

Editorial: An International Examination of Teacher Education: Exposing and Resisting the Neoliberal Agenda

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On January 1, 2012, National Public Radio aired a story about Eric Mazur, a professor of physics at Harvard University. The report focused on a realization Mazur had about teaching and learning. According to the story:

He (Mazur) says that listening to someone talk is not an effective way to learn any subject. “Students have to be active in developing their knowledge,” he says. “They can’t passively assimilate it.” (Hanford, 2012)

The connections between these ideas and teacher education are evident. In schools of education, transmission pedagogical models have been de-emphasized in favor of critical, constructivist, transformational approaches. The more disturbing part of the broadcast followed Mazur’s statement about passive versus active learning, when the reporter claimed that:

This is something many people have known intuitively for a long time — the physicists just came up with the hard data. Their work, along with research by cognitive scientists, provides a compelling case against lecturing. (Hanford, 2012)

This statement is disconcerting for several reasons. First, it discounts the expertise of professional educators and simultaneously privileges the

expertise of positivists (physicists and cognitive scientists). Educators, despite explicit concentration on aspects of teaching and learning, are nonexistent in this narrative. Their voices are silent; their absence is a massive void. And not only are educators missing, the body of scholarship – decades and decades of research and experience – are discounted. Worse than being critiqued, they are disregarded entirely.

This context – a world in which dialogue around teaching and learning ignores the existence of an established field of professional inquiry – frames the ideas presented in this issue.

Teacher education, like all social institutions in the current global environment, is being reshaped by neoliberal forces. According to Porfilio and Hoffman (2012):

Critical scholar-practitioners who educate future and current teachers, school administrators and other school personnel in schools or colleges of education have been particularly affected by the changing nature of higher education (Butin, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2009; Hinchey & Cadiero-Kaplan, 2005; Porfilio & Yu, 2006; Sleeter, 2008). Political leaders in the United States, Western CEOs, educators, psychologists, and think tank organizations have been able to sell the public the false idea that it is the teacher education system (rather than unjust policies, systemic inequalities, and historical forces) that perpetuates a dysfunctional educational system nationwide.

In recent decades, the transnational capitalist class has wielded power and influence to gain control over elements of social life that were once considered vital domains to fostering the social welfare of global citizens. Affected public domains include natural resources, health care, prisons, transportation, post-catastrophe restoration, and education. The chief linchpin in the elite's corporatization over social affairs is its effective propaganda campaign to convince the global community to believe that

neoliberal capitalism ameliorates, rather than devastates, humanity. According to political pundits, free-market academics, and corporate leaders, economic prosperity and improvements in the social world emanate from “unregulated or free markets, the withering away of the state as government’s role in regulating businesses and funding social services are either eliminated or privatized, and encouraging individuals to become self-interested entrepreneurs” (Hursh, 2011). Since “neoliberalism” is a term rarely uttered in most dominant (mainstream) media outlets, most global citizens are not aware of its connections to many contemporary deleterious economic and social developments, such as massive unemployment, swelling home foreclosures and related increases in homelessness, militarism, school closings, maldistribution of wealth and power, and environmental degradation (Hill, 2006; Hursh, 2011; McLaren, 2005; Scipes, 2009). Equally important, many global citizens fail to recognize how the transitional elite have spawned a McCarthy-like witch hunt to eliminate academics, policies, and programs that have the potential to engage citizens in a critical examination of what is responsible for today’s increasingly stark social world – as well as what steps are necessary to radically transform it.

In this special issue of *The Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies*, several progressive scholars from across the globe provide readers with valuable insights which unpack how corporate imperatives, practices, and policies are structuring life in schools and colleges of education. Since the impact of neoliberal capitalism on programs, policies, relationships, and pedagogies in schools of education is not uniform, as local histories and politics structure how macro-forces come to impact people in local contexts (Gruenewald, 2003), the contributors' empirical work, theoretical insights, and conceptual analyses are integral in understanding and

confronting the structures, constitutive forces, and social actors responsible for diminishing the humanizing nature of education. Additionally, several contributors detail discoveries of emancipatory fissures amid corporatized schools of education in order to implement critical forms of pedagogies. Not only are they guiding current and future schoolteachers to reflect upon how corporate involvement in schools is inextricably linked to maintaining structural relationships that generate “unwarranted inequalities, shattered communities, and unfilled lives” (Greene, 2008), but also they are germinating visions that guide students to think beyond the orbit of neoliberal capitalism (McLaren, 2005). These authors raise the possibility that students, perhaps for the first time, might gain the critical imagination to break “with the given, the taken-for-granted-to move towards what might be, what is not yet” (Greene, 2008).

In the second essay, “Democracy in the Global World; from Dewey’s Educational Aims for Social Efficiency to Educating a Global Mind,” Samoukovic reminds us that John Dewey warned us nearly hundred years ago of how the *annihilation of space* (or globalization) will have a profound impact on the world both “intellectually and emotionally.” According to the author, scholars, such as Moore-Lapp, claim that the most profound impact of today’s globalization lies in the continual move to a “privately owned government,” which generates policies and practices that perpetuate “hunger, poverty and environmental crises.” After examining the current state of democracy at today’s historical moment, Samoukovic argues Dewey’s call for tentativeness of an educational aim could become the “first step in revolutionizing a democracy” in schools and in society. Next, the author describes how educators can challenge the neoliberal status quo by guide students to develop a “global mind,” a form of awarness that privileges “empathetic

human relations in cooperative, not competitive environment, to nurture our sense of fairness, need for meaning, curiosity, imagination."

Samoukovic also makes it clear that a democratic social order can only be achieved if critical scholars continue to embrace revolutionary form of pedagogies so as to help citizens "see the deficiencies of the capitalist frame of reference." The author concludes the essay by asserting that educators must generate several alternative discourses to "create a new citizen of the world" as well as to thwart the elites' quest for the *annihilation of space* in "the current times of neoliberal hegemony."

In the third essay, "Importing Educators and Redefining What it Means to be a Teacher in the U.S.," Books and de Villiers pinpoint how the neoliberal agenda, "a form of late-stage global capitalism that envisions an unrestricted market subsuming all things public," is impacting the teaching profession throughout the globe by critically examining the unjust educational practice of "recruitment of overseas-trained teachers without a long-term stake in union negotiations to work in U.S. classrooms." After providing an overview of how political and economic leaders lull the public to incorrectly believe this practice is designed to "address a teacher shortage (undocumented) and, on the other, to foster cultural and global understanding," the authors capture how this practice impacts the overseas-trained teachers, the teaching profession, and the political leaders who support privatizing education. They state that:

[The] recruitment has led to emotional trauma as well as legal and financial exploitation of often ill-informed overseas-trained teachers. The practice pits "native" U.S. teachers against teachers recruited abroad in a way that contributes to the erosion of teachers' collective bargaining rights -- a neoliberal dream, quickly becoming a reality. Finally, the practice enables political leaders at all levels (national, state, and local) to respond to systemic problems with stop-gap measures that do not address the core problem: that

some public schools in the U.S., particularly high-poverty schools in central cities, have become places where many teachers prefer not to teach (AFT 2009; Hadley Dunn 2011) and where many students find they cannot learn (Anyon 1997, Eaton 2006, Kozol 2005).

Next, the authors unveil how the recruitment program benefits the corporate elite. For instance, many corporations extort money from overseas-trained teachers who are bent on finding a temporary teaching job in the US. In fact, one program "coerced and threatened the teachers with deportation," if the teachers did not pay the company a substantial amount of their gross salary.

After documenting the online recruitment strategies to attract school districts in the US and overseas-trained teachers, the authors conclude the essay with several key recommendations to make the recruitment of overseas-trained teachers a practice that is involved in the "broader transformation of US schools," instead of a practice that allows political leaders to further privatize schools, to exploit the labor power of overseas-trained educators, and to sidestep providing public resources for progressive teacher education programs and for improving the conditions inside and outside of schools, which are vital for offering students transformative schooling experiences.

In the fourth essay, "Waiting for Superwoman: White Female Teachers and the Construction of the "neoliberal savior" in a New York City Public School," Brown provides data from her two years of ethnographic research to demonstrate how some White female educators are embracing a "White neoliberal savior" mentality. According to the author, this mindset reflects the support of "a moneyed logic intertwined with the liberal agenda of tokenistic diversity and equality." Consequently, some of her participants at "College Prep" are complicit in supporting

neoliberal ideologies that cause the oppression encountered by millions of "working-class citizens across the globe." Importantly, Brown also demonstrates that some of her participants hold a more critical understanding of how neoliberal logics and practices degenerate the schooling process as well as cause social inequalities. Brown argues the educators' pedagogical work is important because it demonstrates to future teachers why there is an urgency to engage in activist work that focuses on eliminating the social structures perpetuating "intersectional oppression."

In the fifth essay, "Comparing the OECD's and Norway's Orientation to Equity in their Teacher Education Policies – Teacher Autonomy under Attack?," Haugen documents how transnational organizations are coming to dominate the trajectory of the nature of national education systems across the globe. Specifically, the author illuminates how the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is attempting to implement educational policies that support the corporate takeover of teacher education in Norway. By critically examining two contrasting equity models, Haugen investigates whether both the OECD and the Norwegian government support neoliberal reform in teacher education. The results of the author's empirical work (e.g., critical discourse analysis) show that the Norwegian government did not embrace the OECD's neoliberal agenda for teacher education whole cloth. Rather:

teacher education policies from the Norwegian socialist-alliance government both follow and reject some of the ideas from the OECD in some important areas. Their similarities deal with the idea that the teachers' competencies should be standardised to a greater degree by improving subject matter knowledge and providing a more instrumental pedagogy. Furthermore, the government also addresses more centralisation through tighter monitoring.

Finally, Haugen also makes evident that neoliberal forces are impacting the teacher education system in Norway in other ways. This is despite the fact that the government consists of a "socialist alliance." For instance, business leaders are involved in promoting alternative paths "into the teacher profession in Norway." Therefore, the author is deeply concerned "that there might be reason to fear that the Nordic model of education based on a strong welfare state, with its tight connection to principles of equity, local anchoring, and a common education system, is losing its legitimacy."

In the sixth essay, "Corporate Education Reform and the Rise of State Schools," Paul L. Thomas pinpoints how the neoliberal agenda has become embraced by the two major political parties in the US and by numerous large-scale business leaders, such as Bill Gates, and why these leaders are on "misinformation tour" across the US. The author details how the political and economic elite's rhetoric of needing "national standards, increased testing, and greater teacher accountability" to produce a "world-class workforce and to keep the U.S. competitive internationally" is a false narrative to commercialize the US educational system as well to increase their economic wealth and social power. Next, the author explicates another strategy used by the ruling elite to promote the neoliberal agenda and maintain their status "at the top of the hierarchy of power." They have reified the idea that the poor are in control of poverty, so people will not question how neoliberal capitalism is the source of the poor's lack of social and economic power. Furthermore, Thomas examines how a specific educational practice supported by the dominant elite-high-stakes testing- maintains "the status quo of corporate privilege in the U.S..." The author concludes his essay by issuing a clarion call to educators and their professional organizations, exhorting

them to use their remaining autonomy and professionalism to challenge "the rising oligarchy and inevitable merging of corporate America and government."

In the seventh essay, "Resistance to Self-Regulated Learning Pedagogy in an Urban Classroom: A Critique of Neoliberalism," Stephen Vassallo supplies data from his qualitative case study to document how critical forms of teacher preparation can sensitize current and future teachers to the debilitating effects associated with neoliberal pedagogies.

Specifically, the author highlights how a critically-aware urban secondary English teacher, who had a deep background in critical theory and was influenced by "Paulo Freire, Pierre Bourdieu, Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, and Michele Foucault," challenged the author and the mainstream research that supported the use of self-regulated learning (SLR) pedagogy in urban schools. Through Vassallo's interviews and observations of the teacher, we witness how the teacher's critical orientation to schooling positioned her to recognize how the SRL pedagogy was part of the larger neoliberal project to structure the entire schooling process through the values of "accountability and efficiency." Moreover, the teachers' critical background gave her the courage to resist the implementation of neoliberal practices as well as to vocalize her concern that, "in a neoliberal climate, SRL made the transmission of knowledge efficient and involved harnessing students' cognitive capacity in order to improve performance on standardized tests. " The author ends the essay by suggesting how various constituents involved in preparing schoolteachers and educating children can become more aware of how neoliberalism impacts the schooling process. He states:

In moving forward with our critique of neoliberalism, researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners must remain aware of the neoliberal influence in the

various inscriptions of individualism, the normalization of life trajectories (especially as framed in economic terms), the assignment of value related to information about students, and the production of a community and cultural hierarchy. Although all of these areas of reflection are critical for resisting neoliberalism, a pressing concern relates to the psychologization of students and its alignment with neoliberalism and SRL.

In the eighth essay in this issue, "The Possibilities and Constraints of Three Teachers' Perspectives and Enactment of Critical Praxis in Public Schools," Crawford Lima examines "the possibilities and constraints of 3 teachers' perspectives and enactment of critical praxis in their K-12 classrooms, public schools and communities in California." After outlining her conceptual framework and reviewing the extant literature surrounding praxis and teachers' work in schools, the author identifies the broad range of strategic actions her participants employ to "accomplish their daily goals of achieving greater economic, racial, and social justice in schools." The insights gleaned from her research are, indeed, important to teacher educators as well as current and future teachers because they provide guidance for challenging "many schooling practices and policies," while simultaneously keeping their jobs. The author concludes her essay by providing critical scholars and educators an important reminder: "critical praxis trajectories in school remind all of us that the theory/practice divide is not a problem of whether teacher practice lives up to our critical theories about critical teaching. Rather, it is our responsibility as researchers to improve how we bring critical social theories to bear upon teacher practice."

In the ninth and final essay of this issue, "Neoliberalism as nihilism? A commentary on educational accountability, teacher education, and school reform," Tuck argues that neoliberalism is a nihilistic, as death-seeking

ideology. The author's argument is grounded from her own empirical and theoretical work involving "participatory action research with New York City youth," school push out policies, and "educational accountability policies." Tuck begins the essay by calling on critical theorists to tap "indigenous decolonizing theory" to understand how neoliberalism impacts developments across the globe. However, unlike numerous critical scholars, the author believes neoliberalism should not be viewed merely as a contemporary ideological doctrine. Rather, it must be seen as the latest "configuration of colonial imperialism." Tuck claims that settler colonization, which was initially designed to support the extraction of land from Indigenous groups, is not a "fixed event in time." Instead, it is a structural relationship, where the ruling elite establish settler colonies not primarily to "extract surplus value from indigenous labor, but from land, which required/requires displacing Indigenous peoples from their homelands."

In the remainder of the essay, she provides examples of how "Indigenous theories engage neoliberal logic and neoliberalization as part of a very particular trajectory of human thinking (not inevitable) and as reflective of shared aims with logics of settler colonialism and manifest destiny." She also provides examples of how she guides her students to understand "neoliberalism as a set of responses to real and perceived crises in the public sphere." Additionally, she articulates how the contributors of this issue "attend to multiple expressions of neoliberal logic as they are applied and propagated in teacher education in several international contexts." Tuck concludes the essay by encouraging us to take on the task "of *disbelieving* neoliberal logic and "remember that there *are* other axes of thought, other spectrums of possibility that can interrupt the continuum of government vs. private business." There are also other

frameworks, such as indigenous epistemologies, that can guide teacher educators to remake "public schools and the preparation of fabulous educators."

Indeed, this special issue provide both a clear-eyed vision of hope – the kind of possibility for change that can only exist when members of society are willing to *see things as they are* in order to create spaces for transformative action that will lead us where we might be: a world where all children learn of their own worth through education that values humanity over profit.

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