

**Review Essay of Ross, E.W., & Gibson, R. (Eds.). (2007).  
*Neoliberalism and Education Reform*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.**

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**Introduction**

*Neoliberalism and Education Reform* is an edited anthology that analyzes the ramifications of neoliberal global capitalism and its hazardous impact on education. The editors, E. Wayne Ross and Rich Gibson, argue that neoliberalism has been a dominant "political and economic paradigm" over the last 25 years that represents those policies and practices whereby a relatively handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximize their profit. The free market, private enterprise, consumer choice, entrepreneurial initiative, the elimination of the concept of "public," cutting public expenditure for social services (such as education and health care) and so on, are the chief characteristic features of neoliberalism.

The editors explain in their "Introduction" the ways neoliberal policies have proved themselves hazardous for education and society. Economically, the neoliberal policies have resulted in massive social and economic inequalities among individuals and nations. On global scale, neoliberal economic policies, created by US government and international financial institutions such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund, have destroyed the economies of countries like Brazil and Mexico, whereas local elites and transnational corporations reaped huge profits. Politically, neoliberalism has given rise to a "formal democracy" where citizen remains mere "spectator," diverted from any meaningful participation in decision-making. Educationally, neoliberalism has resulted in fund reduction towards public education, imposition of standardized tests to regulate freedom of teachers in the name of "accountability," privatization of schooling, among others (p. 2-3).

The book undertakes two primary projects: 1) a critique of the educational reforms that result from the rise of neoliberalism; and 2) providing Marxian alternatives to neoliberal conceptions of education. The latter would help, editors expect, advance Marxian educational theory and practice by employing Marx's own works and the works of those who advanced his legacy to examine educational theory and practice today (p. 8).

**Major themes of the volume**

The volume contains 11 chapters in addition to "Introduction" by editors and "Foreword" by Richard A. Brosio. Broadly, the 11 chapters of the book may be organized around four themes: neoliberalism and education reform; higher education; US-Mexico relations; and Marxism and critical pedagogy. Out of eleven, six chapters have been devoted primarily to investigate the issues outlined in the "Introduction," namely, the policy of neoliberalism, and educational reforms being carried out in its wake particularly in USA and UK; two chapters are concerned with analyzing the current state of affair of higher education under the influence of marketization and positivism; one chapter explains the historical genesis of the imperialist relations of US to Mexico; and two chapters are rather theoretical in nature

explaining the importance of Marxism and critical pedagogy in educational theory and practice.

### **Neoliberalism and education reform**

In Chapter One "Marketing Higher Education: The Rise of Standardized Testing, Accountability, Competition, and Markets in Public Education" David Hursh analyses how neoliberal policies in United States, England, and Wales have transformed educational system according to the market principles of accountability, choice, and efficiency.

Hursh explains that neoliberal reforms emerged as a critique of Keynesian policies after World War II in North America and Europe on account of former's inability to provide an adequate rate of profit to corporations and providing too many personal rights to individuals. Neoliberal policies, on the contrary, were considered highly promising for corporate growth through increased trade and decreased taxation and regulation, and decreased public support, even privatization of public services such as health, transportation, and education. The dominance of multinational corporations world over and the World Bank-IMF policies (biased in favor of the developed world) that compel developing countries to reduce welfare function, Hursh argues, are also the product of neoliberal policies.

Hursh identifies four rationalizations that have been put forward by capitalist government to weaken resistance to neoliberal education reform. First, in order to control resistance to cuts in social services, neoliberal governments have shifted social responsibility from community to the individual. In the context of education, by reducing success to individual merit schooling becomes one more consumer choice where one benefits by choosing wisely. Those who work hard are admitted to good schools and do well; those who do not work hard have only themselves to blame. Inequality is explained as difference in personal efforts (p. 26).

Secondly, the proponents of neoliberal reforms have ignored the improvements of the previous three decades especially with reference to the declining racial achievement gap, and blamed education for the US economic and social problems (p. 27). Such fallacious criticism increased public receptivity to promises to improve education through raising standards, testing, and competition.

Additionally, the reliance first on standards and testing and more recently on private, for-profit, competitive markets also demonstrates that the neoliberal strategy in the US has not been to directly intervene into the classroom, but affect the educational system by focusing on outputs, leaving the means to achieving those goals to the schools. This has led to the development of an "evaluative state" (Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998) that "steers from the distance" (Ball, 1990).

Finally, supporters of standardization argue that standardized test scores will provide parents and teachers with a valid and reliable means of assessing student learning. Such objective methods are required, government and corporate official state, because teachers cannot be trusted to assess student learning objectively and accurately.

Hursh provides several examples from the contexts of US and UK in order to explain the consequences of neoliberal policies on education. Hursh discusses the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of US government, which uses students scores on standardized exams to determine whether schools are succeeding or failing to make "adequate yearly progress."

Ironically, according to the NCLB, the schools that fail to make adequate progress must fund tutoring for their students, often through private for-profit organization and faith-based corporations. Furthermore, failing schools face the prospect of being administered by or turned over as a charter school to a private corporation those have had demonstrated records of effectiveness.

In the context of UK, Hursh explains that the schools that have open enrollment, receive funding based on the number of students in the school, with no increased funding for students with disabilities, students from low income families, or students who are English language learners. Consequently, schools compete for the White middle-class students who require fewer financial resources and are more likely to raise the school's aggregated test scores published in the annual school "league table." Those schools with high test scores are likely to admit high-scoring students to their few openings, whereas those schools with low scores are desperate to retain their "more able middle class students." Schools serving diverse students and needs struggle to retain their students and funding. Already advantaged schools gain, whereas disadvantaged schools lose (p. 30). Moreover, the market system also exacerbates the inequalities within schools. Since secondary schools in UK are judged based on what grades students attain on their exams, schools focus on those students who are seen as likely to achieve a grade of "C" or better and pay less attention to those who are likely to be failures, again typically students of color, students with disabilities, and students who are English-language learner.

Chapter Two "No Child Left Behind: Globalization, Privatization, and the Politics of Inequality" by Pauline Lipman is yet another account of the implications of NCLB for intensified race and class inequality in the context of neoliberal globalization. Her analysis draws on data from the education accountability system of the state of Texas and from Chicago's accountability-based school reform that began in 1995.

NCLB, Lipman argues, has been able to bring "under one umbrella social conservatives, proponents of the market, and business interests concerned with preparation of a literate and disciplined workforce through education standards and measurements" (p. 39). The proponents justify strict accountability measures by pointing to the failure of public schools, particularly their failure to educate children of color. Tough accountability measures, Lipman points out, are thought to suggest that something is finally being done with schools, education, and students to make sure that all children can read and do math.

The main destructive impacts of the NCLB as pointed out by Lipman and other works she cites, for example the studies of McNeil (2000) and Haney (2001), are worth mentioning. First of all, since the fate of individual students, teachers, principals, and schools depends on the results of high-stakes tests, the latter becomes the focus of teaching and learning. This is more true with reference to poor schools serving Mexican-American students that, in order to perform better on these tests, spend huge money on buying commercial test preparation-books in spite of inadequate infrastructure such as good libraries and laboratories. High-scoring schools, on the contrary, which are mainly attended by high-income White students, are free to choose more holistic curricula. Such different educational practices institutionalize educational inequality and widen disparities in students' educational experiences.

Moreover, standardization has led to the intensification of racism. The disaggregated test scores in a Chicago school that supposedly "worked" for White and middle-class students reinforced the belief that students for whom the school was "not working" had something wrong with them. Thus, standardization led to a focus on improving these "deficient" individuals rather than looking at what was going on in the school.

Furthermore, NCLB requires testing in English after 3 years in US schools, which not only undermines research on effective bilingual education but also devalues students' home language. Moreover, the pressure to pass standardized tests in English is so intense that bilingual teachers are bound to sacrifice Spanish fluency of their students. Thus, NCLB attacks bilingualism and multiculturalism as well as serves market's demand for an assimilated and easily managed English-speaking workforce (p. 47).

In addition, test-driven education constrains teachers' and students' opportunities to develop critical approaches to knowledge. Teaching directed to standardized test preparation promotes an emphasis on the right answer, speed over thoughtfulness, and a standardized definition of what constituted legitimate knowledge. Test driven teaching stands in opposition to knowledge as socially constructed, education as dialogue and debate among multiple perspectives, and the curriculum as something socially and culturally situated.

Moreover, NCLB's tough discipline policies and further integration of the schools with police and the juvenile court system are part of a discourse of regulation and enforcement that permeates the entire education blueprint. These policies are not simply motivated by economic interest; they represent cultural struggles over race, ethnicity, and power. "The subtext of gentrification, militarization of urban high schools, regimented curriculum, zero-tolerance discipline policies, and the criminalization of youth [primarily African-Americans and Latinos]," explains Lipman, "is the white supremacist desire to police and contain those who threaten "white places" of order and civility" (p. 54). The African-American, Latino and other youths of color who make up the majority of the 20 largest school districts, are disproportionately suspended and expelled from schools, and often attend schools that are more like jails, are certainly the target of "safe school" policies (p. 54). As a racialized text, NCLB provides a common sense solution to "discipline problems," taking attention away from underlying social, economic, and ideological roots of oppression.

Finally, the policies of General Agreement on Trade in Services and Free Trade Area of Americans are reducing education to a commodity, with the argument that any institution that involves payment of fees, even in a public system, is considered a commercial activity and must be open to the market without state interference. GATS and FTAA also represent the control of knowledge production through global sales of textbooks, educational media such as Channel One, and the commercially produced curricula.

Lipman emphasizes on the utmost importance of criticizing public schools while defending the institution of universal public education and its democratic potential. She argues that

... in a world circled ever more tightly by the forces of global capital and facing the catastrophe of unlimited imperial wars, the institution of universal, free public schools needs to be fought *for* as a democratic public space and *fought* over ideologically. The popular appeal of the Bush agenda is that it makes sense in the absence of a sharply defined alternative discourse that not only reframes education in the language of democracy and social justice, but rethinks schooling in relation to the racial, ethnic, gender, and class oppression and conflict of the present (global) moment (p. 55-56).

Vinson and Ross in Chapter Three, "Education and the New Disciplinary: Surveillance, Spectacle, and the Case of SBER," show how Foucault's (1979) notions of spectacle and surveillance merge together in the present day school education system to explain the nature and impacts of Standard Based Education Reform (SBER) in US. According to Foucault, both spectacle and surveillance have been used in the establishment and

maintenance of regulatory power. But whereas Foucault characterized ancient civilization as the "civilization of spectacle" (observation of few by many) and modern civilization as a "civilization of panoptic surveillance" (observation of the many by few), Vinson and Ross argue that the two have merged together to bring about a more "insidious and problematic gaze based disciplinarity" in social spheres including school education (p. 60).

Vinson and Ross examine NCLB as a case of SBER, where state bureaucrats "monitor" schools' performance on standards-based high stakes tests, the results of which are made public through media reports to maintain "accountability." In this case, monitoring by bureaucrats and public test scores are the examples of surveillance and spectacle, respectively. Vinson and Ross explicate the deleterious impacts of surveillance and spectacle as a gaze of disciplinarity to control and regulate education.

First of all, the commitment to high-stakes standards-based tests trivializes the richness and complex classroom experience by invalidating knowledge other than what is required to perform better on tests. Such policies exercise a strong control over what should be learnt (curriculum) and how it should be learnt (pedagogy) through disciplining students, teachers, administrators, classrooms, schools, and districts through "panoptic surveillance" where teachers survey students, administrators survey teachers, and school boards and other public officials survey all of them. The interesting dimension is added due to media representation of the schools' performance on the tests that brings it under the gaze of larger public. As the public views tests scores that are not satisfactory, they pressure school personnel and public officials to do something. This gives officials increased control over curriculum, instruction, and assessment and thus increased surveillance over classroom, teachers, schools, and administrators.

Additionally, since these tests take away decision-making capacity and agency from the teachers and threaten them and students by means of the results on these tests, they bring about what Marx (1988) calls *alienation*. Teachers are forced and in turn they force students to confine themselves to those aspects of academic knowledge that is valuable for the tests. This makes teaching and learning a repetitive, uncreative, and reproductive activity. Thus, these tests are well in accord with capitalist production practices that alienates labor from the product. In this case, these tests take teachers and students away from authentic teaching and learning. This is also essential for the ruling classes to maintain their hegemony by reducing teachers and schools as agents of reproduction rather than places for creative and critical thinking that encourages questioning of taken-for-granted issues and thus challenges oppression (p. 74-75).

Moreover, if schools and its members show conformity and observe discipline as required by these tests, the consequences are higher graduation and promotion rates as well as increased funding. Otherwise, what happens is right the contrary: graduation rates lower, teachers who object it lose their jobs, and schools who either do not perform better or object are not given proper funding. Thus, the connection between school knowledge and economics intensifies (p. 71).

Vinson and Ross also suggest several counter-hegemonic strategies to fight against surveillance and spectacle in educational sphere. Referring to Foucault's call for continuing struggle against any and all concentration of power, Vinson and Ross urge teachers and students to boycott high-stakes tests (see also Gibson, Queen, Ross, & Vinson, 2009). Following Debord (1981), Vinson and Ross emphasizes on the ideas of *derive* and *detournement*. In this case *derive* refers to looking for the new ways of understanding the impacts of tests on education and human society and techniques to resist the same. *Detournement* means destroying the existing meanings to create new ones. More

specifically, detournement means destroying the hegemonic notions related to these tests that blind people, thus revealing their harmful effects (p. 79-81).

In Chapter Five "Educational Perversion and Global Neoliberalism" Dave Hill provides an in-depth Marxist critique of neoliberal project of global capitalism. The main function of neoliberalism, Hill argues, is to create a "free market global economy" that is biased in favor of developed nations and rooted in the exploitation of poor countries and poor people within rich and poor countries by having an alliance with state and seeking latter's withdrawal from its welfare functions. Hill explains that neoliberalism is different from classic laissez-faire capitalism, as the latter desires the least possible state interference in the market, while the former a strong role for the state in suppressing any activity that does not favor global capitalism.

Hill identifies three "business agendas" of the capitalist class in Britain and the US: business agenda *for* education that centers on socially producing labor power for capitalist enterprise; Business agenda *in* education that centers on privatization of education for profit-making within UK and US; and business agenda for educational business that allows British and US based edubusiness and those based elsewhere to profit from privatization of educational activities internationally (p. 108).

According to Hill, one of the most significant impacts of neoliberalism on education is the "loss of critical thought." Hill argues that increasing subordination of education, including university education, and its commodification, have been responsible for the loss of critical thought. Hill provides examples as to how in the UK the term "teacher education" has been replaced with "teacher training" to ensure that teacher colleges simply produce skilled workforce to teach what is required by the market rather than critical thinkers who question the hegemonic nature of social and economic reality.

Hill explains in detail, based on the work of McMurtry (1991), how education and the neoliberal global capitalism are ways apart in terms of their goals, motivations, methods and standards of excellence. While education has the goal of learning more and sharing more, capitalism's goal is to maximize profit through accumulation of private wealth via exploitation of surplus labor value. For education learning and growing cognitively are the real motivating forces whereas capitalism's main motivation is to satisfy the consumers who will purchase its products. Capitalism's method is to sell its products while education never sells but shares without being governed by its price. Whereas capitalism's standards rest on how well the products are sold and for how long it remains in the market, for education what is more valuable is how deep and broad problems it poses for the teacher and the taught (p. 124-125).

Recognizing the grave danger that the neoliberal project of global capitalism has brought about for education and society world over, Hill suggests how to resist and reverse this hegemonizing process. First, Hill emphasizes Freire's (1998b) notion of teachers and educators as cultural workers—those who are not merely intellectualizing issues of social justice and equality but also struggling for the same in public and political domains such as media and policy-making. Additionally, Hill stresses the need to have transformative intellectuals (Giroux & McLaren, 1986) who enable student-teachers and teachers (and school students) to critically evaluate a range of salient perspectives and ideologies with a commitment to egalitarianism. Furthermore, though Hill realizes that structures dominantly control teachers and students from all over and force them to reproduce the existing order, he believes that schools can also be sites of resistance. His suggestion for anyone interested in critical education is to exploit whatever and whenever he or she get any spot—in the classrooms, in media, in public meetings, and community activities—for resisting the capitalist hegemony. Finally, Hill demands that researchers and academicians critique ideas

that weaken the struggle for equality and justice including all "post" discourses (see also Hill, McLaren, Cole & Rikowski, 2002).

Patrick Shannon, in Chapter Seven "Reading Marxism," employs Marxist thought to explain the commodification of literacy. Shannon locates the current hype of high-stakes testing and efficient reading instruction in the "progressive era," nearly 100 years ago when the business principles of economy combined with psychological behaviorism of Thorndike and technology were thought best to bring prosperity and success to all sectors of society including education. Across the century educational ideas and practices such as programmed learning, criterion-referenced testing, mastery learning, teachers and school effectiveness, and now curriculum standards and high-stakes testing (in the wake of NCLB Act) can be seen, argues Shannon, as variations on the theme of ensuring that teachers follow the prescribed teacher guides closely in order to make the outcomes of their instruction more predictable and less dependent on teachers.

Shannon proposes that Marxian analysis can help us understand the reason behind the proliferation of business practices in reading programs and to comprehend teachers' apparent complicity with these practices. Shannon explains that in the "capitalist logic" of maximizing profits, all aspects of business must become predictable. In this way of thinking, raw materials, the environment, and workers simply become factors in the planning and organization of the "rational process" of production. Capitalist logic rationalizes that if all of society could be organized in a similar fashion, then society and human activities, like education, would be conducted like a business, creating the best conditions for production, technological advances, and accumulation. (p. 164). Shannon argues, based on his analysis of logic of capitalist society, that the justification for scripted lessons and high-stakes testing in contemporary schools provide an example of the capitalist logic/rationalization process.

According to Shannon, two cardinal principles of Marxist theory, namely, reification and alienation, can help us understand why so many teachers, administrators and taxpayers now accept this rationalization. Reification is the treatment of an abstraction as a concrete object or an immutable procedure. One of the best evidences of reification process is the exchange of one scripted, commercial literacy program for another when school districts find that their students are not learning to read in a timely fashion. Commercial publishers enlist the support of educational scientists to develop and endorse the scripted programs for the broadest possible market without any regard for the emotional and social context of any particular classroom. These scripted programs are produced far from the daily practices of teachers and students; they divide, fixate, and synchronize teachers' instructional behavior during reading instruction, reducing them to technical support for the actions required in the scripts. Teaching without these scripted commodities, then appear to be the irrational act.

Alienation, explains Shannon, is the process of separation between people and some quality assumed to be related to them under natural circumstances. The scripts have standardized teachers' statements and actions, which separates teachers from natural associations with students thereby limiting their thoughts and actions to those encoded in the scripts. The content of the scripts defines students' learning to read, suppressing all students' thoughts and behaviors that are not scripted to bring higher test scores. Thus, the scripted system of test score production requires that both teachers and students lose attachments to the process of teaching and learning and to each other. Under these circumstances, teachers' attempts to compose curricula for their classrooms and to improvise during their teaching in order to tailor their work to particular students in particular contexts are acts of resistance not only to the whole activity of standardization and rationalization, but also to the capitalist state that sponsors such activities.

Recognizing the current form of rationalization of reading education in particular and standardization in general, Shannon proposes what he calls "projects of possibility" containing large scale and small-scale strategies. The large scale strategies of the project of possibility includes the following: teachers must become political from a Marxian standpoint and raise their and others consciousness about the root causes of scripted lessons, high-stakes testing, and commercialization of schools; teachers should join the movements advocating livable minimum wages, national health insurance, affordable housing, and ending of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT); and finally, teachers should make their presence known at the protests of the World Trade Organization (WTO). On a small scale, Shannon suggests that attempts should be made to incorporate choice about methods at a district and school level to keep open the possibilities of reading instruction, allowing at least some composition of curricula and improvisation in teaching; teachers should fight for more time and space for teaching to undercut the standardization of reading instruction; teachers must work with other adults (parents, custodians, librarians, local business owners, etc.) as co-teachers to expand the possibilities of literacy and learning for all involved. "Each of these acts," emphasizes Shannon, "rejects the rationalization of schools, the reification of reading instruction and science, and the alienation of teachers from their teaching and students from their learning. Each is directed by a commitment to human emancipation" (p. 175).

In Chapter Six "Schools and the GATS Enigma" Glenn Rikowski provides an in-depth analysis of General Agreement on Trades in Services (GATS), as part of larger neoliberal agenda with reference to educational policies in UK. Rikowski explains, based on Krajewski's (2002) detailed analysis of GATS agreement, that the "enigmatic nature" of GATS is attributable to the fact that though on the surface it looks as though public services like education are not touched by GATS regulations, yet a deeper analysis shows the harmful impacts of GATS policies on education.

Rikowski describes that the GATS seeks to open up 160 services sectors to international capital to create "level playing fields" thereby avoiding discrimination against foreign corporations entering services markets. The process of trade liberalization in services (including the currently public ones) will be deepened and strengthened over time and slowly the "public" services, including education, will be turned into internationally tradable commodities. Notably, once a service has been committed to the GATS there is no possibility of reversing the position (p. 151).

Through an analysis of EU GATS Infopoint (n.d.) Rikowski argues that education has already been lost to the GATS. GATS incorporates four models of service supply: Model 1 assures cross border supply of services from one member's territory to other members' territory; Model 2 stipulates that consumer of the service travels to the service supplier; and Model 3 states that the service suppliers establish in the foreign market as a legal entity in the form of a subsidiary or a branch.

Rikowski argues that for all these modes of supply EU's commitment to primary and secondary education is "none," which simply means that a country commits to GATS regulations without restrictions. Moreover, WTO members, who commit themselves to open up primary and secondary education through GATS, must show any limitations on access for foreign suppliers. These limitations are then open to be challenged through the WTO Disputes Panel by a corporation's national government, if they are WTO members. The clause that only national government can carry out dispute process, corporations would have to lobby and persuade the national governments to be part of GATS.



Model 4 “presence of natural persons” from another country does impose some limitation regarding foreign primary and secondary education suppliers. Model 4 supply is “unbound,” which means a country making no commitment either to open up its market or to keep it as open as it was at the time of accession into the WTO. This simply means that if a company wants to set up a school on UK soil then the former cannot employ its citizens regardless of government’s approval. However, the policy further obscures the picture, as it does not clearly impose any barrier on the employees of foreign countries being brought into UK.

Rikowski further examines contradictions entailed in Section 5 of the EU’s Schedule of Commitments, which indicates that in relation to education, the GATS refers to “privately funded education services.” Such a clause might give impression, remarks Rikowski, that the only education services in relation to school under threat from the GATS are independent and private schools. Rikowski explains that this clause is nothing but an example of cleverly crafted language. Rikowski argues that Schedule does not pinpoint private education “institutions,” but privately funded education “services,” which implies that it is not mandatory for an education institution to be for-profit outfit in its entirety for GATS to apply. Any of its services—from frontline teaching, to cleaning, school meals services, and the school library—could fall under the GATS if private capital is involved.

Moreover, the danger of GATS policies extends to innumerable public schools where the start-up money comes from the private foundations under Education Act 2002. Education Act 2002 allows school governing bodies to set themselves up as companies, which in turn, allows them to have power to invest in other companies. The school companies can join other school companies to make “federations” to increase their profit-making capacity. Interestingly, those who run schools need not have teaching qualifications. Schools can enter with other private sector organizations, and can also sell their services to other schools. The Act also provides freedom to 1000 schools to choose their curriculum and change (or manipulate) teacher’s pay and conditions. Education Act 2002 provides all gateways to GATS to enter public school space.

## **Higher education**

John Welsh, in Chapter Nine “The Unchained Dialectics: Critique and Renewal of Higher Education Research,” draws on the Habermas’ (1971) categories of human knowledge and interest in his explanation of the dominance of positivistic and interpretative research traditions in higher education. According to Welsh, neither positivism nor interpretivism shows their concern with critical examination of higher education and social reality to bring about change. He states that inquiry into higher education has become “too technocratic, too narrow, too specialized, too self-serving, too inwardly focused, and irrelevant to public policy and social practice” (p. 218). His call is for the establishment of a critical theory research tradition in higher education that is concerned with critiquing the exploitation and oppression by and ideological hegemony of ruling classes.

Welsh critiques the epistemological assumptions (e.g., social inquiry aims at establishing an identity between thought and object) of the positivistic, interpretive, and some postmodern methodologies. Likewise, he also critiques the ontological assumption of positivism and interpretivism that the aim of higher education is the external transformation of social relations by scientific, policy and managerial elites (p. 219). Welsh emphasizes that opposed to the “correspondence theory of truth” and an “externally mediated theory of social action” is a philosophy of liberation that maintains that human freedom—which can be understood

as “self-conscious self determination” (based on the Absolute Idea of Hegel (Hegel, 1952)—is the goal of inquiry into social relations and the knowledge process (p. 224).

Welsh employs the critical framework of Marx (1954), Lukacs (1971), Gramsci (1971), and Hegel (1952) to stress the need for understanding exploitation of surplus labor and commodity fetishism, ideological hegemony, and reification, with particular reference to higher education. The central idea that Welsh emphasizes is the demolition of the dualities of thought and object and the pure and the practical reason and establishing the importance of the Hegel’s concept of Absolute Idea and unchained dialectics (p. 232). The notion of Absolute Idea has at its core a concept of freedom that means that the human beings are self-conscious and self-determining. The concept of unchained dialectics refers not to the mechanical triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis but a ceaseless movement of ideas in human history and that can take humanity away from the tyranny of capitalism and state (p. 233).

Welsh concludes that an important point of departure for scholars and educators who seek to understand the role of higher education in our contemporary socio-historical context is to acknowledge both method and society as subject, not substance. The methodological challenge is not to generate knowledge that can be uncritically applied by administrators and policy-makers to fix the world, but to identify and learn from those forms of social and educational practice that are self-consciously self-determining.

In Chapter Ten “Marketizing Higher Education: Neoliberal Strategies and Counter-strategies,” Les Levidow provides a critical analysis of neoliberal policies and their impact on higher education in terms of increasing emphasis on marketization and academic capitalism, redefinition of educational efficiency and accountability in market terms, development of courses as instructional commodities, and commodification of student-teacher relationships. More specifically, Levidow focuses upon the emergence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which intends to favor neoliberal agendas rather than the welfare of larger public.

Levidow argues that the universities, being caught into the “age of information,” “knowledge economy,” and neoliberalism, are forced to raise their productivity to survive. Universities must package knowledge, deliver flexible education through ICT, provide adequate training for “knowledge workers,” and produce more of them at lower cost. Thus, universities are becoming subordinate to corporate-style managerialism and income maximization. The main purpose of neoliberal strategies, Levidow states, is not to enhance skills but rather to control labor costs in the labor-intensive service sector such as education.

According to Levidow, ICT is not necessarily negative. It can help to democratize educational access (e.g., by helping students to learn at their own pace, or by creating “virtual communities” of interest in particular issues). Alternatively, it can also have harmful effects: commodification and standardization of learning; lower personal contact and thus reduced student motivation; the development of new softwares and hardwares to which teachers and students must adapt or suffer the loss; and emphasis on technical efficiency and necessity to homogenize social qualities into universally comparable and quantifiable ones to the end of managing, disciplining, exploiting, and/or expelling human labor (p. 240-241).

On the basis of the analysis of neoliberal policies in Africa, Europe, and US, Levidow identifies three key strategies being employed by global capitalism to marketize higher education, namely, efficiency as progress, commodification, and globalization.

First, in neoliberal ideology, employment insecurity is attributed to a deficiency of human capital appropriate for the information society. This problem is cited to justify pedagogical

changes for adapting students to labor-market needs. Educational “reforms” are presented as universal progress on grounds that they enhance efficiency, extend access, flexibly customize the content for individual needs, facilitate learning through ICT, provide accountability to students and society, yield a better return on state investment, and so on.

Second, prospective students are represented as customers/markets in order to justify commodifying educational services. Knowledge becomes a product for individual students to consume, rather than a collaborative process for students and teachers to learn and grow. Through ICT, neoliberal agendas take the apparently neutral form of greater access and flexible delivery. Thus, student-teacher relationships are reified as relations between things (e.g., between consumers and providers of software).

Finally, the commodification of all institutional arrangements is justified through invoking global competitiveness and opportunity. People are actively linked around the world through new market relations, as business partners, competitors, patrons, clients, and customers. As structural adjustment conditionalities forcibly marketize and standardize higher education in Third World countries, people there may be forced to become more willing customers for instructional commodities (e.g., through distance education).

To fight the neoliberal agenda in the sphere of higher education Levidow suggests four critical counterstrategies. First, critics need to demonstrate how structural adjustment policies are linked to funding priorities, public-private partnerships, tuition fees, cost-benefit analysis, curriculum change etc., as part of a global agenda. Second, an international network of teachers, students, and nongovernmental organizations across all geographical regions should link all targets of the neoliberal attack worldwide, to circulate analyses of anti-marketization struggles, to enhance solidarity efforts, and to turn ourselves into collective subjects of resistance and learning for different futures. Third, de-reifying information and communication technology (ICT) through enhancing critical debate among students and teachers. Finally, developing alternative pedagogies that enhance critical citizenship along with the above-mentioned strategies.

## **US-Mexico relations**

In Chapter Four “US Imperialism, Mexico and the Education of Mexican Immigrants, 1900-1960” Gilbert G. Gonzalez analytically proves that United States is an imperialist power and that the US-Mexico relations since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century falls squarely into the definition of imperialism (p. 87). Furthermore, Gonzalez shows how such relation has significantly impacted Mexican immigrant community in all sphere of life including education.

Between the end of Civil War and the Spanish-American war, the United States expanded economically into Mexico with a goal of “peaceful conquest,” which was nothing except economic domination or colonization of the latter. The policy of “peaceful conquest” involved huge investment of US capital in Mexican mining, railroads, oil and significant sectors of her agriculture. “Economic colonialism,” Gonzalez argues, brought major alterations to Mexico’s demography and economy as well as its social relations and class structure. In order to attract labor, companies constructed housing at the work sites. These company towns, however, were strictly segregated towns, with Mexicans living in their own quarters separate from the American minority who resided in comfortable residences, often with recreational facilities. Many Americans brought their own families whose children were educated at the American elementary school and taught by an American teacher brought from US for that purpose. Thus, the segregated social system as practiced in United States was embedded within Mexico.

The social consequence of the US capitalist enterprise, especially mining and railroad, not

only spurred migration within Mexico northward but also from the northern regions of Mexico across the border into US. By 1910, a “century of migration” began, assuming a variety of forms, from state-sanctioned labor importation programs to legal and undocumented migration. Notably, except for the Great Depression, Mexican migration remained constant to the present. Gonzalez describes that as the immigrants settled into their communities in US land they experienced many of the same conditions—residential segregation, ethnic class differentiation, the Mexican wage, company towns, company stores, and the American’s racialized perceptions of Mexicans—they found in their former villages and towns where American companies operated. Moreover, the terms *Oriental*, *mestizo*, *peon*, and the sum total of all these terms, “Mexican problem,” once applied only to Mexico, soon became blanket definitions for Mexican immigrants (p. 98).

The ideas that turned Mexican people and the issues encountered by them into “Mexican problem” had serious impacts on the gradually expanding public education system. Mexican children were identified to have the following characteristics: inferior ‘race,’ higher percentage of contagious diseases, slower progress in school, and low moral standards. Thus, the imperative of these characteristics was to segregate Mexican children wherever number permitted and special courses of study were prepared to meet the needs of Mexican children (paraphrased from Carpenter, 1935 in Gonzalez, p.100). The segregated schools, Gonzalez points out, severely limited academic training to industrial education for Mexican children. The vast majority of the Mexican children entered into a schooling process that immediately defined them as good with their hands but limited in mental ability.

In its fundamental, argues Gonzalez, the Chicano educational experience has not been altered since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Mexican problem continues in altered forms from the “wetback problem” of the 1950s to the “illegal alien problem” of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and now the “Latino problem” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (p. 102-103). Each one of these variants warns of behavior patterns antithetical to the cultural and institutional foundations of the United States. In this setting, Americanization, testing, tracking, and vocational education remain important means to allocate education.

### **Marxism and critical pedagogy**

Rich Gibson in Chapter Eight, “Paulo Freire and Revolutionary Pedagogy for Social Justice,” provides deep insights into Marxism and its core tenet dialectical materialism and brings to the surface the theoretical contradictions in the work of Paulo Freire. Gibson explains the incompatibility of religion/idealism and Marxism and thereby shatters the basis on which Freire tried to forge a link among Marxism, Catholicism, post-modernism, and liberalism.

Gibson presents a strong critique of “objective idealism” and “mechanical materialism” to explicate the notion of dialectical materialism. Objective idealism, Gibson explains, assumes that though there exists a world other than the mind, the key to any change is necessarily the mind. In the words of Freire (1973) “read the word to read the world.” Mechanical materialism, Gibson argues, is devoid of any substantial analysis of labor and capital and assumes that national development and abundance come first and sharing and equality come later. Dialectical materialism is defined by Gibson as the study of change in the material world. It is the idea that things do indeed exist external to us, although we are clearly part of the world, and that things change, and the human agency, including conscious agency, is a key part of social change. According to Gibson, dialectical materialism is the only viable tool of social analysis and change in the real sense of the terms (p. 189). He provides a concrete example of how Freire’s objective-idealist and mechanical-materialist thoughts were responsible for the failure of the revolutionary movement in Grenada and Guinea-Bissau to reinforce his argument (p. 195).

Gibson, however, praises Freire for his emphasis on education as a “democratic egalitarian” weapon and for recognizing the immense significance of problem-posing pedagogical methods instead of “banking method.” Gibson, nevertheless, critiques the four-part formula of social justice developed by Freire: literacy, social insight, revolution, and national economic development. It is the last part of Freire’s framework that receives heavy criticism. Gibson shows how mechanical materialism in former USSR, China and other communist countries reduced Marxism to industrialization and technological development where equality could wait till abundance is achieved and the same happened due to the advice of Freire in the revolutionary movements of Grenada and Guinea-Bissau, where national economic development became more important than equality.

In his conclusion, Gibson suggests many significant ways in which the increasing tide of capitalism can be reversed. First, the untenable contradiction of national economic development and democracy could be resolved, Gibson proposes, by uniting them under the rule of the “moral and material imperative of equality”—in both the mode (decision making) and means (equality in distribution) of production: ethical ideas as a material force (p. 205). Second, referring to Ollman (1979), Gibson urges workers to recognize their interests as members of a class and believe that their class’ interests come prior to their interests as members of a particular nation, religion, race etc.; they must have an idea that their conditions can be qualitatively changed; they must believe that they themselves, through some means or others, can help bring about this improvement; they must believe that Marx’s strategy, or that advocated by Marxist leaders, offers the best means for achieving their aims; and finally, having arrived at all the foregoing, they must not be afraid to act when the time comes (p. 206-207).

Gibson identified three immensely significant points shared by both Lukacs (2000) and Freire (1998a) in their last books. First, overcoming the contradiction of subject and object requires the conscious action of the “critically curious subject”; second, “justice demands organization” and only through a revolutionary political organization can such a consciousness become truly a movement; and finally, within this organization for justice “revolutionary passion” is a vital key (p. 210).

The volume concludes with “Critical Pedagogy and Class Struggle in the Age of Neoliberal Globalization: Notes from History’s Underside” by Peter McLaren. McLaren shows his discontentment over the lack of Marxian analysis (based on labor/capital dialectic, surplus value extraction, the value form of labor, and the structure of property ownership) among the critical educational left. McLaren considers this lack a state of crisis in education given the rampant expansion of capitalism and neoliberalism and consequent cutbacks in government expenditure on health, education, and housing investment, the creation of shantytowns in urban industrial areas, the concentration of women in low-wage subcontracted work, the depletion of natural resources due to over exploitation, the exploitative financial policies and structural adjustment measures of World Bank and IMF, the rampant de-unionization, the expansion of temporary and part-time labor, rapid growth of “casino capitalism” and so on (p. 257-258).

In the wake of educational left’s inattentiveness towards the growing danger of the tide of global capitalism, McLaren argues strongly in favor of developing critical pedagogy as an approach to curriculum development, educational policy making, and teaching practices that challenges the conception of knowledge as “neutral” or “objective” and that is directed toward understanding the political nature of education. Critical pedagogy’s basic project is to develop the opportunities of political struggle through educational means as a way of challenging the alienation of intellectual capacity and human labor. McLaren expresses his

concern about the way critical pedagogy and its principles have been extraordinarily misunderstood and misrepresented. In the US, explains McLaren, “critical pedagogy has become so completely psychologized, so liberally humanized, so technonologized, and so conceptually post-modernized, that its current relationship to broader liberation struggles seems severely attenuated if not fatally terminated” (p. 267).

In doing so, critical pedagogy has avoided class analysis and has focused instead on a postmodern concern with a politics of difference (issue of racism and sexism) and inclusion that silences historical materialism as the unfolding of class struggle. Having done so, educational postmodernists have diverted critical analysis from the global sweep of advanced capitalism and the imperialist exploitation of the world’s laboring class. In the wake of the growing “domestication” of critical pedagogy by the postmodernist educators, McLaren urges for the renewal of the Marxist problematic (based on the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism) that would guide revolutionary critical pedagogy. Marxist humanists believe that the best ways to transcend the limits to human liberation set by capital are through “practical movement” centered on class struggle. The key concern for critical pedagogues is not to privilege class oppression over other forms of oppression but to see how capitalist relations of exploitation provide the ground from which other forms of oppression are produced and how postmodern educational theory often serves as a means of distracting attention from capital’s global project of accumulation.

Revolutionary critical pedagogy, coined by Paula Allman (2001), McLaren argues, will be based on the works of Karl Marx, Paulo Freire, and Antonio Gramsci and would raise the level of progressive education. Such theoretical infrastructure is necessary, McLaren argues, for the construction of concrete pedagogical spaces—in schools, university seminars, cultural centres, unions, social movements, and popular forums for political activism—for the development of revolutionary praxis.

McLaren outlines in detail his conception of critical pedagogy that intends for emancipation. Critical revolutionary pedagogy, McLaren explains, begins with a three-pronged approach: First, students engage in a *pedagogy of demystification* where dominant sign systems are recognized and denaturalized, where common sense is historicized, and where cultural formations are understood in relation to the larger social factory of the school and the global universe of capital. This is followed by *pedagogy of opposition*, where students engage in analyzing various political systems, ideologies, and histories, and eventually begin to develop their own political positions. Finally, inspired by a sense of hope, students take up a *pedagogy of revolution*, where deliberative practices for transforming the social universe of capital are developed and put into practice. “Revolutionary critical pedagogy,” McLaren argues, “supports a totalizing reflection upon the historical-practical constitution of the world, our ideological formation within it, and the reproduction of everyday life practices. It is pedagogy with an emancipatory intent” (p. 279).

### **Critical evaluation of the volume**

The editors and the contributors of the volume must be appreciated for their insightful analyses of oppressive, exploitative, and divisive system that we inhabit, and their forceful assertion of the urgency for change, change that can be brought about through a revolution in structure and consciousness of human existence.

All of the chapter authors are well-established critical educators, who have contributed in this book, and elsewhere, to the advancement of Marxian analysis to understand

educational problems. They have reasserted the timeless importance of Marxian analysis in educational theory and practice, which in the recent years have been taken over by postmodernism in North America, and have been successful in illustrating Marx's dialectical and materialist analyses remain the "sharpest tool" for critical educators seeking to teach and organize for social justice.

*Neoliberalism and Education Reform* successfully presents ruthless criticisms of the exploitative global capitalism and its alliance with hegemonic states all over the world. Authors explain, primarily basing their arguments in Marx and Marxian thinkers, that world-wide neoliberal policies are characterized by cutting public expenditures for social services and control over every aspect of life including education. For the authors, and rightly so, neoliberalism is tantamount to imperialism and colonialism in a new and dangerous garb.

Readers will also find the analyses and explanations of how capitalist schooling has defeated the democratic imperative extremely useful. The NCLB legislation and SBER in US, and privatization of schooling in the US and UK has been explained and situated as part of the larger neoliberal project, which has been accurately defined as "class war from above." The volume is also immensely beneficial in terms of the rich philosophical, political, social, historical, and educational arguments and analyses, which provides readers with a variety of critical analytical tools to investigate and counter the taken-for-granted assumptions about education prevalent in the society (e.g. standardized tests brings educational equality).

The book also succeeds in provoking readers to move beyond developing a clear understanding of what is wrong with the capitalist society and its schooling to developing an agenda for change, because understanding alone does not lead to social transformation. The editors have been able to show the acute significance of engendering critical consciousness in society via schools in order to terminate the destructive social relations of capitalist society.

Although the authors' analysis may make readers feel pessimistic about the sad state of our world, which is being increasingly swept up by capitalist exploitation, accumulation crises and their natural consequence, war, authors themselves are quite hopeful. Each of them in his or her own way makes useful suggestions for the collective and individual actions, not only in education but also in community, policy-making, media, and other arenas, to question and fight back against the ideological, cultural, and economic hegemony of the capitalist system to bring about a more just, peaceful, and democratic world. Throughout the volume the authors have supported their arguments with statistics, document analysis, policy analysis, and case studies, which make their argument convincing. All the chapters in the volume are well written, with lucidity of language and clarity of thought.

The *Neoliberalism and Education Reform* meets the demand of this historical junction when the entire world is slowly being *recolonized* bit by bit by means of neoliberal global capitalism. The book clearly explicates the menace of neoliberalism and provides counter-strategies to fight back. This book would be a good choice for graduate level courses in education dealing with capitalism, the state, and their relationships with education. Moreover, the book will be useful for educational researchers investigating the similar territories.

In summary, the volume successfully accomplishes the objectives of explaining the hazardous impacts of neoliberal reforms on education and the providing detailed explanations of the counter strategies.

Nevertheless, the volume has certain limitations and inconsistencies. First of all, there are several chapters—for example the articles by Hill, Gibson, and McLaren—that follow strict Marxist perspectives. These authors view “post-discourses” as weakening elements in human struggle for resistance against capitalism due to former’s overemphasis on the “politics of difference” at the cost of a unified class struggle. However, the chapter by Vinson and Ross employs the notions of surveillance and spectacle (as developed by Foucault and Debord) to explain the case of SBER. Moreover, a large part of the latter’s chapter employs Marx and the Marxist theorists such as Perlman (1972) to explain the negative influences of high-stakes tests.

Another important point of difference among the authors is regarding the value of work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Every chapter in the volume holds Freire in high regards except the chapter by Gibson, which primarily intends to argue against inherent contradictions in the work of Freire. Moreover, while Gibson undermines the work of Hegel and pushes it aside it as “objective idealism” and theoretically inferior to Marx’s concept of “dialectical materialism,” Welsh’s article considers Hegel’s work extraordinary (and something not contradictory but complementary to Marx’s work) to understand and solve educational problems. I myself do not see any problem in such an association of ideas; rather I consider it as strength of the volume because it explains the situation in a more comprehensive way. Moreover, the chapters by Gonzalves, Gibson, and Welsh are invaluable in their analysis in unearthing the various dimensions of capitalism and imperialism as shown above, they do not seem to fit with the overarching theme of the book—neoliberalism and education reform.

Other, Rikowski’s chapter provides a fruitful critical examination of the GATS and its impact on school; however, it would have been more beneficial if Rikowski could have provided some ways to combat GATS in spite of its “enigmatic nature.” The Vinson and Ross chapter could provide a more detailed elaboration of the concepts of *derive* and *detournement* employed to counter standardization and accountability movement. Similarly, Hursh’s chapter would be more fruitful if it had provided some counter-strategies to fight the menace of neoliberalism. Although editors’ “Introduction” does a good job of explaining what neoliberalism is and how does it operate world over, a concluding chapter, based on the others chapters, to summarize the dangers of neoliberal capital and ways to fight the latter, would have been appreciated by many readers.

Moreover, the volume lacks sufficient number of school-based case studies to actually understand the impacts of neoliberalism, standardization, accountability, and privatization on students and teachers and their everyday teaching-learning processes. The volume also restricts itself to UK and USA largely and does not pay much attention to the others parts of world, especially the developing world where the neoliberal reforms are likely to cause more dangerous effects.

Furthermore, the authors have shown their excellence in explaining the relationship of neoliberal school reforms (spearheaded by standardization and accountability, among others) and capitalism. It looks to me, however, that readers would have benefited more if the authors could have located the whole of the standardization process in the conceptions of behaviorism and positivism—the psychological and philosophical sources behind standards, measures, examinations, grades, control, regulation, and prediction—as briefly touched upon by Shannon and Welsh in their respective chapters. Capitalist society and its schooling gives value to what can be commodified through production, quantification, marketing, and consumption. Standardized tests are the very manifestation of positivism and behaviorism that value objective, measurable, reproducible, and transmissible



knowledge, and are bound to be popular in capitalist society for they fit the very notion of commodification on which the capitalist society rests. It is my contention that capitalism, behaviorism, and positivism always go together as also exemplified by the classic work of F. W. Taylor (1911) *The principles of scientific management*.

Finally, though the editors' "Introduction" considers the development of "critical consciousness" as one of their major goals, this phrase did not appear that often throughout the volume. Though each contributor has suggested immensely useful counter strategies to deal with neoliberal reform and capitalism, it is my contention that a deeper comprehension of human consciousness is needed to know why some of us execute oppression on others and why others accept the oppression. Such comprehension of human consciousness is desired to direct people towards understanding and revolting against their own oppression and exploitation to bring about fundamental change in the structure of society, as desired by the contributors of the volume.

In summary, I strongly recommend *Neoliberalism and Education Reform* for those who are serious about education, society, and the future of humanity. The book will serve as an indispensable guide for critical scholars, educators, activists, and anyone else who is perturbed with the ever-expanding empire of neoliberal global capitalism, wants to understand latter's hazardous impacts on every aspect of society including education, and wants to contribute to the reversal of this ever-growing tide and bring about a more just and democratic world. The American Educational Studies Association has recognized the critical significance of *Neoliberalism and Education Reform* by awarding it the *Critics Choice Award* for 2008.

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