

Corporate Testing: Standards, Profits, and the Demise of the Public Sphere

By Pepi Leistyna

The line between public and private decision-making is being blurred beyond recognition by a maze of quasi-private “education-reform” groups *with direct ties to big corporations*.¹

Most citizens of the United States are unaware of the extent to which public schools are controlled by private interests such as publishing, food, and pharmaceutical companies, for-profit education management organizations, and corporate lobbyists (Kohn & Shannon, 2002; Molnar, 2005; Molnar et al., 2006; Saltman, 2000, 2005).² The stealth onslaught of privatization and commercialization of this vital institution should come as no surprise given that education reform over the past few decades has been masterminded, in large part behind closed doors, by a handful of corporate executives, politicians, and media moguls who have already profited handsomely from the over \$600 billion-a-year education industrial complex (Bacon 2000; Gluckman, 2002; Humes, 2003; Miner, 2005; Olson, 2004; Rees, 2000).

It’s a pretty simple equation: when you have a captive audience, given that K-12 education is mandatory in the U.S., private interests within the logic of capital can’t help but salivate and pounce. But as all good capitalists know, the overriding objective of corporations is to maximize their profits. So what they have to do in order to shape public policy in their own interests—and gain consent on those rare occa-

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sions when the general public is involved in the process—is disguise their ‘profit over people’ mentality by wrapping themselves in an image of expertise and compassionate concern for the education and future of our children.

To illustrate this point, the following research takes a look at standardized high-stakes testing in the wake of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) movement. Although it is well beyond the scope of this paper, it is important for concerned citizens to look into the various problems that high-stakes testing engenders, for example:

- ◆ most school administrators, parents, and communities are stripped of any substantive influence over the educational process;
- ◆ educators are disempowered by what publishing companies describe as ‘teacher proof’ materials;
- ◆ in order to teach to the test, many schools have been forced to drastically narrow their curriculum;
- ◆ under extreme pressure to produce results or face losing their jobs, cuts in federal resources, and school closure, educators often lower standards and engage in unethical behavior in order to raise test scores;
- ◆ research clearly shows that racism and the structures of social class affect the quality of faculty and staff employed across school districts, the overall allocation of resources to schools, as well as the content of assessment instruments and testing results;
- ◆ nationwide there are drastic retention and ‘drop out’/push out rates that are the direct result of this practice;
- ◆ there is a large body of research that unequivocally shows that standardized tests should not be used to make critical decisions such as eligibility for graduation . . . (Bacon, 2001; CNN Presents, 2005; FairTest, 2006; Gluckman, 2002; Haney, 2000; Kohn, 2000; Sacks, 2001; Sturrock, 2006; TC Reports, 2000).

While these are all extremely important issues, the general focus of this article is on the political economy of the testing industry; that is, a look into the ownership, intent, and regulation of the private forces that produce, provide materials, prep sessions, and tutorials for and evaluate, report on, and profit from these tests. By looking at and analyzing this powerful sector and the old-boy networks therein it is much easier to understand the synergy that exists among government, corporations, and the media and how this force has been controlling public education in the U.S. to the detriment of its people. It is from this position of awareness that activists can better mobilize against these forces, and teacher education programs can be restructured, if they are really intent on democratizing schools, in order to better meet the needs of educators and students alike.

A Bit of History

While standardized assessment has been around for a long time in the United States, its focus on student performance and accountability and its impact on grade promotion, eligibility for graduation, and overall school evaluation has increased dramatically.³ Over the past 50 years, expenditures on testing have increased by 3000% (Frontline, 2006).

Many of the roots of the current assessment craze can be traced back to two significant events: the 1957 launch of the Sputnik satellite in the former Soviet Union—an achievement that was used to call into question the intellectual capital of youth in the U.S.; and the 1966 release of The Coleman Report—*Equality of Educational Opportunity*—which initiated a major shift in national strategy from targeting resources and their impact on student achievement to a focus on measuring individual performance.

Assigned the mission of mining data in an attempt to document the educational achievement of students in public schools, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was established by the federal government in 1969. Also known as “the Nation’s Report Card,” NAEP continues to be the only federal body that assesses student progress in all of the major subject areas.⁴

While the Minimum Competency Test would appear on the scene in 1975, what really fueled the drive to increase federal and state funding for the standardization movement, and its privatization, was the Reagan Administration’s Commission on Excellence in Education. Intent on privatizing all public institutions and resources, and swamped with domestic and foreign policy problems, conservatives were dead set on distracting the public away from their disastrous programs and practices through a strategic focus on what they presented as the failure of public education in the United States. Using the old Cold War tactic of fear, it released *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. While the sources that informed the report’s conclusions were vague to say the least, in no uncertain terms its authors drew a bleak picture of a country replete with semi-literate youth who were rendering the U.S. vulnerable in a competitive and ever-growing global economy and in a world ‘still threatened’ by what they readily evoked as the ‘evil empire.’

In bed with powerful members of the profit-minded business community, the Reagan Administration called for a dramatic increase in the use of standardized curricula and assessment nationwide. It did so while simultaneously working to disarm teacher unions (all organized labor for that matter) and dismantle the Department of Education. The obvious goal was to have the private sector take the reigns of this reform movement as well as the lion’s share of the federal and state monies directed towards public education. Their efforts proved successful in opening schoolhouse doors to corporate-sponsored education organizations that would carve a path for standards, measured achievement, and accountability that would lead the way to No Child Left Behind.

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Groups like the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) and America's Choice would emerge and campaign around the country offering their reform advice. Many of these organizations would charge school districts huge sums of money for membership fees and curricular and assessment materials. By the 1990s, they would also be active in forging lucrative partnerships with major publishing companies.⁵

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, big business representatives and government officials would meet on a regular basis and strategize about ways to forge coalitions and officially infuse standards nationwide. Organizations like the Business Roundtable, the National Alliance of Business, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the American Business Conference would join forces and lobby heavily for this cause (Committee on Education and the Workforce, 1999; Mickelson, 2006).

After the National Education Summit in 1996 in Palisades, New York, a resource center "for states to help benchmark state academic standards and assessment against the best national and international exemplars" was established by a new comer on the block, Achieve, Inc., led by governors and business leaders from around the country (Edward B. Rust, Jr., as cited in Committee on Education and the Workforce, 1999).

Perhaps the most blatant conflict of interest that surfaced in the early stages of this movement, foreshadowing things to come, was the development and influence of the New American Schools Development Corporation. Initially funded by IBM CEO Louis Gerstner,⁶ who threw in a cool \$1 million in order to get the organization off its feet, New American Schools was run by then President George H.W. Bush's Deputy Secretary of Education, David Kearns—the former CEO of Xerox Corporation (Suchak, 2006). NASDC was successful in using its connections in Congress to federally fund its 'reform package,' and it also profited enormously from the purchase of its methodologies, curricula, texts, and testing materials by schools all over the country. As David Bacon (2000) notes, by the end of the millennium, 49 states were caught up in some way or another in the standards game.

Rather than look to seasoned educators for advice about their reform efforts, corporate-sponsored activists (who have always understood that a great many teachers and parents are diametrically opposed to their agenda) turned to the likes of the late Edward B. Rust, Jr., the Chairman and CEO of State Farm Insurance. Regardless of the fact that he had no professional experience in education, and that his company was convicted of fraud and ordered to pay over \$1.5 billion in damages in the late 1990s (France & Osterland, 1999), Rust nonetheless became the go-to-guy for spreading the word about the virtues of a market-driven educational system and the role that a corporate model of management should play therein. In fact, he would chair or direct all of the major committees, boards, and organizations of the private sector that supported testing, and he would testify in front of the federal government in favor of more rigorous standards (Committee on Education and the Workforce: U.S. House of Representatives, 1999). As Suchak (2006) notes, for his

loyalty, he was not only elected to the Board of Directors of McGraw-Hill in 2001 (a point that will be of interest when I discuss the connections between McGraw-Hill and the Bush family), but “Almost simultaneously, Rust was chosen to head the incoming Bush Administration’s Transition Advisory Team on Education.”

No Child Left Behind Makes Its Way to Center Stage

In his bid for the presidency in 2000, George W. Bush, as Governor of Texas (1994-2000), effectively used what was referred to as the ‘Texas Miracle’ to spearhead his educational policy plans based on high-stakes testing. Declaring himself the “education president,” Bush would also use the ‘miracle’ to help push through the No Child Left Behind legislation.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Texas school districts had implemented standardized assessment to measure student knowledge of the state’s curriculum in 1980. By 1990, the Texas Academic Assessment Skills (TAAS) program had been developed—through a five-year coordinated effort between TEA and the publishing giant Harcourt Brace—in order to measure students’ abilities in writing, mathematics, reading, science, and social studies. The exam would be fine-tuned over the years to meet the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills curriculum standards which were approved by the State Board of Education in 1997. Success on the TAAS is required in order to graduate from high school in Texas.

While spokespersons for conservative organizations, studies funded by advocates of the testing industry, and much of the mainstream media raved about the work being done in Texas, and the fantastic decrease in drop out rates and increase in academic achievement that occurred since TAAS had been implemented, the so-called ‘miracle’ was in fact a scam (CNN Presents, 2005; Gluckman, 2002; Haney, 2000; Humes, 2003; McNeil, 2000).⁷ Those students who were perceived as potentially lowering the overall test scores were retained in grades where testing was not required, especially ninth grade; or they were placed in special education classrooms or labeled Limited English Proficient (LEP) and were thus exempted from taking the exam.

In prior years, a limited English proficient student could be exempted from taking the TAAS for up to three years.⁸ Last year [1999], approximately 45,000 LEP students were not required to take the TAAS. (Texas Education Agency, 2000)

This language policy also exempts LEP students “if the child’s language proficiency assessment committee determines that the child does not have sufficient language skills to take either the English or Spanish version of the TAAS” (Texas Education Agency, 2000).⁹ As any seasoned educator immediately recognizes, this leaves plenty of room open for inappropriate evaluation and exemption.

All of these aforementioned conditions, coupled with a long list of discriminatory practices that predate the standardization movement—but continue to fester, have caused high drop out rates in Texas, throughout the country for that matter.

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It's not as if Rod Paige, the superintendent of the Houston Independent School District (HISD), could have been unaware of allegations of discrimination related to the TAAS exam or the mass exodus of students from his schools, given that he was elected to the district's Board of Education in 1990, had been the superintendent of HISD since 1994, was listed by *Inside Houston Magazine* as one of "Houston's 25 most powerful people in guiding the city's growth and prosperity,"¹⁰ and the fact:

On October 4, 1995, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) received a complaint filed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.), Texas State Conference against the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Austin, Texas. The complaint raised concerns pertaining to the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and its alleged discriminatory impact on African-American and Hispanic/Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. (Texas NAACP, 1995)

High drop-outs rates are fantastic for raising test scores but they simultaneously call into question the overall success of the standards program in place; so while they are often encouraged by corrupt administrators, they need to be disappeared from public view. In a self-serving malicious move, Paige and members of his administration cleverly manipulated the numbers and claimed that the drop-out rate of local schools was 1.5%, rather than the actual figure of over 40% (60 Minutes II, 2004). In reality, Texas schools, in particular those in Houston—the 7th largest school district in the country, have some of the worst drop-out rates nationwide.

There were also widespread stories of encouraging students to cheat on the TAAS in order to raise the scores (CNN Presents, 2005), as well as reports of the monopolization of the entire curriculum by prep classes that were teaching solely to the test (Haney, 2000).

Praising Paige for his 'success,' the publishing giant McGraw-Hill, that was making money hand over fist in Texas, awarded him its highest honor for educators, and in 2001 Paige was named National Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators, and was appointed Secretary of Education by President George W. Bush.¹¹

Newly elected, Bush immediately, and with bi-partisan support,¹² signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, better known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In a hitherto unheard of transfer of power to federal and state governments—granting them the rights to largely determine the goals and outcomes of these educational institutions—high-stakes testing was officially mandated nationwide.¹³

NCLB required that by 2003, students in third through eighth grade be evaluated in mathematics and reading, and then reevaluated once in high school. By 2007-08, federal requirements also demand that states administer tests in science in elementary, junior high, and high school. By the year 2014, all students must be proficient in these subject areas. Schools that don't meet this criteria will be stripped of their government funding, threatened with closure, or placed in the hands of charter schools or other such private management companies.

When you consider the fact that NCLB is already under-funded by more than \$40 billion, a chilling reality sets in: all of this rhetoric about accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, and excellence in public education is really an ideological trap intended to ensure that public schools fail, thus paving the way for their complete privatization.¹⁴ Some states are well aware of the fact that these new mandates cost far more to meet than they could ever possibly financially provide for and have thus decided to opt out of their eligibility for federal funding and go it on their own.

Show Me the Money Trail

Embracing what is in fact an old neoliberal approach dressed up as innovative reform, the political machinery behind NCLB has effectively disguised the motivations of a profit-driven industry. Public schools now give nearly 50 million tests a year and the annual value of this market ranges from \$400 to \$700 million (Frontline, 2006). The General Accounting Office estimates that by 2008, up to \$5.3 billion will be spent by states trying to meet the requirements of this legislation (Miner, 2005). However, this figure doesn't include the enormous costs of prep sessions, practice tests, scoring and reporting, data storage, and let's not forget the nearly \$7 billion a year market for instructional materials. But the enormous expense doesn't end there. Ben Clarke (2004) reminds us of another lucrative market:

Under NCLB, if a school fails to improve math and reading test scores within three years, a portion of its federal funding will be diverted to 'parental choice' tutoring programs. . . . These outsourced programs are run by private companies such as Educate Inc. owner of Sylvan Learning Centers whose revenues have grown from \$180 to \$250 million in the past three years and whose profits shot up 250% last year.

The potential for funneling taxpayers' money into private pockets is astounding. This is precisely why it is important for the public to watch closely how money is earmarked when politicians increase the federal budget for education: what often appears to be a concerned call to increase spending to improve schools for our nation's youth is actually a ploy to increase profit potential for those kingpins playing the standards game.

It is also important to know who the actual power brokers are that are lobbying government officials and consequently reaping the benefits of this movement. While many corporations (e.g., Edison Schools/Newton Learning Corporation, Educational Testing Service's ETS K-12, Advantage Learning Systems, Measured Progress, Data Recognition, Questar Educational Services, Kaplan, Princeton Review, BP, AT&T, Tribune, IBM, and Dupont¹⁵) are in the race to get a piece of this pie, there are four big publishing houses that have virtually monopolized the industry: Harcourt Brace, Houghton Mifflin, Pearson, and McGraw-Hill. As Stephan Metcalf (2002) notes, "the so-called Big Three—McGraw-Hill, Houghton-Mifflin and Harcourt—[were] all identified as 'Bush stocks' by Wall Street analysts in the wake of the 2000 election."

It is interesting to note that three of the four giants are internationals, and given

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the conservative pitch on global competitiveness and national security, other than for financial gain, it's not clear why such companies would have any vested interest in improving the education of students in the U.S.

Harcourt Brace is owned by London-based publisher Reed Elsevier. With contracts in 18 states, the company is known in the testing industry for the SAT-9, STAR, and Wechsler Intelligence Scale tests, and as mentioned earlier, it played a significant role in drafting Texas's TAAS exam. Willing to go to almost any length to maximize its profits in Texas, Harcourt pitched its course materials as being published by "the same company that helps to write the TAAS tests" (Bacon, 2000). What is unethical and self-serving about this practice is that any use of prep materials that developmentally coincide with the content of the exam, compromises the validity of the scores (Gluckman, 2002). In other words, prepping of this kind is a subtle form of cheating; but for Harcourt, student success on the exam means guaranteed contracts.

By the end of the millennium, when the testing movement was really heating up, Harcourt's educational division was pleased to inform its shareholders of an almost 30% increase in sales. The international conglomerate that also owns Holt, Rinehart and Winston boasts annual revenues of over \$5 billion.

The Houghton Mifflin Company, formerly owned by the French corporation Vivendi Universal, is currently the property of the international conglomerate HM Publishing Corp.¹⁶ With contracts in 13 states it is primarily in the business of selling textbooks and instructional technology. Its testing division—Riverside—is known for the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), the Metropolitan Achievement Test, and two assessments that comply with the "Reading First" mandates of NCLB—the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test and the Basic Early Assessment of Reading (BEAR).

Houghton Mifflin also gained from the early race to nationalize standards as its testing division's profits grew by almost 18% in 1999. With a keen understanding of how information processing is a key component of the standards market, in 2003 Houghton Mifflin purchased Edusoft, a profitable company that specializes in data storage and online tests. The conglomerate now boasts more than \$1 billion in annual sales.

Pearson Education is under the flagship of London-based Pearson Publishing which also owns Penguin Books, *The Economist*, Simon & Schuster, and *The Financial Times*. For years it has maintained a working relationship with NAEP scoring exams, and it is currently the leading scorer of standardized tests in the country. To assist and expand these efforts, in 2000, Pearson bought National Computer Systems at a cost of \$2.5 billion.

When Congress allocated \$3 billion per year for teacher training in its reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001, Pearson decided to take a big bite out of that market share by acquiring National Evaluation Systems, Inc. (NES) which produces assessments for teacher certification. A key characteristic of the new "highly qualified teacher," according to NCLB, is his or

her ability to pass a subject matter test administered by the state. Reducing teacher expertise to a fixed body of content knowledge, teachers are expected to meet an extremely narrow range of skill requirements under the new policy. Any concern with pedagogy—not what we learn, but how we learn it—has virtually disappeared.

Teacher burnout, a serious side effect of this era of standards and accountability, is actually a virtue in a profit-driven industry as new teachers require certification. As Pearson notes in its 2006 press release:

There are approximately three million public school teachers in the U.S. Approximately 2.5 million new teachers will need to be hired in the current decade, as 700,000 current teachers retire and 1.8 million are expected to leave the profession prior to retirement. On average, nearly 6% of the teacher workforce does not return for each new academic year and half of all new teachers leave the profession within five years.

Pearson currently has long-term contracts with more than 20 states and its 2005 profits were up 29% (Forbes.com, 2006). Since the implementation of NCLB, their sales on assessments alone are up more than 20%. In its 2005 “Performance Report” under the subtitle “Continued Investment for Future Growth,” Pearson reassures its shareholders how it will greatly increase its profits from U.S. schools by a steady investment in school publishing, basal curriculum programs for reading, science, and social studies, and school testing (where it already maintains contracts in Texas, Virginia, Michigan, and Minnesota that have a lifetime value of \$700 million). It also mentions the creation of Pearson Achievement Solutions that targets the growing market for teacher professional development and integrated school solutions. It’s interesting to note that there isn’t a single word in the report about the academic achievement of students.

With 280 offices in 40 countries, McGraw-Hill is a major player in the publishing world and among its treasured assets are *Standard & Poor’s*, *Business Week*, four television stations, and the online data analysis company Turn Leaf Solutions. A simple look at this New York-based company’s website and one can see how profits have consistently soared since the advent of the standardization craze (McGraw-Hill, 2005, 2006).

With contracts in 23 states, McGraw-Hill’s Terra Nova, CTBS, and California Achievement tests are the most lucrative of its assessment instruments. Trying to expand its \$1.4 billion textbook sales, “McGraw-Hill lobbyists used the statewide results on their own California Achievement Tests to convince the state legislature that California schools needed the McGraw-Hill Open Court and Reading Mastery program to improve students reading performance” (Clark, 2004). Expected to teach at least part of the day from the McGraw-Hill Open Court materials, “according to Ben Visnick [president of a local teachers union in California], ‘School district employees and instructional facilitators—we call them Open Court police—inspect the classrooms to verify that the right posters are on the walls and they want everyone in the district on the same page every day’” (as cited in Clark, 2004). While the California

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Department of Education guidelines prohibit the use of test-prep materials written for a specific test, the practice is common nonetheless (Gluckman, 2002).¹⁷

In the world of the Fortune 500 (2006), McGraw-Hill comes in at 359 with over \$6 billion in annual revenues. But perhaps what's most interesting about this corporation is its deep connection to the Bush dynasty. In his article in *The Nation*, "Reading between the Lines," Stephen Metcalf (2002) lays out the depth of this nepotism, describing how the two families have been chummy since the 1930s when they vacationed together in an exclusive area in Florida. He is worth quoting at length here:

Harold McGraw Jr. sits on the national grant advisory and founding board of the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. McGraw in turn received the highest literacy award from President Bush in the early 1990s. . . . The McGraw Foundation awarded current Bush Education Secretary Rod Paige its highest educator's award while Paige was Houston's school chief; Paige, in turn, was the keynote speaker at McGraw-Hill's "government initiatives" conference last spring. Harold McGraw III was selected as a member of President George W. Bush's transition advisory team. . . . An ex-chief of staff for Barbara Bush is returning to work for Laura Bush in the White House—after a stint with McGraw-Hill as a media relations executive. John Negroponte left his position as McGraw-Hill's executive vice president for global markets to become Bush's ambassador to the United Nations.

And of course, under Bush Jr., Negroponte would go on to be U.S. ambassador to Iraq (2004-05), and is now the Director of National Intelligence. The word 'intelligence' here has two frightening implications: a scary thought in terms of national security given the well-documented horrors that Negroponte was involved in while trying to subvert the growth of democracy in Latin America when he was U.S. ambassador of Honduras (1981-85) under Reagan; and a scary thought in terms of what our children learn in schools that are under the influence of a standards regime that works diligently to engineer history as it sees fit; much in the way that Negroponte himself worked to keep his actions in Latin America from becoming public knowledge.¹⁸

McGraw III, on the other hand, as part of a group of 'education leaders,' was invited to speak at the White House by George W. Bush on his first day in office.

Bush Jr. and McGraw-Hill have been partners in crime before. As governor, Bush joined forces with the publishing giant in order to pitch their proposed phonics-based literacy program to the Texas Education Agency, which was trying to establish a statewide reading curriculum.

For a period of roughly two years, most often at the invitation of the governor, a small group of reading experts testified repeatedly about what would constitute a "scientifically valid" reading curriculum for Texas schoolchildren. As critics pointed out, a preponderance of the consultants were McGraw-Hill authors. (Metcalf, 2002)

As to be expected, these experts tooted their own horns in front of TEA, calling for a reading program that was right in tune with a slew of new textbooks and materials

from McGraw-Hill—a market that the company easily cornered with the support of the governor (Clark, 2004).

Conservatives insist, ad nauseam, that “scientifically-based research” inform and sustain the nation’s educational practices, policies, and goals. However, the empirical studies that are used to buttress the Republican agenda, under close scrutiny, are easily stripped of any legitimacy (Allington, 2002; Coles, 2000). The corporate bodies and the well-funded private think tanks that produce much of the research and literature to support these causes have an obvious ideologically-specific take on these issues, one that is widely supported by mainstream media whose ownership have similar interests.

A recent and striking example of how data can be manipulated, packaged, and presented as ‘scientific research’ is the official report signed and circulated by the congressionally appointed National Reading Panel (NRP). The report, that informed Bush’s multibillion dollar Reading First literacy program campaign, is replete with inconsistencies, methodological flaws, and blatant biases (Allington, 2002; Coles, 2000). For starters, Bush’s educational advisor when he was the governor of Texas, G. Reid Lyon, headed the NRP. A staunch phonics advocate, Lyon hand selected the panel and made certain that virtually all of the participants shared his views. Curiously, there was only one reading teacher on the NRP. However, by the end of the group’s investigation into effective literacy practices, she refused to sign the panel’s final report, maintaining that it was a manipulation of data, and that the cohort failed to examine important research that did not corroborate its desired findings. As Metcalf (2002) reveals:

Widmeyer [the public relations firm hired by the government to promote the panel’s work] had represented McGraw-Hill’s flagship literacy product Open Court during the Texas literacy drive, and now it counts McGraw-Hill and the Business Roundtable among its most prominent clients. “They wrote the introduction to the final report,” says NRP member Joanne Yatvin. “And they wrote the summary, and prepared the video, and did the press releases.”

McGraw-Hill has been laughing all the way to the bank ever since, tapping into the \$6 billion that the President has set aside to fund his ‘literacy’ campaign. And guess who’s been recruited to hold the federal purse strings: Christopher Doherty, the guy who spearheaded the move to bring McGraw-Hill’s DISTAR (Direct Instruction System for Teaching Arithmetic and Reading) to public schools in Baltimore (Metcalf, 2002).

In the world of crony capitalism, these kinds of deals are made all the time. Look at how Bill Bennett, the former Secretary of Education under Reagan (1985-1988), and drug czar under Bush Sr. (1989-1990), has been cashing in lately. Bennett’s online home/school company K-12 Inc. recently received \$4 million in grant money from the U.S. Department of Education. The funds are intended for an online charter school in Arkansas—Arkansas Virtual Academy (The Homeschool Place.com, 2006).

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Not only is it morally questionable how Bennett's for-profit business came about getting the grant, especially since other programs that had been turned down had better independent reviews (Ohanian, 2006),¹⁹ but it is also disconcerting that federal funds are being diverted away from public schools in order to subsidize education for home-school students. Sure, NCLB has set aside money for its Voluntary Public School Choice Program with the expressed purpose of giving students a chance at a better education; however, only 25% of the students who have participated in K-12 Inc.'s program are from public schools (Ohanian, 2006).

Meanwhile, Bennett has been working his inside contacts to cut deals in other states around the country.

Though he extols universal morality in his *Book of Virtues* (1993), it is important to remember that this is a guy who has a multimillion dollar gambling addiction, and who on his syndicated radio talk show expressed to a caller: "If you wanted to reduce crime, you could—if that were your sole purpose—you could abort every black baby in this country and your crime rate would go down" (CNN.com, 2005). This is a guy who doesn't even support public education and yet uses taxpayers' money to finance his own business ventures. As Intel Director and former FCC Chair Reed Hundt reveals about the former Secretary of Education:

. . . I asked Bill Bennett to visit my office so that I could ask him for help in seeking legislation that would pay for internet access in all classrooms and libraries in the country. . . . He told me he would not help, because he did not want public schools to obtain new funding, new capability, new tools for success. He wanted them, he said, to fail so that they could be replaced with vouchers, charter schools, religious schools, and other forms of private education. Well, I thought, at least he's candid about his true views. (as cited in Hoffman, 2005)

It's also important to remember that Bennett used start-up money from Knowledge Universe to get K-12 Inc. up and running. Knowledge Universe is owned by Michael Millikin, the "Junk Bond King" who ripped off investors for billions of dollars in the 1980s and consequently spent a couple of years behind bars—actually, there were no bars where Millikin did time. And when he was done with his sentence, a period during which he learned how to prepare traditional French dishes from the in-house chef, he was allowed to keep over \$2 billion that he had accumulated from his criminal escapades. It certainly doesn't seem virtuous for Bennett to use blood money for any purpose, let alone to profit from the very taxpaying public from which it was ultimately stolen.

There is ample room for nepotism in state and federal politics, especially when it comes to family connections. As revealed in the *USA Today* article, "Congress Full of Fortunate Sons—and Other Relatives" (Lawrence, 2006), there are more than 50 U.S. senators and representatives that are closely related to governors and other members of Congress. But what better position is there to be in when it comes to old-boy networks than to be the grandson of a former senator, the son of a former CIA Director and President of the United States, the brother of

the incumbent governor of Florida, and the brother of the former governor of Texas—now President of the country.²⁰

Neil Bush, the president's youngest brother, in the spirit of NCLB, is pushing to sell to states around the country online, multimedia educational products and test-prep software produced by his Austin-based company Ignite Inc. Founded in 1999, Ignite set its sights on Florida public schools where the company has been pitching its products as helping students prepare for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). While the Florida Education Association has expressed some concern about a potential conflict of interest in developing a business relationship with Neil Bush, given that his brother is the governor, the youngest sibling adamantly denies any discussion about his business affairs with either of his two brothers.

Ignite's materials are currently being used in a pilot program in Orlando and the company hopes to be able to market an early American history course throughout the state at a cost of \$30 a year per student. It is trying to sink its teeth into what looks to be a \$60 million deal.²¹ The company also plans to develop software for math, science, and the language arts, as well as programs for special needs and linguistic-minority students.

Ignite has also successfully pedaled its education wares in California, New York, Ohio, Georgia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Arizona (Achieve, Inc., 2002). But, the majority of the over 40,000 students that are being exposed to this program are in Texas.

The Board of Education in Texas, while still licking its wounds inflicted in the aftermath of the 'miracle' scam, "approved spending \$115,000 this academic year to use [Ignite's] eighth-grade U.S. history curriculum in 23 schools, on the condition that Bush and the HISD Foundation come up with an additional \$115,000 to fully fund the program" (Nissimov, 2003). With wealthy friends in high places, of the likes of Wells Fargo, Neil Bush easily came up with the funds; there are now over 40 Ignite programs being used in the Houston area alone (Clark, 2004).

Much of the over \$20 million that Ignite has generated to materialize and sustain its operations has come from international technology and oil companies in such countries as Kuwait, Dubai, and China. However, some of the financial support has actually been arranged for by his mom—the former first lady who campaigns around the country rallying business leaders to support her sons' education policies and curriculum packages. She recently made a donation to the Katrina Disaster Fund stipulating that some of the money had to be spent on Ignite's educational products and their implementation in public schools in Houston, the city where many of the hurricane evacuees found high ground (Garza, 2006; Hart, 2006). Not only is this inappropriate in the general practice of non-profit donations, but it provides yet another example of how the rich are brilliant in getting tax breaks for themselves while simultaneously profiting.²²

If everything goes as planned, Neil Bush could use more than just his family name for influence and access. Given that the government has already agreed to fund

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a portion of State costs for technological products and services for the classroom, and has allocated \$1.5 billion for private research and development of educational technology, Ignite could be eligible for federal dollars. The company certainly has an advisory board fit for the job of soliciting these monies:

Ignite has loaded its advisory committees with Bush loyalists, assuring the company a sympathetic ear in Washington. According to the company, its big-name consultants include Bill Brock, a former senator from Tennessee who chaired the Republican National Committee; Bob Stearns, a Houston investor appointed to a Texas technology board by George W.; Peter Su, a former campaign adviser of the president, and two executives from Bessemer Trust, an exclusive investment firm that manages a portfolio for Neil's dad. (Scherer, 2001)

But put aside for a moment the gross conflict of interest here, as well as the possibility of international firms giving Neil Bush money in order to gain access to the President of the United States. Let's even put aside his testimony during divorce proceedings that revealed his marital infidelity with prostitutes while on business in Asia. And instead focus on the financial track record of the man behind this education project and why the public should have no confidence in his management skills, let alone in a financial and educational endeavor that involves the youth of this nation.

The reason that most people don't know much about the youngest Bush heir is largely because his political career died in the late 1980s—during his father's tour as president—when he was the acting director of Silverado Savings and Loan in Colorado, a company that went down with the S&L ship. Neil Bush's scandalous behavior cost taxpayers over \$1 billion. While angry protesters picketed outside his home demanding prosecution and retribution, a grand jury never pursued the case to that end and young Bush was thus never charged with a crime. His banking activities were however restricted by federal regulators and he was ordered to pay a \$50,000 fine. A civil lawsuit was eventually settled against Bush and other Silverado executives for the sum of \$49.5 million.²³

Neil Bush has a long track record of failed business ventures and a history of wheeling and dealing with sketchy characters, including people that he solicited money from in order to start Ignite Inc. (Bollyn, 2005; Carlson, 2003; Democracy Now, 2004; Scherer, 2001). This includes dealings with the Saudi Bin Laden construction group, Russian tycoon Boris Berezovsky who was recently prosecuted for fraud, and the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, the leader of the controversial Unification Church.

And why all this talk about helping to give the children of the United States a fighting chance to compete in a competitive global economy: Neil Bush has actually augmented Ignite's profit structure by outsourcing 70 jobs to Mexico in a partnership that he forged with Grupo Carso Telecom (Carlson, 2003). In spite of all the rhetoric about lending a hand to the youth of this nation by fighting for a better system of public education, U.S. corporations are huge fans of outsourcing jobs and exploiting cheap labor both domestically and internationally.

With capital flight and global outsourcing, both blue collar and white collar jobs have been and continue to be exported by U.S. corporations to nations that pay below a living wage and that ensure that workers have no protection under labor unions and laws that regulate corporate interests and power. As the Federal Reserve has noted, these jobs won't be returning even if there is a major upswing in the U.S. economy. It is important to note, that by cheap labor, we're often talking between 13.5 and 36 cents an hour; we're also talking about a total disregard for child-labor laws and environmental protections (National Labor Committee for Worker and Human Rights, 2003).

The current administration has bragged about creating new jobs for Americans, but it fails to inform the public that these are overwhelmingly part-time, adjunct, minimum-wage positions that provide no pension, union protection, or healthcare benefits. Part-time, temp, or subcontracted jobs currently make up 30% of the workforce and this number is rapidly increasing. As the federal minimum wage is currently \$5.15 an hour—a wage that is sustained by powerful corporate lobbyists, full-time workers in the United States make about \$10,712 a year. Keep in mind that the federal poverty threshold for an individual is \$9,214.

American workers are being blamed for not being educated enough to compete in a global economy, and yet we have one of the most educated and productive workforces in the world regardless of the fact that our public education system is highly class based. There are plenty of college-educated, technology- and business-oriented people scrambling around that can't find jobs in their area of expertise as they have been outsourced by U.S. corporations to countries like Pakistan and India. It's also ironic that corporations are simultaneously claiming that public schools are not doing an adequate job of preparing a qualified labor force in the U.S., while moving their operations to 'third world' countries, where there is enormous illiteracy and where they can exploit the seemingly endless pool of low and semi-skilled labor. And of course, these are the same forces, a la Negroponte, that influence U.S. Foreign Policy that works to keep these countries destitute.

Accountability: A Double Standard

A major contradiction that the high-stakes testing movement seems to be in no hurry to reconcile is that in this era of 'scientifically-proven methodologies' and accountability, the private firms that are benefiting from this trend have little to no outside oversight in terms of their daily operations and the quality and performance of their products and services. It's not even clear what these high-stakes tests evaluate in terms of student competence. While a score may be indicative of how well prepared a student is for a particular testing instrument, it reveals little to nothing about his or her overall abilities (Haney, 2000; Kohn, 2000; McNeil, 2000; Sturrock, 2006; TC Reports, 2000). In other words, the entire industry is built on theoretical ambiguities and empirical uncertainties rather than "scientifically-based research."

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Take Neil Bush's Ignite Inc. for example: there is currently no data, beyond anecdotal comments that are used for publicity, to support the effectiveness of this program. Likewise, there is only one State in the country that tracks whether or not private tutoring services are having an impact on student achievement. Louisiana conducted a study of 91 of its school districts and "found that \$300 million was paid to tutoring companies in one year 'with almost no scientific evidence that this spending has contributed to academic achievement'" (Schools Matter, 2005).

To add insult to injury, unlike public school teachers, those 'educators' who work for private schools or tutorial companies that are receiving federal money under NCLB do not need to be credentialed.²⁴

While other areas of industry are highly regulated—though not for long if neoliberals have their way—there is no federal agency that independently investigates testing company products and practices. The National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy (NBETPP) and the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU) are a couple of university-based programs that keep an eye on the testing industry and provide important reports on the work being done therein. However, the only independent organization that has been vigilantly tracking this movement is the National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest). But other than its ability to inform the public about the status of the testing industry, FairTest has no sanctioned federal or state power to make demands of any kind or secure guaranteed financial support to sustain its operations. While it got its start in the 1980s, through the funding of a private citizen who won a racial bias law suit against Educational Testing Service, the organization is currently in financial dire straits and at serious risk of having to close down (Selliot, 2006).

With so little oversight of an industry that is spread way too thin under the colossal demands of NCLB, quality control is obviously low.²⁵ For one, state testing offices are short on qualified staff and psychometricians—professionals who have experience with assessment design and evaluation (Herszenhorn, 2006). While industry executives are trying to get the government to offer financial incentives to graduate students who focus in this area, it's not really clear that they themselves are looking to benefit from, or pay for, this kind of expertise. As Metcalf (2002) notes, "To help market it, the company [Educational Testing Service's ETS K-12] replaced CEO Nancy Cole, an educator with a background in psychometrics, with an executive from the marketing wing of the pharmaceutical industry." Being understaffed has led to all sorts of logistical problems and negligence. As Greg Toppo (2006) reveals:

According to a fall 2005 survey of 23 state testing offices (representing 53% of the nation's school children) by Education Sector: 52% reported that they had had difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified staff for testing-related jobs. 20% reported problems receiving test results from test contractors "in a timely fashion" since 2000, 35% reported a "significant error" by a testing contractor in scoring a state test since 2000.

Most test score-related problems are the direct result of companies producing

flawed answer keys, providing an arbitrary and shifting line between passing and failing, repeating questions from sample tests on formal exams, generating and using faulty questions, and hiring unqualified people to conduct the final evaluation (Bacon, 2001; Bracey, 2002; Gluckman, 2002; Miner, 2005; Selliot, 2006). These problems are not simply the result of a labor shortage; they are also the inevitable outcome of the corporate bottom line of cutting expenses and maximizing profits by keeping staff at a minimum. As a Minnesota judge ruled in 2002, “. . . test errors were caused by [National Computer System’s] drive to cut costs and raise profits” (Miner, 2005).

The critical mistakes that these corporations make have a dramatic impact on thousands of students around the country who have been held back, denied graduation, and ordered to attend summer school; on school administrators and teachers who have been demoted or have lost their jobs altogether; and on schools that have been tarnished as not performing up to par and have consequently lost funding.

The only time that the private sector appears to be called to the mat about its products and services is when the general public gets angry and agitates or threatens to drag a school district into court. The problem with this strategy is that in the end it is not the corporation that is prosecuted and fined; rather, it is the state or the school district that takes the heat while the taxpayer covers the legal expenses. And even then, there is no guarantee that citizens will gain more rights. Demanding to see the content of the FCAT exam that his daughter had apparently failed, “In Florida, a state appeals court ruled last year that copies of the state’s standardized exams are not public records and parents have no right to see them” (Miner, 2005). Governor Jeb Bush has been fighting against the idea of allowing parents to review the tests and post-test answer sheets, claiming that it would be far too expensive. The testing industry certainly has no plans on becoming more transparent in its operations or helping to open up public dialogue about its controversial practices.

What Can Educators Do?

Progressive educators and community activists desperately need to continue to do the important work of informing the public about the privatization of their schools. Ultimately, the long-term goal is to have a critically informed public vote out of office representatives that are sacrificing children to the corporate bottom line with prepackaged teacher-proof curricula, standardized tests, and accountability schemes. But in the meantime, there are things that teacher education programs and practitioners can be doing to work towards redemocratizing public schools and creating civic-minded students and a vibrant public sphere.

First and foremost, teacher education programs need to be structured in a way that helps apprentice students into conducting critical inquiry. Not to be confused with what’s traditionally thought of as higher order thinking skills, *critical* in this sense implies being able to understand, analyze, pose questions, and affect the

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sociopolitical and economic realities that shape our lives (Freire, 1970). It is important to emphasize that developing critical consciousness—or what I often refer to as presence of mind, isn't an exercise to get people to think in a certain way ideologically, rather it is intended to get us to explore in greater depth the issues and relations of power that affect the world around us (Leistyna, 1999, 2002). Unlike the President's agenda that deskills and disempowers educators, as revealed in the following two comments,

We want our teachers trained so they can meet the obligations, their obligations as teachers. (Fritsche Middle School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 2000)

When I picked the Secretary of Education, I wasn't interested in a theorist... (White House ceremony honoring the 2002 National Teacher of the Year)

civic-minded teacher education programs need to create the conditions within which people can think for themselves. Teachers shouldn't be mere practitioners who are "trained" to jump when they are told to jump or technicians whose only purpose is to read materials to the class and handout and collect high-stakes tests. They need to be intellectuals and professionals that can make sense of—i.e., theorize—the world around them and make informed, critical and ethical decisions. They need to engage in praxis—the ongoing relationship between theory and practice/reflection and action, and teacher education programs can play a significant role in this development.

Theory embodies existing ways in which people have interpreted, analyzed, and made generalizations about *why* the world works the way that it does. It is the *why* and *how* of what has been happening around us, and not simply a focus on *what* is occurring and how to effectively respond. While understanding the ways in which existing theories explain social reality is enormously important, *theorizing* is the ability to actively engage bodies of knowledge and human practices for the logics and sociohistorical conditions that inform them so that they can be reworked. It encourages individuals to evaluate, based on their own experiences, expertise, and insight, the strengths and weaknesses of any conceptual and practical movement and recontextualize and reinvent its possibilities for one's own predicaments (Leistyna, 2005).

Unfortunately, as evident in the President's words, theory and theorizing are often discouraged and disarticulated from human agency, regardless of the fact that all sociocultural practices are always sustained by some underlying assumptions and understanding. An integral part of any political project, theorizing presents a constant challenge to imagine and materialize alternative political spaces and identities and more just and equitable economic, social, and cultural relations. It makes possible consciousness raising, coalition building, resistance, activism, and structural change. In such undemocratic times, it's not surprising that this type of practice is often discouraged.

The assault on theorizing is in part connected to ways in which the university

has been used as an indoctrinating force to deskill students by working to mold them into uncritical receivers and consumers of existing theory, but rarely viewing them as active and creative participants in the generative process of understanding. This is especially evident as globally the academy is falling prey to the kinds of corporate logic that package thought as a commodity for exchange in the marketplace rather than inspiring the kinds of inquiry that probe that very logic and use of public energy and space (Aronowitz, 2001; Readings, 1997). Within these corporate models of public education the production of technicians in all disciplines (areas of study which are artificially disconnected from one another) comes at the expense of transdisciplinary thinkers and producers of social knowledge about the world. As students are distracted or lured away from critically reading historical and existing social formations, especially those that maintain abuses of power, they often become the newest wave of exploited labor power and reproducers, whether they are conscious of it or not, of oppressive social practices.

In the spirit of theory and theorizing, future educators should study in detail the standards and assessment movement during their graduate work. They need to learn about the historical developments therein and the policies that inform such practices, and the people behind them. They should be examining the content formulation and evaluation procedures of high-stakes tests and the empirical research that explores this terrain. Teacher education programs can arm students with the skills necessary to look into the political economy of this industry and the synergy that exists within among the private and public sector. They can effectively apprentice students into deconstructing the theoretical frameworks that undergird the practice itself. Educators need to ask themselves on a regular basis, why exactly are we doing this? This is surely better than what the President does in his daily duties—as he revealed onboard Air Force One in 2003: “I’m also not very analytical. You know, I don’t spend a lot of time thinking about myself, about why I do things.”

Teacher education programs also need to continue to do extensive research and help put into practice more complex and nuanced forms of evaluation like portfolio assessment. Private schools—where the elite, ironically including the most vociferous proponents of the testing industry, send their own children—don’t have high-stakes tests, don’t have to abide by the rules and regulations of NCLB, and have far more in-depth evaluative processes.²⁶

As teachers are activists, whether or not they want to be—given that they have an effect on people everyday, part of their graduate experience should help them become more effective agents of change. As part of this process, teacher education programs should include case-study analysis of movements that both support and reject high-stakes testing. There are a plethora of case studies that could be used for this purpose. In support of testing, they could analyze the work of the Business Roundtable. On the flip side, there is much to learn from the actions of the Coalition for Authentic Reform in Education (CARE), Californians for Justice (CFJ), The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and other such organiza-

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tions and activists groups around the country that have been effectively working to mobilize the community against the kinds of social injustice and profiteering that the privatized high-stakes movement engenders. There are also a plethora of teacher and student movements that are worth studying, such as the Student Coalition for Alternatives to the MCAS (SCAM).

The intent of exploring this kind of activism is not to offer up a recipe book to be followed to the last grain of salt; rather, it is a way to inspire critical appropriation and the reinvention of social change as these struggles offer a theoretical, empirical, and practical springboard for future efforts.

While the title *No Child Left Behind* connotes fairness, compassion, and equity, and the instigators of testing mania promise academic and professional success for our children, these political campaigns virtually disregard why inequities exist in the first place. As advocates of the corporate model of schooling hide behind notions of science, objectivity, and universal knowledge, what is largely missing from national debates and federal and state policies, and what should be central to any good teacher education program, is a recognition and analysis of how racism, the structures of social class, and other oppressive and malignant ideologies inform actual educational practices and institutional conditions. These factors play a much more significant role in students' academic achievement than whether or not they have access to abstract content, a monolingual setting, and constant evaluation. Instead of honestly confronting these issues, conservatives readily blame progressive educational programs, democratic social policies, and organized labor for the country's problems.

While standards are a way of limiting the power of labor unions, teacher education programs can be designed to expose students to the extensive history of organized labor's struggles to improve education both domestically and internationally. It is important to note that with improvements in technology and computers, standardized testing has become a global industry and thus a global problem (Rees, 2000). Future educators need to learn how to work with teacher unions to collectively organize, and they need to be able to effectively mobilize these organizations to act on behalf of the community. For example, how does one go about pressuring the federal government to fund independent watchdogs to help keep an eye on assessment practices in the U.S.?

But K-12 students also need to learn how to be more effective agents of change and need to be encouraged to engage in praxis themselves. If testing is such an important part of society as advocates of this industry claim, then students should also know more about the practice—not just what's on the test and how to take it, but how the tests are generated and by whom. This opens the possibility of an interdisciplinary approach to learning where subjects such as history, math, science, and social studies are part of analyzing the industry and the tests themselves. In the spirit of critical pedagogy, teachers should also teach to the test. But by this I mean that they should engage the students in ideological analysis of the knowledge that they are being exposed to. It is important for young people to take a critical look at,

for example, the history lessons that are taught in schools whose curricula and textbooks are generated by the current standards regime. Whose stories are told, how are they told, what is being excluded in such representations, what purpose and whose interests do such stories serve? Again, teacher education programs could play an important role in nurturing this kind of pedagogical practice.

In this era of massive corporate corruption of the likes of Enron, World Com, Adelphia, Wal-Mart, and Tyco, where unscrupulous political figures such as Tom Delay, Ralph Reed, Jack Abramoff, and David Safavian are readily caught engaging in criminal activity with the private sector, it simply makes no sense to put or nation's youth in the 'trusting hands' of corporations. The results that matter for private industry are financial gains achieved by selling materials on a grand scale, and by guaranteeing that schools produce an uncritical mass of a low and semi-skilled labor that is in high demand in our now post-industrial service-oriented economy. Why else would they support policies that offer a mechanical and mediocre curriculum, and that force kids out of school prematurely, guaranteeing that they don't get a high school diploma and thus access to college?

Leaving public education in the hands of for-profit corporations would be like letting HMOs and pharmaceutical and insurance companies tell doctors what to do; it would be like letting Exxon/Mobil and construction companies like Halliburton make decisions about whether or not this nation goes to war. Unfortunately, this is precisely what the neoliberal approach to governing and decision making has done. It's about time we redemocratize this society and if public schools are to play a key role in this change, we need to be honest about what these institutions are designed to do. My favorite Bush misspeak is:

The public education system in America is one of the most important foundations of our democracy. After all, it is where children from all over America learn to be responsible citizens, and learn to have the skills necessary to take advantage of our fantastic opportunistic society. (May 1, 2002)

While this statement is an obvious slip of the tongue, and sadly, a sign of a semi-literate man, in reality what it says isn't too far from the truth. Part of being a democracy means having public institutions that are designed to create a vibrant and critical citizenry. However, within the grips of unbridled capitalism, private interests have worked to create a get-what-you-can-for-yourself mentality. To really create responsible citizens it means that a society has to collectively participate in maintaining healthy public institutions and restraining those opportunistic forces that have an undying love for profit, but such contempt for public life.

Notes

¹ Bhawin Suchak (2006).

² In 2005, \$2.4 billion were spent on lobbying. "Some 80% of all political contributions now come from less than 1% of the population" (Collins, Hartman & Sklar, 1999, p. 5). Most

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of the public policy debate thus remains in the confines of the Wall Street and Fortune 500 agenda.

³ It is important to note how Draconian the stakes were when questions of intelligence and competence led to the sterilization of over 60,000 people from 1907-1970. These racist and classist intelligence tests were devised in part to embrace social Darwinism by separating the more from the less intelligent (Gould, 1996; Kincheloe et al., 1997).

⁴ The organization is currently directed by the Commissioner of Education Statistics, who heads the National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education. Policy and practice are set by the National Governing Board (NAGB) whose members are appointed by the Secretary of Education (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/>).

⁵ For a much more detailed version of the early days of this corporate story, see Suchak, B. (2006). *Standardized Testing: High-Stakes for Students and for Corporate Bottom Lines*. This research informs much of this section of my paper and should be read in its entirety.

⁶ “One of the reform movement’s founding documents is *Reinventing Education: Entrepreneurship in America’s Public Schools*, by Lou Gerstner, chairman of IBM. Gerstner describes schoolchildren as human capital, teachers as sellers in a marketplace and the public school system as a monopoly” (Metcalf, 2002).

⁷ Like the “Vallas Miracle” in Chicago and the “New York City Miracle”...

⁸ The new policy changes in 2000 make it so that a student who has been in the country for less than three years is exempt.

⁹ The exam has been provided in English and Spanish since 1997.

¹⁰ This reference is taken from the White House Webpage at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/paige-bio.html>

¹¹ Paige has yet to be prosecuted or even censured for his criminal behavior.

¹² It is important to note that many democrats also belong to the big business party and thus support the same corporate agenda.

¹³ It is ironic that this social movement has been spearheaded by a political party that has for a long time represented the idea of getting big government off the backs of local leadership, and in the not so distant past called for dismantling the federal Department of Education altogether. Conservatives figure if they can’t defeat the system, they can nonetheless control it. But that’s just the point, under Article I of the U.S. Constitution, the founding fathers gave the Congress no power to legislate when it comes to public education. Individual states were empowered to make such decisions.

¹⁴ For examples of studies of this under-funding, see <http://www.schoolfunding.info/news/federal/3-14-05ctnclbstudy.php3> and <http://www.schoolfunding.info/news/federal/9-23-05VAnclbcoststudies.php3>

¹⁵ Former CEO of DuPont Merck Pharmaceutical Co., Kurt Landgraf is the President and CEO of the Educational Testing Service.

¹⁶ HM is owned by the private investment firms Bain Capital, Thomas H. Lee Partners, and the Blackstone Group.

¹⁷ “California Department of Education guidelines prohibit the use of test-prep materials written for a specific test. Buckle Down’s California marketing blurb acknowledges this policy, assures customers that it’s in compliance—and then, in the same paragraph, touts how closely its materials are pegged to the state’s tests” (Gluckman, 2002).

¹⁸ For an excellent example of historical engineering by conservative forces, see any of the materials produced by E.D. Hirsch, Jr.’s Core Knowledge Foundation—*What Your 1-6th Grader Needs to Know: Fundamentals of a Good Education*.

¹⁹ K-12 Inc. is the first online home-school project to be federally funded.

²⁰ For a detailed elaboration of their abuse of power, see Kevin Phillips (2004). *American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush*. New York: Penguin.

²¹ One can only imagine how history will be engineered by Neil Bush—my guess is that he'll have Lynn Cheney draft these passages in the spirit of her 2002 book *America: A Patriotic Prime* (New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers). Ignite has already come under some heavy criticism for its 'dumbed down' version of history such as the lesson on the Seminole Wars which presents, in cartoon form, a football game with "the Jacksons vs. the Seminoles."

²² 60% of U.S. companies pay no income tax. By the year 2000, the corporate share of taxes had fallen to 17% (Soll, 2002). By 2003, corporate tax revenues fell to only 7.4% of federal tax receipts.

²³ In 1999, Neil Bush's reputation was again under the spotlight when he was suspected of insider trading when he cashed in on close to a million dollars on three stock trades in Kopin Corp., where he had been a consultant—one of them for almost \$200,000 in one day.

²⁴ Exposing the contradiction in hiring public school teachers with federal funds to work for after-school private tutorials, Macus Silvi from the Office of Student Achievement, states, "Ironically, the rationale behind NCLB is that the public schools need competition from private vendors in order to improve among other things their teaching staff" (as cited in Clark, 2004).

²⁵ Amy Gluckman (2002) reveals how States and the testing industry violate The Code of Fair Testing Practices (a document developed by experts in education and psychology that outlines the dos and don'ts of testing for publishers and practitioners): "using a single test score to make a high-stakes determination—such as high-school graduation—represents misuse. But as a business-based model of accountability comes to dominate education reform, a number of states are beginning to do just that. . . . Today, testing companies are signing large, multiyear contracts with states to create customized statewide tests, and sometimes the companies are well aware from the start that a state is planning to misuse test results." It is important to note, she adds, that "in 1987, when ETS—concerned that Texas planned to fire teachers who did not pass a new recertification test—declined to bid for the contract to develop it."

²⁶ George W. Bush attended elite private schools. By no means am I arguing that these are necessarily better educational institutions; just look at some of the language production of the President himself who is infamous for his misspeak:

"Laura and I really don't realize how bright our children is sometimes until we get an objective analysis." (CNBC; April 15, 2000), "The Illiteracy level of our children are appalling" (Washington, D.C., January 23, 2004). "As a society, we must demand something better, because there is no second-rate children in America" (Speaking in South Bend, Indiana, September 5, 2002). "That means we've got to have an education system that is next to none" (Denver Colorado, September 27, 2002), "Rarely is the question asked: Is our children learning?" (Florence, South Carolina, January 11, 2000).

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