
Introduction

DESPERATE MEASURES: SHIFTS IN POWER, HIGH-STAKES ACCOUNTABILITY, AND THE BEAT OF WAR IN US PUBLIC EDUCATION

Stacy Otto
Illinois State University

The annual meeting's 2012 theme places philosophy of education within critical social community posing the question, "How do we engage new political economies of education?": a weighty question indeed. In his OVPES presidential address drawing from his recent book,¹ Mike Gunzenhauser wisely, thoughtfully, and with gravity tinged with levity, analyzes the theoretical and practical fallout brought about by the seemingly inescapable crush of neoliberalism on PK–12 education and its carefully crafted mission to increase the social class gulf. The neoliberal economy's "fair-market"-based shifts in power rapidly are leading to moral lapses, and, I would go so far as to argue, a new morality motivated by and tightly lashed to educators' survival instinct. By now we all have read of teachers' and administrators' desperation precipitated by the need for ever-increasing scores in high-stakes accountability measures leading to cheating scandals, the scope of which now just begins to become apparent. Chaos created by the rapidly accelerating number of educational "reform" measures and curricula—so many of which are lock-step scripted—successfully marketed by for-profit education companies further rocks teachers' ability to do what they know is best for all children and wholly undermines teachers' expertise and professionalism.

Interior to education, high-stakes testing and accountability discourse operate together as a metanarrative—an overarching, human-created structure of domination through which, by design, the few dominate the many. Although one is able to see high-stakes testing and accountability as discrete, just as with many other cultural metanarratives, this organized structure of domination is closely related to others: here most notably—and most powerfully—the neoliberal economy. This relation perhaps is demonstrated most clearly in Stephen Metcalf's now-infamous 2002 article in *The Nation*, "Reading Between the Lines: The New Education Law Is a Victory for Bush—and for His Corporate Allies."² In this article, Metcalf discloses the long-standing

¹ Michael G. Gunzenhauser, *The Active/Ethical Professional: A Framework for Responsible Educators* (New York: Continuum, 2012).

² Stephen Metcalf, "Reading Between the Lines: The New Education Law Is a Victory for Bush—and for His Corporate Allies," *The Nation*, January 28, 2002, <http://www.thenation.com/article/reading-between-lines>.

relationship between the Bush and McGraw (of McGraw-Hill) families precipitated by “three generations of social mingling.”³ Metcalf reminds readers McGraw-Hill is the leading producer and seller of standardized, high-stakes testing instruments which the company also must be paid to score, creating an unfunded, yet legislated—and seemingly never-ending—directed, financial bonanza. I point to Metcalf’s article when teaching pre-service teachers in Foundations courses (young adults tested half to death themselves who display a dreamy compliance with standardized testing—after all, they profit from an education that produced their “good” scores) asking them a question most of them have yet to consider: “If there were no money to be made from high-stakes testing, do you think it would exist?”

In addition, as the American Federation of Teachers⁴ reports, the full-court press for students, teachers, administrators, schools, and districts to “succeed” at high-stakes testing translates to monopolizing 20–40 minutes of every student’s school day or one of 12 school years during which they are either prepping for or taking standardized exams.⁵ Teachers and administrators spend even more time than students on prepping and testing, labeling and distributing exams, securing exams and materials from cheating, and sending exams out to be scored.

An additional, significant power shift in public education the annual meeting’s theme puts forward includes the effects of union-busting. I add to union-busting the current reviling of public employees: insidious race-, class-, and economics-based arguments instrumental in the devaluing of teachers’ knowledges and professional expertise. Fervor over the orchestrated, shifting, educational power dynamic plays out daily in newsmedia outlets and among political pundits and are showcased as refrain in the land of hate-mongering, Fox-News-type commentators and talk-radio jockeys.

Not highlighted in the annual meeting’s theme, a monumental—and stealth—educational power shift is found within the suffocating influence of a few privately funded (through wildly profitable corporate entities) educational foundations dictating educational policy and privatizing public education and, on the legislative lobbying side, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). For instance, Sam Walton’s educational foundation, The Walton Family Foundation, unabashedly funds “school choice” initiatives, canonizing such “educational reformers” as parent groups acting as local foot soldiers for

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴ It is worth noting the AFT, a member of the AFL-CIO, is a group vocally pro-testing and pro-Common Core Standards.

⁵ Howard Nelson, *Testing More, Teaching Less: What America’s Obsession with Student Testing Costs in Money and Lost Instructional Time* (Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, 2013), <http://www.aft.org/pdfs/teachers/testingmore2013.pdf>.

charter school initiatives.⁶ Many prefer to pretend the Gates Foundation,⁷ for instance, which has poured hundreds of millions into US public school systems and into higher education, focuses on improving learning for all children, and the US newsmedia certainly are complicit in creating and feeding the foundation’s missionary profile. But, the Gates Foundation serves (not surprisingly, along with the Koch brothers’ foundation and such economic superpowers as McDonald’s, Wendy’s, AT&T, Mars, PepsiCo, Reynolds, Coca-Cola, and Kraft Foods’ international branch, Mondelēz International) as a major funder of the American Legislative Exchange Council.⁸ In fact, multinational corporate entities join to conspire within the pernicious, secreted ALEC whose membership flexes both enormous legislative influence and riches to privatize US education. Coincidentally, the anti-democratic ALEC is also hard at work “to dilute collective bargaining rights, make it harder for some Americans to vote, and limit corporate liability for harm caused to consumers—each accomplished without the public ever knowing who’s behind it”⁹: something of a double- or even triple-whammy perpetrated on teachers, for not only is union-busting afoot, but the Gates Foundation conditions funding upon tying teachers’ pay to students’ performance on standardized exams. And the Gates Foundation funds the Rockefeller Foundation¹⁰ which, in turn, generously funds several of the more powerful charter school-supporting foundations: Rocketship Education, Education Trust, and Parent Revolution.¹¹ These foundations represent just three of what has become a viral assortment of private foundations waging war on US public education by influencing public policy and funding “school choice.” While power shifts and other stealth attacks perpetrated by those determined to favor the neoliberal economy and

⁶ “Education Reformers to Watch,” The Walton Family Foundation, accessed August 5, 2013, <http://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/educationreform/education-reformers-to-watch>.

⁷ In 2006 Warren Buffett, a Gates Foundation trustee, pledged \$31 billion of his \$44-billion-dollar fortune to the foundation and, this past July, made a \$2 billion distribution. Timothy L. O’Brien and Stephanie Saul, “Buffett to Give Bulk of His Fortune to Gates Charity,” *New York Times*, June 26, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/26/business/26buffett.html>; William Alden, “Buffett Gives \$2 Billion to Gates Foundation,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2013, <http://dealbook.nytimes.com/2013/07/08/buffett-gives-2-billion-to-gates-foundation>.

⁸ “ALEC’s Top 10 Original Corporate Donors,” last modified July 8, 2013, <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2013/07/08/1221996/-CHARTS-ALEC-s-Top-Ten-Original-Corporate-Donors>.

⁹ Bill Moyers, “United States of ALEC,” *Moyers & Company*, September 28, 2012, transcript and video, <http://billmoyers.com/episode/full-show-united-states-of-alec/>.

¹⁰ “ALEC’s Top 10.”

¹¹ *Ibid.*

dismantle public education may not constitute actual warfare, at a minimum these attacks constitute class-based warfare.¹²

Considering these many significant power shifts—overt, covert, and subversive—and the cacophony of voices and mountains of dollars intending disharmony and anti-democracy along with the current imbroglia playing out in US newsmedia over illegally imposed, wartime, governmental surveillance tactics of the NSA, the nature of “patriotism,” and the boundaries of treason bring me squarely back to reconsider Virginia Woolf’s words in her bold, brave, brilliant, feminist educational treatise, *Three Guineas*¹³: “How are we to educate for peace rather than for war?” Woolf’s argument offers an alternative way of thinking about US public education’s shifting power sands, in particular, the accountability focus (and the surveillance machine it constructs, implements, and feeds) and what seems to remain at its root: a determination to educate for war rather than for peace.

Last of Woolf’s “four great teachers”—those teachers meant to educate one for war rather than for peace—she imagines “freedom from unreal loyalties”¹⁴ as “freedom from loyalty to old schools, old colleges, old churches, old ceremonies, old countries,”¹⁵ “damning war as a man’s *raison d’être* and duty of patriotism which can only lead to the ‘morning’s collection’: photographs of dead children, burnt houses, and mutilated, mangled humanity.”¹⁶ Woolf decries we must serve real loyalties and despise unreal loyalties, owing that authority to one of two “psychometer[s]”: the first is private, physiological, that one “carr[ies] on [one’s] wrist,”¹⁷ and, like the mercury contained within a thermometer, reacts to a certain level of exposure and “is affected by any body or soul, house or society in whose presence it is exposed.”¹⁸ Perhaps one’s quickening pulse when reacting to one’s instinct is to what Woolf refers, even though, as “civilized” beings, humans carefully are socialized fully to suppress animal instinct.

The second authority Woolf draws from a publically available source, advising one attend the national galleries and public libraries—for they are

¹² I do not include race-based warfare here, even though it logically is implied. As political economist Robert Reich argues, the neoliberal economy is designed equally to enslave economically Black, brown, and white, and therefore—and ironically—operates as a post-racial metanarrative. Needless to say, this is *not* the sort of “equity” for which we, Foundations scholars and teachers, advocate. Robert B. Reich, *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st-Century Capitalism* (New York: Knopf, 1991).

¹³ Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (Richmond, UK: The Hogarth Press, 1938).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Stacy Otto, “Heeding Woolf’s Great Teacher: Uncovering and Defusing an Education in ‘Unreal Loyalties,’” *Democracy & Education* 20, no. 2 (2012): 2.

¹⁷ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 81.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

open to all—to look at pictures and browse volumes to experience those unreal loyalties artists, poets, and philosophers recount to learn “the effect of power and wealth upon the soul.”¹⁹ Woolf claims art functions as a “public psychometer,”²⁰ art objects being pedagogues themselves that offer “a far more instructive analysis of tyranny than any of our politicians can offer.”²¹ Experiencing art allows the viewer to discover those loyalties named unreal, not by politicians, sociologists, or archbishops, but by artists, who reveal “the duties of an individual to society.”²² Remembering Woolf herself is using art in a revolutionary way “to propagate political opinion”²³ in the same vein as Swift’s *A Modest Proposal*, “one may see that once one knows his or her duties, absent unreal loyalties, he or she knows freedom. Woolf strongly argues for true loyalties and even more strongly against the hypocrisy of the unreal, pride being a harbinger of unreal loyalties.”²⁴

Woolf shows how “the finest education in the world does not teach people to hate force, but to use it,”²⁵ so “clear eyes and steadfast determination must become the tools of pedagogues who strive to teach...peace as a true loyalty.”²⁶ If educational philosophers are to engage in new political economies of education, then we must get in touch with our individual psychometers, feel for the quickening pulse of instinct, press our ears to the ground to hear the beat of war approaching, educate others to listen to their private psychometers, and look to all forms of art to illustrate—and make real—the tyranny the neoliberal economy enacts on education and society. For,

As a cultural politics and a form of economic domination, neoliberalism tells a very limited story, one . . . antithetical to nurturing democratic identities, values, public spaces, and institutions and thereby enables fascism to grow because it has no ethical language for recognizing politics outside of the realm of the market.²⁷

The Foucaultian spectacle of high-stakes accountability eclipses the complexities of educators’ and students’ humanity by reducing humans to the tasks and results of examining, counting, ranking, and pathologizing our failures. If we believe or embrace Foucault’s examinations of such public

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Brenda R. Silver, “The Authority of Anger: Three Guineas as Case Study,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 16, no. 2 (1991): 362.

²⁴ Otto, “Heeding Woolf’s Great Teacher,” 2.

²⁵ Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 29.

²⁶ Otto, “Heeding Woolf’s Great Teacher,” 3.

²⁷ Henry A. Giroux, “The Terror of Neoliberalism: Rethinking the Significance of Cultural Politics,” *College Literature* 32, no. 1 (2005): 13–14.

institutions as schools,²⁸ we would see that, just as schools are masculine in their structure, they are also militarized. Perhaps it is out of fear educators have yet to articulate this military structure. I do not think we can avoid any longer making this marriage of schools and militarization explicit. The constant presence, the constant pressure, of high-stakes accountability in the lives of educators I equate to Baker's claim the neoliberal economy normalizes a "constant military presence in our lives,"²⁹ for accountability surely is the militarization of US public education. The war accountability wages on US public education "sanction[s] war as spectacle, and fear as a central formative component in mobilizing an affective investment in militarization."³⁰ With the militarization of public education driving the neoliberal economy's push into education, how can educators help but educate for war?

At present, I, along with many of you, my colleagues, am comforted and placated by the assurance I work at the local, individual, student level to do what I know needs to be done to confront education's and society's inequities. And I write. I write in an attempt to lay bare the contradictions and complexities of systems of domination and their effects. But the more, frankly terrifying, reading I do into the nature and workings of the neoliberal beast, the more I become convinced we need somehow to be playing at the economy's upper echelons, for that is where this inhuman, warmongering game is being played, where the neoliberal economy's robber-barons do their will. It is where the players are and where they exercise power. Coincidentally, the activities of the neoliberal economy traditionally occur at the same level at which the march to war plays out: in backroom deals between robber-barons and legislators, who, in the past, concerned themselves more with putting boots on the ground in non-democratic, resource-rich nations, but who now freely put boots on the ground in US classrooms.

Recently Bill Maher expressed his astonishment³¹ at the seemingly insane political goings-on in North Carolina where one of the Koch brothers' "brothers from another mother," Art Pope, used his post-*Citizens United* influence to seize control of the state budget³² ushering in anti-women, anti-voting rights, anti-union, and pro-gun³³ legislation that, as Maher posits, resembles "every crazy, angry idea your drunk, right-wing uncle mumbles at

²⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995).

²⁹ Kevin Baker quoted in Giroux, "Terror of Neoliberalism," 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Bill Maher, "New Rules," *Real Time with Bill Maher*, episode 292, aired August 2, 2013, Home Box Office.

³² Paul Blumenthal, "Art Pope, Koch Brothers Ally, Picked to Run North Carolina Budget," *The Huffington Post*, December 21, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/21/art-pope-koch-brothers_n_2342932.html.

³³ In North Carolina concealed carry is now legal both in bars and on playgrounds.

Thanksgiving, [and] turn[s] it into a law and that's North Carolina today."³⁴ Although North Carolina voters still trend democratic and although Maher and others estimate 4 of 5 voters oppose such legislation, Pope's money and political sway nevertheless reign supreme. Maher notes this battle—between democracy and the neoliberal economy—comes down to “our super-rich versus their super-rich. And theirs are winning.”³⁵ He challenges rich liberals to exert their financial power for good, not-so-subtly eyeing guest Jay-Z in the process.

As educational philosophers, we are as unlikely to exert such a monetary force of influence as anyone anywhere, but we do have our voices, and voices *can* carry. Virginia Woolf's words echo a similar sentiment to John Steinbeck's in his 1962 Nobel Prize acceptance speech.³⁶ In it, he worries aloud, in the march to war and in the wake of the atomic bomb's advent and recent use, that science's head has rushed ahead of its heart. He calls upon his humanities colleagues to draw abreast of such “progress,” asking they join him in loudly questioning scientists' and government's actions so humans might survive—and remain humane. Returning to Henry Giroux's call to action, applicable to our group of educational philosophers, Giroux charges us with using those tools readily available to us, our voices and our pens, to halt the militarization of education and the rush to war.

One of the most central tasks facing intellectuals, activists, educators, and others who believe in an inclusive and substantive democracy is the need to use theory to rethink the language and possibilities of politics as a way to imagine a future outside the powerful grip of neoliberalism.³⁷

For, as Woolf illustrates, the better one becomes at competing, the poorer one gets at fostering humanity, the farther away from “the dream of peace” and “the voices of the poets...assuring us of a unity that rubs out divisions as if they were chalk marks only” and the closer to “the sound of the guns.”³⁸ I echo Steinbeck's call to action when he says, “With humanity's long, proud history of standing firm against all...its natural enemies, sometimes in the face of almost certain defeat and extinction, we would be cowardly...to leave the field on the eve of our greatest potential victory.”³⁹ We cannot allow

³⁴ “Bill Maher on North Carolina Going ‘Ape Shit’ & Why Rich Liberals Like Jay-Z Should Start Buying States,” *The Huffington Post*, August 3, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/03/bill-maher-north-carolina_n_3700777.html.

³⁵ Maher, “New Rules.”

³⁶ John Steinbeck, “Banquet Speech,” December 10, 1962, transcript and audio, The Nobel Foundation, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1962/steinbeck-speech_en.html.

³⁷ Giroux, “Terror of Neoliberalism,” 15.

³⁸ Woolf quoted in Otto, “Heeding Woolf's Great Teacher,” 5.

³⁹ Steinbeck, “Banquet Speech.”

the seemingly certain extinction of democratic, public education; I call upon us all to lift our pens and our voices both in protest and in pedagogy.



In addition to those addressed by Michael G. Gunzenhauser, Virginia Worley, and Phil Smith Symposium honorees Cris Mayo (speaking on the promise of engaging adult learners dialectically in philosophy texts to renew education and create community), Jennifer Logue (exploring how forms of ignorance and those who claim ignorance work politically in schools and the potential for dialogue, formation, and fostering of critical communities of difference), and Lisa Weems (advocating for an epistemological and ethical shift to a performative, surprising, suspenseful, responsible guerilla pedagogy), many of this issue's authors substantively confront concerns surrounding the annual meeting's theme, "How do we engage new political economies of education?," boldly laying bare the effects the neoliberal economy imposes on US education and society within their remarkable essays.

Angela Hurley begins the issue by theorizing educational fundamentalism as the policy implications resulting from education's intersection of a neoliberal economy with the single-minded, zealous characteristics of religious fundamentalism. Hurley argues for the importance those within education understand and engage fundamentalists' rigid, binary, crisis-focused, discursive rhetoric, particularly as it plays out through the evidence-focused, high-stakes accountability movement, ultimately challenging educators to recognize, imagine, implement, and advocate for ways and means to dismantle educational fundamentalist discourses.

Lance Mason explores Dewey's notion of society's "lost individual" within the educational context arguing technological advances and the neoliberal economy's influence combine to alienate individuals from their community bonds and to disengage them from the democratic enterprise. Mason maintains use of standardized, high-stakes accountability measures and the ubiquitous use of technology in schools dangerously narrow curricular content, block bonds between individuals and their communities, and lead to schools' neglecting the development of students' democratic habits. Mason concludes dramatic changes to education's ecology by way of communication and collaboration are necessary if schools are to reclaim an ever-increasing number of lost individuals.

Sarah Stitzlein exposes the profit-driven Educational Management Organizations' (EMO) remaking of public charter schools into neoliberal, for-profit enterprises, calling into question the very nature of "public" in what has become an educational marketplace. She argues EMOs not only undermine the public, other-regarding good of public education, but actively work to conflate public and private ultimately disguising for-profit, private educational good as

public. Stitzlein concludes that only by maintaining public schools’ “publicness” can we sustain democracy in the US.

Jeffery Dunn asks what the place of religious education might be given Kūng’s argument that to ensure peace among religions one must have an understanding of and dialogue among religions. This question Dunn asks in light of theology’s seeming unimportance to a world focused upon capitalism. Drawing from Lipman, Dunn argues opening conversation about including intentional religious curricula leads to “counterhegemonic discourses,” useful because such discourses can take on the anti-human characteristics of a neoliberal economy. Dunn ends by advocating for a “religious-like community” in public schools that “attends to the souls of teachers and students.”

Sheron Fraser-Burgess poses the question, in light of large-scale cultural, racial, and social-class-based change in US society, how is democracy to be incorporated into schooling in a way that promotes equity and social justice? She examines Bull’s theory of social justice taking exception with the way Bull characterizes sociocultural factors’ influence in social justice-based conflict. Fraser-Burgess ends by asking what might be the implications “for defining social justice with respect to democracy.”

Ronald Chennault searches beyond the oversimplified confines of Booker T. Washington’s autobiography and moves past Washington’s characterization as a “trickster” to explore Washington’s educational thought and its connections to pragmatism and progressivism. Chennault neither dismisses critiques of Washington, nor his naïvetés, but works to uncover and explicate the layered complexities of Washington’s educational thought and deeds.

It has been an honor and my great pleasure to work with OVPES members on this issue of *PSIE*. I extend my sincere thanks for the generosity and expertise of those who reviewed manuscripts and to the authors, who proved ever thoughtful, patient, and munificent throughout the editorial process. I very much appreciate the opportunity to act as contributing editor and extend my heartfelt gratitude to *PSIE* co-Editors Michael G. Gunzenhauser and Kathleen Knight Abowitz for their sage guidance and good humor. Both are sincerely appreciated.

Stacy Otto, Contributing Editor
Illinois State University
