl Hayden (personal communication, May 7, 2001) asserted that graduation exams were the only way to ensure that all "children emerged from school [with] the skills and knowledge needed for success in an increasingly complex economy." Yet almost every recent standardized exam in New York has been criticized for having poorly constructed, misleading, or erroneous questions or for using a grading scale that either over- or understates students' learning. Critics argue that an exam's degree of difficulty has varied depending on whether the State Education Department (SED) wants to increase the graduation rate (and therefore makes the exam easier) or wants to appear rigorous and tough (and therefore makes the exam more difficult). The passing rate for the exam can be increased or decreased simply by adjusting the cut score, turning a low percentage of correct answers into a pass or a high percentage of correct answers into a failure. On exams that students are likely to take as part of their graduation requirement, SED makes it easier for students to pass by lowering the cut score. This occurred, for example, on a recent "Living Environments" exam, where students only needed to answer 39% of the questions correctly to earn a passing grade of 55%. Conversely, the exams for the advanced, nonrequired courses, such as physics and chemistry, have been made more difficult. In fact,

39% of students failed a recent physics exam in order, critics charge, to make Regents testing appear more rigorous (Winerip, 2003a). However, because primarily academically successful middle-class students take physics, the students and their parents were able to politically pressure SED to change the scoring.

Furthermore, sometimes an unusually low or high failure rate may not be intentional but the result of incompetence. The June 2003 Regents "Math A" exam (also the test students are most likely to take to meet the Regents' math requirement) was so poorly constructed that the test scores had to be discarded. Only 37% of the students passed statewide (Arenson, 2003). At Rochester's Wilson Magnet High School, a school consistently ranked by *Newsweek* as one of the best in the nation primarily because of its International Baccalaureate Programme, all 300 students who took the exam failed (M. Rivera, personal communication, June 19, 2003).

The SED has also been criticized for how it constructs test questions. For example, an English exam received national censure for removing from literary passages references "to race, religion, ethnicity, sex, nudity, alcohol, even the mildest profanity and just about anything that might offend someone for some reason" (Kleinfield, 2002, p. A1). Examples of changes included deleting all references to Judaism in an excerpt from a work by Isaac Singer and the racial references in Anne Dillard's description of the insights she gained when as a White child she visited a library in the Black section of town.

Many of the authors of the changed passages were outraged that such changes occurred without their permission and substantially changed the meaning of the texts. Others pointed out the absurdity of having students answer questions that often referred to deleted portions of the text and objected to how confused a student might become if he or she were already familiar with the passage and were now confronted with a passage in which the meaning was changed (Kleinfield, 2002).

Yet states and NCLB use these same tests and test scores to determine whether students should graduate and whether schools should be rewarded or punished. However, even if the tests were well constructed and valid, the yardstick by which schools are measured—AYP—often discriminates against schools serving students of color and/or living in poverty.

The determination of whether a school is making AYP tells us little about whether a school is improving. Not only can we question the validity of the tests, but also the determination of success or failure may have little to do with whether the school is improving. Under NCLB, every state, with the approval of the federal Department of Education, determines for every test what knowledge and skills students need to demonstrate proficiency. States can therefore make achieving proficiency more or less difficult. However, for all states and every school, all students (regardless of ability or proficiency in the English language) are required to achieve proficiency by the year 2014.

However, contrary to a commonsense interpretation of AYP, schools are not evaluated on whether their test scores are improving but whether their aggregated and disaggregated test scores exceed a minimum yearly threshold that gradually increases over the next decade. Consequently, a school is

considered to be passing as long as its scores exceed the threshold, even if its scores fall. Similarly, schools that begin with initially low test scores may be considered failing even if they significantly improve their test scores as long as those scores remain below the threshold. Therefore, achieving AYP may have nothing to do with whether a school's test scores rise or fall; achieving AYP depends only on exceeding the minimum threshold.

Because test scores strongly correlate with a student's family income, a school's score is more likely to reflect its students' average family income than teaching or the curriculum (see "Social Class, Student Achievement, and the Black-White Achievement Gap" in Rothstein, 2004). As a result, the largest percentage of failing schools in New York can be found in poor, urban school districts. Almost all (83%) of the failing schools are located in the big five urban districts: New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers (New York State School Boards Association, 2002). Most of the remaining failing schools can be found in smaller urban districts. The failure rate among schools in large urban districts is high, particularly at the middle school level. In Rochester, for example, all the middle schools failed, which led Superintendent Manuel Rivera to fold all the middle schools into Grade 7–12 schools, temporarily averting penalties for failing to meet AYP.

Because of the pressure to raise test scores, particularly in the urban school districts, teachers are compelled to teach the skills and knowledge that will be tested, neglecting more complex aspects of the subject and, indeed, some subjects altogether. Lipman (2004), in her ethnographic study of schools in Chicago, documented how testing requirements undermined the critical literacy goals of a bilingual school and frustrated creative, dedicated teachers. She described how teachers at an elementary school, with a student population of more than 90% Mexican American, had to shift their focus away from using the students' own culture to develop critical literacy and focus instead on test preparation. One teacher stated that she devoted the first half of the school year to developing students' writing skills and familiarity with sophisticated literature but then for the third quarter shifted to test preparation. Test preparation includes getting students "used to the format of a short, mediocre selection of writing . . . to get them to recognize this type of question is asking you for some really basic information you can go back to look for" (Lipman, 2004, pp. 110–111). The teachers, Lipman wrote, experience "the contradictions and conflicts . . . between their efforts to help students see knowledge as a tool to analyze the world and the process and practice of preparing for standardized tests" (p. 111).

Under accountability systems where schools are evaluated based on the percentage of students passing the standardized exams, it becomes rational to leave the lowest performing students behind. In Chicago, as in England (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), administrators instruct teachers to put their efforts into raising the test scores of those students who are closest to passing the standardized tests. As one teacher said,

> They tell us . . . "We don't want high kids and we don't want the lowest kids, we want the kids that are just about to pass the IOWA [standardized] test." So here you have a third or a fourth of your classroom really needs help to be ready for that next grade level and they don't get to go. (Lipman, 2004, p. 82)

Such educational triage exacerbates educational inequality as the students who either pass or are close to passing the test become valued commodities and those students who need the most help are left to fend for themselves.

McNeil (2000) documented how the emphasis on tests and test scores undermined exemplary schools and teachers in Houston, Texas. In her study of several Houston schools that successfully educated low-income students of color, McNeil sought to understand what made the schools successful. In the course of her research, the Texas standardized testing requirements (TAAS) were implemented and as a result she documented how previously successful schools began to expect less of their students as they prepared them to use the more basic skills required to pass the tests. Rather than, for example, teaching students to write well, teachers taught students to write the five-paragraph essay with five sentences in each paragraph that would receive passing grades on the standardized tests. Because culturally advantaged middle- and upper-class students are likely to rely on their cultural capital to pass the exams, disadvantaged students received additional drilling. Unfortunately, learning to write five-sentence five-paragraph essays does not transfer well to literacy required beyond the test and outside of school. When schools expect less of disadvantaged students, they fall further behind.

But lowered expectations are not the only problem. Schools emphasizing test preparation are likely to devote most of their curriculum budget to test prep materials rather than the enriched resources students need. In focusing on test preparation, schools are likely to reduce or eliminate subjects that are not being tested, including the arts and sciences (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001; Nichols & Berliner, 2005).

Last, rather than ensuring that more students do well, the pressure to raise test scores encourages schools to force weak students out before they take the required exam. In Texas, urban students are more likely to be retained in school, especially in 9th grade, the year before the required TAAS exam is first given. Students who are repeatedly retained are likely to give up and drop out of school. Haney (2000), in his study of the Texas education reforms, concluded that for the year 1996–97, 17.8% of students were being retained in 9th grade (24.2% of African American and 25.9% of Hispanic students) and that only 57.57% of African American and 52.11% of Hispanic 9th-grade students were in 12th grade 4 years later.

Moreover, schools in Texas face a double-edged sword: They need to raise test scores but face possible sanctions for high drop-out rates. Paige, as superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, resolved this dilemma by ordering principals to not list a student as dropping out but as having left for another school (or some other category other than "dropout").

Such creative record keeping resulted in the district's claiming a greatly reduced drop-out rate of 1.5% in 2001–02 and winning awards for excellence (Winerip, 2003b).

Eventually, critics claimed that the drop-out rate was covered up and research has revealed the rate to be much higher. Robert Kimball, assistant principal at one of the Houston high schools, raised questions when his school amazingly reported no dropouts even though their freshman class of 1,000 had dwindled to 300 by the senior year. A subsequent state investigation into 16 high schools revealed that of 5,000 students who left school, 2,999 students should have been reported as dropouts but were not (Winerip, 2003b). Significantly, Kimball added, "Almost all of the students that were being pushed out were at-risk students and minorities" (Capello, 2004).

In New York, students are likewise being pushed out of schools to raise test scores. Rather than being counted as dropouts, they are listed as having transferred to an alternative school or as working on a Graduate Equivalency Diploma (Lewin & Medina, 2003), a diploma achieved not by attending school but by passing an exam. Other analysts have described how "school officials are encouraging students to leave regular high school programs even though they are of school age or have a right to receive appropriate literacy, support, and educational services through the public schools" (Gotbaum, 2002, p. 2).

Given what the aforementioned research tells us about the processes of schooling when systems of testing and accountability are created—the curriculum is narrowed and simplified, students who score low on tests are abandoned, poorly constructed tests lead to mass failures, and students are pushed out of schools—it should not be surprising that the achievement gap is growing larger rather than smaller

Quantitative evidence from New York suggests that high-stakes testing has harmed education achievement. First, fewer students, especially students of color and students with disabilities, are completing high school. From 1998 to 2000, the number of students dropping out increased by 17%. A recent report for the Harvard Center for Civil Rights concluded that New York now has the lowest graduation rate of any state for African American (35%) and Latino/a (31%) students (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). In New York City, only 38% of all students graduate on time, 5th worst of the 100 largest cities in the nation (Winter, 2004). According to another recent study, New York's graduation rate ranks 45th in the nation (Haney, 2003). The tests have also negatively affected English language learners, who went from the highest diploma-earning minority in 1996 to the highest drop-out minority in 2002 (Monk, Sipple, & Killeen, 2001). Last, dropouts among students with disabilities have increased from 7,200 in 1996 to 9,200 in 2001.

The quantitative evidence from Texas is contradictory and contested. The state reports that the mean student test score and percentage passing the TAAS exam has increased; the differences between the mean test scores for White, African American, and Hispanic students have decreased; and school drop-out rates have declined. Consequently, proponents assert that testing and accountability have increased educational achievement.

However, Haney (2000) investigated the Texas data and revealed how the higher test scores were achieved. First, although students in special education must take the TAAS, their scores are not included in those reported by the school. If students whose scores might negatively affect the overall school score can be excluded by placing them into special education, we might expect after TAAS was implemented the percentage of students in special education to increase. Haney showed that for the first 4 years in which TAAS was implemented, the percentage of special education students increased from 4.5% to 7.1%.

A second way to increase test scores is to retain students in grades previous to 10th grade, the grade in which students first take the TAAS, providing students another year to prepare for the test. Haney's (2000) data reveal that the retention rate for previous grades has increased significantly, particularly for 9th grade. In 1996–97, 25.9% of Hispanic, 24.2% of African American, and 17.8% of White students were retained in 9th grade. Of course, grade retention also increases the likelihood that a student will drop out of school.

Rather than relying on the drop-out rate reported by schools and school districts, Haney (2000) compared the percentage of students in 9th grade with the number of students in 12th grade 4 years later. His data reveal, not surprisingly given what we now know about how the Houston Independent School District drop-out rate was covered up, that there has been a significant increase in the drop-out rate in Texas.

Therefore, Haney (2000) concluded, the Texas "miracle" was really the Texas "mirage." Test scores have increased because students are increasingly likely to be retained in previous grades or have become so discouraged that they quit school altogether. Furthermore, other students have been placed in special education so that their lower scores would not be included in the reported scores. In Texas, schools have raised test scores by retaining students or otherwise removing them from the pool of test takers. Rather than increasing education achievement, fewer students have the opportunity to receive an education.

Even as schools have manipulated the scores by controlling who takes the exams, the higher average score may only mean that the students are performing better on the tests, not that they are learning more. Although students' scores on the TAAS exam have been increasing, their scores on nationally administered tests, such as the university admissions exams, have been decreasing. Researchers investigating explained,

> The discrepancy in performance has a lot to do with the differences in the tests. TAAS was designed to make sure that students learned at least the basics of the state curriculum. The [university admissions tests], on the other hand, assess students on advanced academic skills needed for college. (Markley, 2004, p. A1)

Advocates for NCLB claim that working to improve test scores will result in improved student learning. Yet in New York, students are subjected to tests

that are badly written and scored to yield the results the Commissioner of Education desires. In both New York and Texas, students are retained and in other ways pressured to drop out to increase the overall percentage of students taking and passing the tests. In Chicago and elsewhere, students who are close to passing the exam or achieving proficiency (called "bubble kids") are provided extra academic attention whereas those deemed too far away from the goal are given little or no attention (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000).

As NCLB nears its reauthorization date, backers tout it as successful. In April 2006, Secretary of Education Spellings stated, "This law is helping us learn about what works in our schools. And clearly, high standards and accountability are working. Over the last five years, our 9-year-olds have made more progress in reading than in the previous 28 combined" (U.S. Department of Education, 2006a). Spellings (U.S. Department of Education, 2006b) cited NAEP test scores showing a 7% gain from the period of 1999 to 2004 to support her claim. In response, critics such as Bracey (2006) pointed out that no NAEP data were gathered in the first 2 years (and we do not know that is not when the gain occurred) and that NCLB was in effect for a little more than a year before the 2004 testing, hardly enough time to take credit for any increase in reading test scores for 9-year-olds in that time. Furthermore, if the 2004 scores are compared to 1980, the increase is only 4%. Spellings chose to compare the 2004 test scores to a previous low point. Last, she only refers to the gains in scores among 9-year-olds, not mentioning that in the same period there was no gain for 12-year-olds and a decline of 3 points for 17-year-olds (Bracey, 2006).

The Bush administration claimed that standardized tests, accountability, tutoring services, and privatized education would increase students' test scores and close the achievement gap between White and African American and Hispanic students. However, as I showed previously, the Bush administration selectively "cherry picks" data, leaving out data that do not support its conclusions. In contrast, more objective data on whether NCLB is achieving its goals are mixed at best and highlight the difficulty of relying on test scores to assess student progress.

Two recent studies, one by the Harvard Civil Rights Project (HCRP; Lee, 2006) and the other by the Center on Education Policy (CEP; 2007), both of which examined reading and math results on state exams and the NAEP before and after the implementation of NCLB, come to slightly different conclusions. Orfield, the director of the Harvard Civil Rights project, in his forward to *Tracking Achievement Gaps and Assessing the Impact of NCLB on the Gaps: An In-Depth Look Into National and State Reading and Math Outcome Trends*, summarized the study as demonstrating that under NCLB,

> neither a significant rise in achievement, nor closure of the racial achievement gap is being achieved. Small early gains in math have reverted to the preexisting pattern. If that is true, all the pressure and sanctions have, so far, been in vain or even counterproductive. . . . On the issue of closing the gap for minority and poor children, a central

> goal of NCLB, there are also no significant changes since NCLB was enacted. (Lee, 2006, pp. 5–6)

In contrast to the Harvard Civil Rights Project's report, the report from the Center on Education Policy (2007), *Answering the Question That Matters Most: Has Student Achievement Increased Since No Child Left Behind?*, provided a positive perspective on NCLB by concluding that "the number of states showing gains on test scores since 2002 is far greater than the number showing declines" and that the achievement gap is closing, especially when we compare the percentage of students achieving proficiency on the state exams. Given that the two reports examine similar data, how is it that they seem to come to such different conclusions? Deconstructing the data shows that the two reports are not that divergent and that the CEP report provides enough caveats regarding their research to support a conclusion that is nearer to that of the Harvard Civil Rights Project.

First, the two reports ask different questions. Whereas the CEP (2007) asks whether test scores are improving under NCLB, the HCRP (Lee, 2006) asks whether tests scores are improving at a greater rate than before NCLB and concludes that they have not.

Second, both reports point out that although more students are achieving proficiency on state exams, the mean test scores have not improved at an equal rate. Furthermore, both point out weaknesses in using proficiency rates, in particular that proficiency levels are simply a threshold measure and therefore may not tell us much about the groups being compared. For example, if one student group already has a large percentage of students scoring above the threshold, even a significant increase in mean scores may not result in a significant or any increase in students scoring above the threshold. Conversely, for a student group with few students initially scoring above the threshold, a small gain in mean scores can result in pushing a significant number of students above the threshold. Therefore, using the percentage of students scoring at a proficient level tells us little about whether the achievement gap is closing or widening. In fact, Orfield (Lee, 2006) pointed out that although the gap in proficiency could be closing, the mean scores between two groups could be widening and that this is occurring in many states.

The CEP (2007) report acknowledged that states' proficiency rates tend to increase at a greater rate than the mean test score but was generally satisfied as long as both scores were improving and discounted whether there was a large disparity. Still, 17 of the 22 they examined had increasing proficiency scores and decreasing mean scores on at least one of their tests used for NCLB.

Orfield (Lee, 2006) also pointed out that it makes a difference as to when two groups are compared.

> The NAEP does show substantial declines in the racial achievement gaps in the 1970s and early 1980s, when more of the civil rights and anti-poverty efforts of earlier reforms were still in operation. The strict

> standards-based effort that swept the country after the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report has not shown similar benefits on achievement gaps. (pp. 6–7)

Therefore, recent NAEP scores show increases comparable to the previous two decades but less than the decades before *A Nation at Risk*.

Third, as I have described earlier regarding standardized testing in New York and Texas, states, schools, and teachers can and have manipulated through various means the percentage of students passing (gaining proficiency) a test: States can change the cut scores, and as teachers become familiar with each test, they can become better at teaching to the test. These possibilities were acknowledged by the CEP (2007) report: "Positive trend lines in test results may indicate that students have learned more, but they may also reflect easier tests, low cut scores for proficiency, changing rules for testing, or overly narrow teaching to the test." They also noted that the gains on state tests in the percentage of students scoring proficient often did not match the results on the NAEP exams; "the states with the greatest gains on their own tests were usually not the same states that had the greatest gains on NAEP."

Therefore, we can question whether tests provide the objectivity proponents of standardized testing claim and whether the test scores tell us very much about whether particular groups of students are learning more than in the past. My examination of the data suggests that student learning has not improved under NCLB and that the consequences of NCLB, including narrowing the curriculum, teaching toward the test, increasing the percentage of students dropping out, and decreasing teacher morale, are dangerous (Nichols & Berliner, 2005).

Moreover, not only has NCLB not resulted in improved learning, but its neoliberal premises also have the potential to radically transform democratic decision making. Neoliberalism undermines deliberative models of democracy, in which people participate in the decisions and processes that affect their lives and use their knowledge and skills to affect those around them (Young, 2000).

Iris Young (2000) and John Dewey (1916) argued that social justice can only be achieved through deliberative models of democracy. Young contended that social institutions, such as schools, should be organized to promote individual growth and change through "communication among citizens, and between citizen and public officials, where issues are discussed in an open and critical fashion" (p. 167). Dewey (1916) similarly conceptualized democracy as "a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 87). Mathison (2000), in writing about Dewey's notion of deliberative democracy, stated that this requires that people engage in collectively deciding what and how to be and what to do. "Differences of opinion must therefore be settled through deliberation, not by coercion, appeal to emotion, or authority" (p. 236). This does not guarantee resolution, but

> members of a community can disagree as long as they are willing to engage in discussion about their beliefs, as long as their beliefs are consistent with the best available evidence, and as long as they are open-minded about their beliefs. (p. 237)

The deliberative model provides places in which people can provide justifications for their preferences, listen to others, and where possible, work out new understandings and compromises. In schools this means, for example, that educators, parents, students, and members of the community would be able to deliberate their educational goals and methods. Rather than having the curriculum content and assessment determined by others, such as the state or federal government, such issues would be discussed and debated within schools and school districts.

Such discussion and debate has the positive outcome of deepening people's understanding of the purposes and processes of schooling as they defend their own views and listen to the views of others. The process of setting social and educational goals becomes an educative process as citizens work to refine their views in light of increased understanding. Furthermore, it is important for Young (2000) and Dewey (1916) that civil society be strengthened and remain relatively autonomous from government, making it possible to "limit state power and make its exercise more accountable and democratic" (Young, 2000, p. 159).

In contrast, aggregative or market systems of democracy focus not on the decision-making process but on tallying individual preferences. Such systems, Young (2000) argued, while focusing on individual's choices, ignore the reasons for those choices. Young stated that "There is no account for their origins, how they might have been arrived at . . . no criteria for determining the quality of the preferences by either content, origin or motive . . . preferences are seen as exogenous to the political process" (p. 20). For example, under NCLB, parents and students in failing schools are to be given the choice of attending another school. Because such choices are individual family choices, "individuals never need to leave the private realm of their own interest," that is, they can choose without engaging others regarding the consequences of the choice beyond their own family. Such decision making "lacks any distinct idea of a public formed from the interaction of democratic citizens and their motivation to reach some decision" (p. 20).

Furthermore, market systems such as NCLB restrict democratic debate over which subjects are valued and when and what kind of assessments are to be made. The *Parents Guide* (U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 2003) boasted that NCLB will transform schooling though testing and accountability. The authors stated, "What you value, you measure." Because the Department of Education measures math, reading, and science (but not other subjects), they have stipulated which subjects are significant. Moreover, they redefine literacy as reading, restricting funds for literacy instruction to the teaching of phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension—programs evaluated

through "scientifically controlled studies (like clinical trials)" (U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 2003).

Under NCLB, the important educational decisions are made by the federal and state governments. Individuals are cast as consumers who can choose among the choices provided by an educational marketplace. But for Young (2000) and others, a strong civil society is necessary so that state power can be limited and government held accountable to the public. Under NCLB, civil society is weakened and is held accountable by the government rather than the other way around.

NCLB, Neoliberalism, and the Reassertion of Deliberative Democracy

NCLB, then, is part of a larger political process in which concerns about increasing global economic competition have been a pretext for neoliberal reforms that focus on increasing efficiency through privatization, markets, and competition. Fairclough (2006) described this process as one in which globalization is "hijacked in the service of particular national and corporate interests" (p. 8). Consequently, I have critiqued NCLB on two levels. It has failed to provide objective assessments, improve learning, and close the achievement gap. I have also situated NCLB with its more implicit, less frequently stated goal of promoting neoliberal solutions to societal problems.

To illustrate these points, I have provided data from a few states and recent analyses of the NAEP scores (Bracey, 2006; Lee, 2006), I strongly suggest that the exams used to assess schools have increased the number of high school dropouts. They have not made curricula more rigorous, and neither have they closed the achievement gap; indeed, they are doing the opposite. What we need instead, as Darling-Hammond argued (2006) in a Distinguished Lecture at last year's AERA, is to remedy the "inequalities in spending, class sizes, textbooks, computers, facilities, curriculum offerings, and access to qualified teachers" (p. 13).

Furthermore, NCLB promotes the view that like other neoliberal reforms, we have no choice but to submit to the discipline of the market rather than relying on processes of deliberative democracy. As Dewey (1916) and Young (2000) argued, market approaches undermine our democracy. As Michael Polanyi (1954) recognized 50 years ago, "To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society" (p. 73).

Instead of a neoliberal vision, we could, wrote Dewey (1916) almost a century ago, organize society not with the goal of serving the economy but, instead, human growth. For Dewey, all societal institutions, including businesses, should be educative; education should be central to all our activities. He argued against "scientific efficiency" in business and efficiency as a central societal goal. In contrast, he argued for the development of such intelligence,

ingenuity, and capacity as shall make all workers, as far as possible, masters of their own industrial fate (Dewey, 1915). Similarly, Olssen et al. (2004) called for an "education state," claiming "that a deep and robust democracy at a national level requires a strong civil society based on norms of trust and active responsible citizenship" with education "central to such a goal" (pp. 1–2).

In such a society, teachers would not merely employ the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessments as determined by others but would become educative leaders engaged in deliberation with the community. Such a change requires that teachers not aim only to raise test scores but to be a "teaching profession whose members embody within their own practices the values and dispositions of democratic citizenship, and who have the capacity to create democratic learning environments within their schools and classrooms" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 269). Instead of subjugating education to the goal of producing workers who will increase our economic productivity within a globalized economy, we would engage students in continually working to answer the question of how we best develop a world that supports human welfare and planetary health.

Note

Throughout his career, the author's research and writing has focused on the politics of curriculum and assessment and most recently on the effect that high-stakes testing has on teaching and learning. In 1999, he helped begin The Coalition for Common Sense in Education (http://www.commonsenseineducation.org), an organization that assesses high-stakes testing at the state and national levels and advocates for alternative policies. The author would like to thank Camille Martina for her assistance and encouragement, the comments from the anonymous reviewers, and students in the courses that read earlier versions of this article.

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