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## An Application of Gramsci's "Who Benefits?" to High-Stakes Testing

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1.1 Until recently, students who stuck it out in school and successfully completed certain required courses, which frequently were adapted to their own achievement levels, received a high school diploma. As such, the majority of students graduated who went to school for twelve years. Regardless of their post-school plans, graduation has been perceived of as a rite of passage to adulthood for American adolescents. Recently, things have changed. An increasing number of States have instituted high-stakes graduate exit exams (also known as gateway, certification, and competency exams) which limit secondary students' eligibility for a diploma to those who pass the test (Langenfeld, Thurlow and Scott, 1997). As of January 2001, eighteen states had legislated requirements for students to pass a uniform, large scale assessment to receive high school diplomas, and six more planned to adopt one within three years (O'Neill, 2001). If statistics elsewhere are similar to those in Indiana, between a third and a half of sophomores initially fail the test; of those remaining in school until their senior year, 14 percent fail the test and so do not receive diplomas (Lane, 2000). And now the Bush administration's education policy *No Child Left Behind* has made this testing gate a national fixture.

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1.2 To discern reasons behind the spate of official state and federal mandates for high-stakes tests as well as other stringent standards and accountability measures, in this article, I turn to what Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1891/1929-1935) claimed should be the perennially essential question to ask related to social actions; that is, "Who benefits?" I make the case that various forms of dominance are established or strengthened through recent state and federal legislation. Because it is clear that social hierarchies are created or intensified through official high-stakes mandates, I identify losers (who fail the test and remain at

the bottom of hierarchies) and, more importantly, winners, who retain or improve their position at the top of hierarchies. I also maintain that dominant groups set normative standards and use certain liberal and neoliberal ideologies to contrive legitimacy for the tests and for social hierarchies generally.

### Domination through Othering

2.1 Ericka Apfelbaum (1999), a Jewish refugee from Germany to France during World War II, theorizes about how dominant groups are formed and about the power inequalities that shape activities within these groups and determine relations between them and marginalized groups.

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Apfelbaum argues that dominant groups create myths about human features and establish norms

related to their own groups' strengths, which they then promote as the standard for all people. The dominant group holds "Others" accountable for attaining these standards whether or not it is possible and without evidence that their norms are worthwhile. Individuals and groups who fail to achieve the central groups' standards are identified (marked, labeled, branded) by stigmatizing names ('failure', 'disabled', 'at-risk'). The binarism of (dominant) insiders and (subordinated) outsiders, formed through distinction-making processes, implies homogenous characteristics within the collective who meet the standards, and in those who do not (Shanahan and Jones, 1999). When central groups portray themselves as 'adequate' and 'normal', peripheral groups are dialectically positioned as 'inadequate' and 'abnormal'. Maximum power is held by the dominant group when distinctions between "us" and "them" are construed as extreme, fundamental, and irreversible.

2.2 Groups declared outside the central collective for reasons related to appearance, ability, behavior, gender, ethnicity, language usage, social class, and/or sexual orientation are relegated to a subordinate status that inevitably leads to oppressions (Eagleton, 1990) of the likes of exploitation, humiliation, harassment, cultural imperialism (Others' attributes are denigrated), bodily violence (intimidation, genocide, mercy killing, physical attack, forced sterilization), segregation, and banishment (Young, 1990, 2000). Based on a meta-analysis of anthropological studies, in *Human Universals*, Donald Brown (1991) found that, to varying degrees, all groups create hierarchies that correspond to power and status relations. Hence, the privileging of central or mainstream powerful groups is widespread, even universal. With predominantly White personnel and deeply-entrenched Eurocentric traditions, American schools have a history of unfavorable relations with subordinated

groups. Subordinates inevitably are segregated into low status, marginalized positions and have little access to goods and services (Nielson, 1997).

2.3 Hierarchies are not purposeless, passive rankings, but represent important interdependent relations among people of different ranks. Indeed, the role, status, and perhaps even *raison d'etre* of dominant groups hinge on the existence of Others; domination depends on subordination; superiority needs inferiority. Using Jacques Lacan's (1973) idea of signification in her analogy of empire building, Elizabeth Bellamy (1998) claims that the identity of colonizers is based on a lack which can only be filled by colonized Others. For example, in high-stakes testing, for some students to pass and excel, Others must do poorly or fail. In the accountability and standards movement, more generally, some teachers and schools must be declared incompetent or failures if others are to be judged to be excellent and models of best practices.

### **Contriving Legitimacy for Hierarchy: The Role of Ideology**

3.1 According to Gramsci (1971/1929-1935), because those who dominate in hierarchies are faced with constant resistance from subordinates, they must continuously exert effort to retain their power. Historically, force has been used to gain and retain power; however, it is nicer and more effective if powerful people can convince those in low positions of the legitimacy of status hierarchies and material disparities. To rule in supposed democracies, dominant groups must have some degree of permission from Others. They gain consent for their goals by circulating ideologies that obfuscate power imbalances. John B. Thompson (1990) defines ideology as meaning in the service of power. Inscribed in language (Bakhtin, 1981) and institutions (Tyack and Tobin, 1994), ideologies permeate thought and action (Zizek, 1994), thus mystifying interpersonal rankings (Thompson, 1984). Ideologies serve to prevent resistance by those at the losing end of status orderings; however, when subordinates get wise to status or material gaps, new legends must be brought forward to convince them of their legitimacy. Gramsci defined hegemony as a dynamic process of ideology circulation in which subordinates continuously are offered new persuasive evidence to interpret experience in ways favorable to dominant groups.

3.2 One form of ideology is storytelling. Debunked decades ago (Keddie, 1973; Ryan, 1971), cultural deprivation stories are still used to explain why poor and Black children do less well in school and, correspondingly, why intergenerational poverty and income gaps exist (Brantlinger, 2003). Versions of victim-blaming narratives are told by lay persons as well as prominent social scientists (see reviews by Brantlinger, 1997; Valencia, 1997; Wright, 1993). Human agency versus social structure explanations for intergenerational poverty divide theorists. Deprivationists see

immorality and bad family values as responsible for children's lack of school success. In contrast, such informed ethnographers as Ray P. McDermott and Hervé Varenne (1996) see caring among the poor set against a breakdown of opportunity. The ideology embedded in the American dream of social mobility, combined with tales of school as a fair meritocracy, works to make students believe that the playing field for educational and employment opportunity is level. The view that those who excel do so by virtue of natural talents and those who fail lack the necessary attributes to succeed becomes common sense. Such ideological persuasions lead people to believe that high achievers are entitled to rewards and failing students deserve negative school and life outcomes. A popular impression (ideological story) held by the middle class is that poor people choose to fail in school, attend poorly-resourced schools, and live in poverty (Brantlinger, 1993, 2003). Such narratives expurgate the poor while constructing the worthiness of people like themselves who "aspire" and "try" (see Thompson's (1997) ideas about the nature of ideological operations). Because affluent people are distanced geographically and psychologically from the poor, their impressions of these Others have little connection to reality. Regardless of cultural myths and stereotypes (ideological narrating), actual empirical evidence indicates that poor people share the middle class's reverence for education and desire for the good life as well as the perception that social mobility depends on school achievement and attainment (Brantlinger, 1985; Kozol, 2001; Lauder and Hughes, 1999; MacLeod, 1987).

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3.3 In spite of similarities in aspirations and perceptions, evidence confirms that children from lower-income families do have lower outcomes on educational measures than their higher-income counterparts (Jencks and Phillips, 1999). There are numerous reasons for the disparities. First, poor families' expectations for educational and occupational attainment are low because they are rational in knowing that they cannot afford higher education or other enabling school advantages (Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser and Deci, 1996). Second, because poor children rarely benefit from school's competitive structure, competition does not play the same motivating role in urban schools as it does in the suburbs (Brandau and Collins, 1994). Poor children do, however, benefit from supportive academic push and access to advanced curricula and programs (Gamoran and Hannigan, 2000; Oakes and Guiton, 1995; Reynolds and Wolfe, 1999) – conditions that rarely exist for them. Third, the ubiquity of poor and minority people's struggles with biased treatment and barriers to school and societal success has a cumulative effect on their morale, which results in their resignation to the probability

of unfavorable circumstances in the future and alienation from mainstream institutions (Brantlinger, 1985, 1993; Mickelson, 1993). Fourth, students who are angry about inequities and humiliations tend to reject dominant ideologies and engage in defiant and oppositional behaviors. Such resistance inevitably leads to retaliation by those in charge and worsening life chances (Ray and Mickelson, 1990; Willis, 1977). The fifth and most important reason for class-related achievement disparities is that the education of poor, immigrant, and urban children has always been hampered by vastly inferior school and community conditions (Kozol, 1991, 2001; Seiler and Tobin, 2000; Wenglinsky, 1998). Gary Orfield (2000) reports almost total segregation by race/ethnicity and social class in urban school districts, and mass chaos and disorganization with high rates of administrator turnover so that consistency is terribly low in anything they do. Hence, poor and minority children get "subtractive" schooling (Noddings, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999). Time spent in school often is agonizing for working-class children (Brantlinger, 1993), as it has been for generations. Herbert Kliebard (1986) cites the 1913 case of a factory inspector in Chicago, who questioned children of immigrants about whether they would choose to continue working long hours in sweatshops or go to school. Of five hundred interviewed, four hundred and twelve preferred factory labor to the monotony, humiliation, and sheer cruelty they experienced in school. Poor people do not choose inadequate schools for their children; however, policy failure means urban residents have little control over the quality of community schools (Anyon, 1997). They do not have the power of the pocketbook to live in neighborhoods known for good schools (Brantlinger, 2003) or to transport their children in school choice situations (Apple, 2003).

### **Supposed Rationale for High-Stakes Testing**

4.1 An official reason for mandating graduation exit exams is that without setting a cut-off standard that prevents low performing students from earning a diploma, schools do not guarantee that graduates have even minimal basic skills, literacy, and general knowledge. It is claimed that without an achievement baseline determined by criterion referenced tests, the diploma conveys little about high school graduates' competencies and it therefore has little credibility or value as a credential. Test proponents believe the diploma will be worth more if access to it is limited.

4.2 Another official rationale touted for requiring high-stakes tests is that the possibility of failure and denial of the diploma provide necessary incentives for students to work harder (FairTest, 1999-2000a). A discourse of societal decline (a common ideology) purports that some people do not pull their weight and consequently burden others and pull society down. Stringent accountability standards and punitive sanctions are

billed as tough love remedies for dealing with corrupted adolescents, neglectful parents, and inept teachers. Such measures are to provide a reality slap aimed at motivating students to attend school, behave

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themselves, and try in their courses. In terms of the effectiveness of tests in motivating failing students to improve scores, David Berliner (2003) documents that, in

spite of the substantial human and monetary expense of high-stakes tests, such initiatives have little or no impact on measured achievement.

4.3 The stakes connected with the testing movement are not leveled exclusively at students. Schools, school districts, and personnel are judged (and penalized) according to aggregate test scores. Teachers are portrayed as lazy, incompetent, and lacking motivation to excel (Mortimore and Mortimore, 1999). Although teachers may now "teach to the test," whether by choice or district mandate, they may not be effectively implementing practices they value. Some school personnel are so pressured by punitive aspects of accountability trends that they feel driven to cheat (Associated Press, 2000a).

4.4 Regardless of recent popularity, "get tough" approaches (e.g., zero tolerance suspension and expulsion rules, grade retention) have rarely had a constructive impact on target students. Indeed, such punitive practices as low grades, stigmatizing placements, and castigating discipline inflict symbolic violence (FairTest, 1999-2000a). Similar "for your own good" rationale are used to justify violence in child-rearing (Miller, 1986). Because it is claimed that such mandates are in students' best-interest, in spite of high-stakes tests' dire consequences for vulnerable students, test promoters and governmental officials who vote for them advertise themselves as concerned and caring about poor and minority children. *No Child Left Behind* legislation is undergirded by a beneficent politician ideology. When initiatives fund compensatory programs for students who fail, politicians also claim generosity. Governing bodies routinely tout the need to discipline or close doors to students and families when they institute "opportunities." The first special education class I taught was called an "Opportunity Room," a misnomer that fooled nobody, particularly my students. Students required to take compensatory classes, attend summer school, or retake tests are unlikely to understand these practices as beneficial; rather they see them as further evidence that schools are not designed in their own best interests.

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## Who Fails? Who Loses?

5.1 Within a short period of time after the exit exams were adopted it became clear that poor and minority children were the ones who would fail. In major urban districts across Indiana, minority failure was higher than 50 percent (Associated Press, 2000b) – rates similar to Blacks and Latinos in Texas (FairTest, 1999-2000a). Racially disproportionate outcomes must have been anticipated; Black students inevitably score lower than White students on all school achievement measures (Jencks and Phillips, 1999). A Texas judge acknowledged that graduation tests had a "legally meaningful and disparate impact against African-American and Latino students" (FairTest, 1999-2000a: 1), nevertheless he concluded that "test-based discrimination is not illegal because only a high-stakes exam can force students and educators to work hard enough and be focused enough to learn the 'basic skills' measured" (11). Because of the history of racial segregation and social class discrimination, any informed educator would expect class- and race-related score disparities. Educators also could have predicted that the tests would raise further obstacles to poor students' school success and limit their access to an enriched or even mainstream general education curriculum.

5.2 The statistics regarding "who fails" high-stakes tests should not be surprising – they are the same students who fail in other school enterprises: they score below average on all tests and have low grade point averages, high rates of grade-level retention, more punished infractions, poor school attendance records, and high 'dropout' rates. Some are identified as disabled, were disabled in the past but currently are not classified, or barely miss cutoff criterion for disability classification. In the first year of the test, more than 1,000 diploma-track seniors with identified disabilities failed Indiana's Graduation Qualifying Examination and thus were not eligible to receive high school diplomas (O'Neill, 2001). The American Civil Liberties Union brought forward a class-action lawsuit charging that gateway tests violated special education students' constitutional rights (Associated Press, 2000a). Others who fail graduate exit exams are not in special education but have been singled out for other forms of compensatory or remedial interventions. "Risk" has previously referred to poor school performance and potential for grade retention or dropping out – or being pushed out – of school (Fine, 1991). Indeed, high school dropouts can be identified for that inevitability as early as third grade. Now, risk encompasses the probability of students not passing gateway tests and not receiving diplomas even if they have remained in school for the full twelve years.

5.3 Given the high rates of failure on high-stakes tests, a public or at least student and parent outcry should be expected. Yet little stakeholder or

grassroots opposition has surfaced locally. A few critical letters to the editor appeared, but they were written in a calm and tentative tone by educators. A more animated complaint arose when someone learned that those denied a diploma due to exam failure would be ineligible for admission to technical and vocational colleges. Because of the devastating consequences of the test for a large percentage of the student body, the lack of public outrage should be puzzling. However, given the high correlations between all forms of school failure (i.e., the stability of ranked orderings of achievement over time and across measures), a viable explanation for the lack of public opposition to the gateway exams is they are just one more instance of failure for the same students who always fail. Again, the negative impact is solely on students already on the losing end of school evaluative and status continua and at the bottom rung of school hierarchies. They also are disproportionately poor, of color, and/or are English language learners. Their low, virtually powerless place in school mirrors their family's status in society. They live an impoverished, ghettoed existence (Conley, 1999; Ehrenreich, 2001; Oliver and Shapiro, 1995) and attend schools and classes with the fewest resources (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991, 2001) and the least academic push (Chazan, 2000). It is likely that those who fail the test are too worn out and demoralized by life circumstances to have the energy or incentive to fight this particular battle.

### Focusing on Who Passes Rather than Who Fails High-Stakes Tests

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6.1 In contrast to the deleterious outcomes for low-income students, students who readily pass gateway tests on the first try are White and middle class. Educated in suburban schools or high "ability" groups in comprehensive

elementary schools, then in honors, gifted/talented, or advanced placement sections during their secondary years, students who readily pass these new tests have high grade point averages and score above average on other tests. Middle- and upper-class students are always on the winning end of ranked orderings. Again, given that test scores inevitably sort students along social class lines and, based on what is known about correlations between tests, class- and race-linked outcomes must have been anticipated.

6.2 There are numerous insider (to the class) explanations for middle-class students' success, including they: "come from genetically superior stock," "acquire cultural capital from educated families," "internalize parental values and caring about school," "are raised to believe that educational achievement and attainment are the epitome of success," "receive respectful home treatment that nurtures the high self-esteem necessary for competence," "live in emotionally supportive conditions that allow

them to concentrate on learning," and "are not subjected to the distracting tensions of substance abuse or antisocial or criminal lifestyles" (see Brantlinger, 2003). Such lay and professional reasoning attributes middle-class success to superior student and family characteristics – again, to the personal traits rather than the structural distinctions in institutional responses to members of each class.

6.3 In addition to middle-class people's perceptions of the strengths of their class, there are other explanations for affluent students' school success that are not based on stereotypes. One theory is that humans behave rationally. Thus, middle-class students' efforts are due to their conviction that K-12 achievement is necessary for admission to higher education and, in turn, that college degrees permit access to professional jobs with salaries high enough to maintain their customary affluent lifestyles. Students who engage in status maintenance behaviors are aware that there are sufficient family funds available to facilitate their attaining middle-class goals. This assurance provides the incentive to make an effort in school. Yet, it must be acknowledged that high aspirations are only likely to enhance achievement when combined with expectations of sufficient resources for advanced education. Given the conditions conducive to monetary support and parental knowledge regarding education, students of the educated middle class are on a college-bound track from the time they are born.

6.4 Another neutral explanation for class-related school success rates is that middle-class people of European American heritage control social institutions so that they mirror their home culture (Bourdieu, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). One way to look at this is that arbitrary historical circumstances have resulted in an Anglo-oriented American school system and that immigrant groups that followed British settlers have had to assimilate to Anglo customs. The cultural mismatch is seen as temporary, surmountable, and unintentional. John Ogbu (1995) makes a compelling case that certain involuntary immigrants, especially ones who do not blend in because of skin color and lasting cultural differences due to continuing segregation, have not been able to break the cultural barriers to be successful in American schools and society.

6.5 Another version of the cultural difference hypothesis is that White, middle-class people are reluctant to give up their hegemony. According to this theory, in both their professional and parental advocacy (for their own children) roles, college-educated people determine the curricular and pedagogical factors that privilege children of their class (Apple, 1993; Brantlinger, 2003). They insist on a Eurocentric curriculum and achievement-differentiated school structures. Annette Henry (1995) writes of replacing Eurocentric curricula as important to anti-colonial struggle even in institutions within the borders of colonial powers. There are huge funding discrepancies

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between school districts that always result in advantaged schooling for affluent classes (see Kozol, 1991). Within school district distinctions between schools attended by affluent and impoverished children exist as well (Brantlinger, 2003). Yet, affluent classes continuously negotiate within school district benefits for their children and never vote to override school funding policies that depend on local property taxes.

6.6 Slavoj Zizek (1989) argues that nothing is neutral and everything is ideological and infused with class interests. Consistent with Marxist accounts of domination and oppression, social class reproduction theories highlight how social relations and societal institutions are stratified along class lines. Yet, even critical theories may not overturn dominating relations when highly abstract language is used. Scholars often convey resignation to stratified relations or fail to be introspective about their own role in reproducing them (Brantlinger, 1999). They do not declare or notice which side they are on (Becker, 1963). In this sense, critical scholars may do as much harm as mainstream scholars who follow techno-rational agendas of exacting classifications of failing students or offering remedies for failure. For example, Gerald Bracey (1997) criticizes academics that make careers of collecting grants to fix problems. In addition, Christine Sleeter (2000) argues that, "researchers from dominant groups have a long history of producing knowledge about oppressed groups that legitimates their subordination" (10). Few scholars turn their gaze upwards in order to understand why dominant classes consistently win and why they create new measures to guarantee their continuing domination of hierarchies. I dub theories neutral when they do not pinpoint human intentionality. When leftist or postmodern theories identify culture as a stock of commonsense beliefs about what is right, natural, normal (Rochon, 1998), see tacit knowledge as visceral and internal (Vygotsky, 1978), or the body/subject as socially inscribed and managed (Shapiro, 1999), it is implied that those who benefit are mere puppets controlled by external forces. In these theories, deliberate intention and informed agency remain invisible. Yet, if there are no intentions, there is no responsibility (or accountability), and consequently little possibility for change.

6.7 Although nothing is neutral (Zizek, 1994), I use the term "political" as an honorific for theories that address the intentionality and self-serving actions of dominant classes and connect to agendas for transformative change. Within these parameters, I ask such questions about the widespread adoption of exams as: If existing evaluative measures already ranked students, why were additional tests needed? If who fails and who passes the gateway test is the same as for all school measures, hence predictable, what is the exam's purpose? Who needs them? Who wants them? Why are they so popular among legislators and voters? On what social meanings do these tests depend? Real answers to such questions are complex, interactive, and definitively political because they focus on

the agency and intentional acts of those who dominate in school and society. If Gramsci were here, I believe he might ask, "If gateway tests do not benefit students they disqualify from high school graduation, then who do they benefit?"

### Who Benefits?

7.1 Because practices mandated by the standards and accountability movement, in general, and the high school exit exams, in particular, are expensive financially and in terms of time spent by teachers and students, it is important to understand why people endorse them and why government officials legislate them. It seems reasonable to conclude that a number of parties reap rewards from high-stakes testing. Turning to Gramsci's idea of hegemony (that powerful groups in society strive to maintain and strengthen their dominance by offering new evidence to justify it), it is plausible to assume that high-stakes tests facilitate the win/lose situations that justify hierarchical social relations and dominant groups' material and status advantages. In the remainder of this article, I identify various "winners" and conjecture about how they benefit in the current high-stakes testing and accountability and standards milieu.

### Benefits for Test Producers

8.1 The most obvious response to the "who benefits" question is that gateway tests are a good source of revenue for test producers. Through connections to the media, test companies announce declining achievement rates for American students and link these rates to downward national economic trajectories — current, foreseen, or imagined. Economic doomsday narratives scare the public into compliance with regulations that require the adoption of yet another expensive accountability measure, if not to gauge students' achievement, then to assess teachers or pre-service teachers. According to this explanation, the burgeoning use of exams results from a conspiracy designed to keep money flowing in the direction of test producers, especially CEOs of such supposedly not-for-profit companies as Education Testing Services. Dependency on objective tests as the sole criterion of educational performance also benefits the companies that shape textbooks to contain the knowledge required for tests. So, among the winners in the high-stakes testing movement are vendors who

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8.2 Hysteria about achievement inadequacies has resulted in proliferation of tests for students at every level of education as

well as for pre-service and in-service teachers. When I started as a teacher educator in the late 1970s, graduating from a teacher education institution translated into State certification. Now teacher education graduates must pass several tests, including one for each age level they teach as well as each subject area and/or disability category certification. If teachers want certification in another State, they must take a different set of tests conveniently customized for that State. Similarly, a few years ago, our institution admitted students to the teacher education program based solely on their GPAs in prerequisite courses. Some programs required evidence of experience with children. Presently, we have dropped the experience requirement, but students must pass admission tests to get into programs. This testing expansion has meant a boom for test and textbook industries as well as for organizations that provide tutorial courses or materials aimed at helping students improve their test scores. These companies are part of corporate conglomerates with connections to the media and prominent politicians (Metcalf, 2002). It is likely that these affiliates deliberately circulate knowledge about educational crises, then market remedies purportedly to improve literacy and other forms of achievement (McNeil, 1995, 2000).

### **Benefits to Trans-Global Capitalists**

9.1 Capitalism is based on maximizing profits, hence the endless pursuit of opportunities to enhance profits among corporations. It is not surprising that those who benefit most from capitalism's 'free market' enterprise would eschew public institutions. That capitalist controlled mass communication systems would publicize low scores, condemn teachers, construct students/workers as intellectually and morally inferior, and recommend business-oriented measures to correct problems they identify is not unexpected. By clever use of their media, capitalists create themes that resonate with ideologies of neoliberals, neo-conservatives, authoritarian populists, and the new middle class (Apple, 2003). Alliances formed through groups' supposed mutual interests allow politicians who endorse the agendas of rich people and powerful corporations to get elected. Reducing public spending and giving tax breaks to the wealthy are their high priorities. To sway the system to advantage current elites, voters and their representatives must be convinced that certain citizens are unworthy of receiving government spending. When the public is convinced that test scores are the key criterion for judging human worth, then it is opportune to prove students and teachers deficient and schools dysfunctional based on low scores. CEOs have gotten widespread public concurrence that certain citizens are undeserving and that welfare safeguards and other public services and accommodations for some citizens unduly burden other taxpayers.

9.2 Defective school and deficient worker narratives also provide CEOs

with the excuse and public endorsement for maintaining low wages. Such narratives distract public attention from unethical corporate and labor practices, business welfare, and self-serving actions of elites. They divert attention that concerned citizens should have about the worldwide colonization of land and people by western trans-global corporations (Martin and Schumann, 1997; Sleeter, 2000). While blaming illiterate United States workers, CEOs insist that for their industries to stay afloat they must relocate abroad, opportunely to places with low wage structures and lax environmental standards. Meanwhile, they claim to transfer companies to third world countries for the sake of the United States economy – to stay ahead of global competition for production and markets. Corporate leaders, and politicians who endorse their agendas, insist on literacy standards, but reject any plan that sets standards for environmental protection or living wages. Unions are busted as CEOs do the "necessary" downsizing that creates national unemployment and underemployment and decimates fringe benefits for the working class. Meanwhile, they up-size their own salaries and return huge profits to corporate shareholders. Transnational corporations have managed to dismantle governmental restrictions so they have infinite unregulated power (Sleeter, 2000). Nation-states have lost control of trans-global corporations and thus are unable to autonomously regulate living standards and welfare needs of their population (Medovoi, 2002; Sassen, 1998). It is little wonder that those with power over economic conditions like to believe in the inferiority of American workers and the neutrality and inevitability of market trends.

9.3 Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the intensification of testing and standards that have marked schools and

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workers as defective is the disconnection between reality and fiction about achievement and its links to the economy. Although current achievement among United States students is relatively high (Berliner, 2000), this has not prevented jobs with sustainable salaries from disappearing for Americans (Wilson, 1996). If inferior workers actually were the cause of corporation departures, then companies would not move to countries whose citizens have lower literacy levels. A credible reason for the onslaught of tests is that corporations have used low scores to convince the public of student/worker inadequacies and pinpoint these failures as the reason for their low wages and existing salary discrepancies between managers and workers. By constructing low scorers as personal losers, corporations have a convenient scapegoat for social problems and a diversion from personal blame. Low test scores provide proof that the poor (previously the working class) are inferior and undeserving. Constructing market dynamics as systemic

inevitably, corporate owners deny their own intentionality and avoid being held accountable for contributing to the dire outcomes of the modern American working class.

## Benefits to Media Moguls

10.1 Media enterprises sustain themselves by engaging the attention of potential consumers of products sold by press or network advertisers. In the past, independent presses and radio stations were owned by individuals of various political persuasions that worked to influence voters in myriad ways (McChesney, 2001). A flourishing populism meant

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working- and middle-class voters had some leverage over who got elected and hence how politicians regulated capitalist enterprise and

were responsive to constituencies. Organized nationally and locally, labor action forced capitalists to pay relatively high working-class wages and provide fringe benefits. Times have changed. International communication networks are now controlled by fewer than two dozen enormous profit-making corporations (McChesney, 1997, 2001).

Responsive to those in power, media serve a master (McChesney, 1999; McLeod and Hertog, 1999). Dominant messages (ideologies) that distort the reality of modern life, advantage business and bureaucratic institutions (Viswanath and Demers, 1999). Corporate control of the media results in public expenditures being "the problem" and business and unregulated free markets being "the answer," so business-oriented measures are recommended to solve their versions of educational and national problems. In this media monopoly, those who protest the capitalist system are ignored, excluded, or negatively portrayed (Glasser and Bowers, 1999). In snippets of coverage of the massive protests against the World Bank and World Trade Organization in Quebec City, Seattle, and Washington, D.C., protesters were portrayed as rabble-rousing miscreants with no legitimate gripes.

10.2 At the same time that media ownership became centralized under corporate control, concern about societal decline and students not measuring up to earlier standards heightened. During the Sputnik era, hysteria arose about losing the cold war to Russia in particular and communism in general. Working-class Americans were persuaded to associate with free market capitalism and disassociate with anything socialist. After the breakup of the Soviet Union and the opening of China to the West, concern about the communist threat shifted to worries about losing out in the economic competition to dominate world markets. Announcements about educational mediocrity, inadequate workers, and the United States losing in global competition prevailed. These mostly undocumented sound bites coalesced into a discourse of school and societal decline that convinced the public of the need to raise

standards and hold public schools accountable for improvements in educational – and economic – outcomes. The *Nation at Risk* legislation framed the rationale for concentrating on measurable academic achievement and *No Child Left Behind* reemphasized similar goals under the guise of concern for the fate of poor and minority children.

10.3 A plausible explanation for the publicity about social and academic deterioration is that it gains and retains audiences. Media moguls know that people generally have personal experiences with and an interest in schools. Education coverage filled the space left when the communist threat dissipated. It still provides filler when natural disasters, crimes, or international conflicts are unavailable to the newspaper pages or air waves. A form of cold war logic lurks behind the fear that America must better educate its workers to win in global markets or on battlegrounds. This crisis mentality about the state of education and the economy is not unique to Americans. Hyperbolic concern about literacy tied to fears of workforce collapse and national vulnerability is apparent in England (Ball, Kenny and Gardiner, 1990; Whitty, 2000) and Australia (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry, 1997). Apparently, sensationalism surrounding declining achievement and social conditions has gained media coverage internationally.

10.4 A compelling case has been made against the validity of arguments of school decline or inferior workers. Bracey (2000) detects flaws in statistics that purport to document American students' comparative weakness, and Richard Rothstein (1999) concludes that, regardless of reports to the contrary, student achievement has consistently improved. The agitation about academic decline and the United States losing ground to other nations has been called a "manufactured crisis" (Berliner and Biddle, 1995). In terms of education's responsibility for depressing the United States economy, the case has been made that even if achievement were declining, tougher standards for student performance would not improve either schools or the economy (Kohn, 1998; Kozol, 2001; Meier, 2000; Ohanian, 1999; Starratt, 1994). Others reject the argument that schools can or should be engines for economic restoration (Smyth and Schacklock, 1998). Regarding apprehension about the scarcity of graduates competent in technical fields – see *Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) and *America 2000* (U.S. Department of Education, 1991) – contradictory evidence of high unemployment rates among graduates with advanced degrees, especially in mathematics, science, and technology exists (Boutwell, 1997; Noddings, 1994; O'Brien, 1998).

### **Benefits for Politicians and Political Pundits**

11.1 At this point in history, undoubtedly due to the clever manipulation of media moguls, the public as well as political parties have learned to

dwell on leaders' personal traits rather than substantive issues. Intense and bitter party rivalries are constant. Such contention is ironic given that differences between Democrats and Republicans, the only parties with a chance to win in modern American elections, are barely discernible. Politicians seem to fear that anything other than the articulation of bland, conformist agendas will alienate voters. Fueled by the educational crisis mentality and avoiding real issues, various politicians espouse their own versions of high educational and accountability standards. They join the bandwagon that bill themselves as "education" presidents, mayors, governors, or legislators. Bureaucrats gain political capital from being messengers of the popular doom and salvation rhetoric regarding education. Because these measures seemingly are instituted for students' sakes, concern about educational failures allows politicians to advertise themselves as caring about children and the country.

**Bureaucrats gain political capital from being messengers of the popular doom and salvation rhetoric regarding education.**

11.2 Politicians have nothing to lose and much to gain from pursuing "improve education" agendas. In the first place, running for public office is expensive, so inevitably politicians are affluent. Members of affluent, educated classes are the ones who benefit most from the social hierarchies created and intensified by standardized tests. Mandates for high-stakes tests and accountability measures officially sanction existing hierarchical relations by rewarding cultural capital and avoiding the equity or redistributive reform that would undermine their privilege. In addition to the personal gain of their children and grandchildren rising to the top of academic competition, thus gaining access to advantaged school conditions, some politicians own stock in test and textbook companies (Metcalf, 2002). Such conflicts of interest are covered in alternative media with small circulation; however, they are not published in mainstream circuits. Hence, the fact that certain politicians engage in illegal and unethical behaviors goes relatively unnoticed by the general public.

11.3 Pierre Bourdieu (1998) equates neoliberalism with dominant discourse of political submission to economic rationality, undivided reign of the market, and withering away of state regulation of business. Amy Stuart Wells (2000) contends that neoliberalism undergirds free market rationale for school choice policy (e.g., charter school development, public vouchers for private schools), which she sees as a backlash against redistributive reforms aimed at decreasing disparities in education and society. Bourdieu (1998) claims that in the mode of consensus, people collectively have an "atavistic faith in the historical inevitability of productive forces" and "utter a fatalistic discourse which transforms economic tendencies into destiny" (18). He warns that "flagrant

inadequacies of the market are undermining the public interest and liquidating the gains of the welfare state," and condemns the French public for judging the "political candidates according to narrow-minded, regressive, security-minded, protectionist, conservative xenophobia" (18).

### Benefits for Conservatives

12.1 In contrast to the goals of democratic and grassroots reform that gained ground during the 1980's, current reform initiatives advocate top-down control of education. An impetus for the groundswell of concern about education and subsequent onslaught of high-stakes legislation is that conservatives fear that democratic, progressive, and transformative school reform would diminish their power and advantage. Test-driven educational standards direct educators away from democratic reform and back to a monolithic, western-European-centered, subject matter discipline-oriented curriculum. For high performance on objective tests, teachers and students must concentrate on the standard academic content provided in commercial texts. Again, it must be emphasized that textbook and test producing companies are owned by the same trans-global corporations (Metcalf, 2002).

12.2 Religious conservatives have long been troubled by the prospect that public school personnel teach secular values to children that are not consistent with, or drawn from, their own religious tenets. Some fundamentalist parents have taken their children out of public schools to be home schooled. Others are determined that if public schools will not be shaped by Christian content, curriculum must be restricted to academic subject matter. Conservatives, who believe in the superiority of western-European culture, have been alarmed by multicultural encroachment on traditional education. Again, because test content drives teachers to cover the conservative curriculum that will be on the test, they approve of high-stakes testing.

### Benefits for Advocates of School Privatization

**Although, constitutionally, education has been deemed a State responsibility, NCLB has vastly extended federal power over education.**

school populations. *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* regulations exert control over all schools by insisting they document continuous annual progress. Although, constitutionally, education has been deemed a State

13.1 Capitalist conservatives appear to advocate for more and more tests to prove the general inadequacy of public schooling. Earlier high-stakes initiatives had an impact only on failing schools; that is, low-income, minority

responsibility, *NCLB* has vastly extended federal power over education. This coincides with corporations' global level of control and capitalist plans to privatize the world. True believers, who have faith in the rationality and benefits of pure market economy, eschew anything public. They demand private ownership of industry, national resources, health, welfare, and education. Evidence of public school failure provides an incentive for privatization. *NCLB* offers the condition that families can move their children from failing to successful schools, including private ones. Thus, the federal government mandates that vouchers be provided for private schools. Although their agenda for privatization is less encompassing and not founded on free market ideology, the fundamentalist religious right and racial separatists join the public education bashing in order to fund the parochial and/or segregated schools of their choice. The pluralist, democratic dream of diverse children coming together in public schools is forsaken.

### **Benefits for Enterprising School Superintendents**

14.1 High-stakes tests have distinctive outcomes for various school districts.

Given the high correlation between social class/race and achievement outcomes, it is evident that school districts with the lowest percentage of children on free and reduced lunch will have higher scores and will look best when test outcomes are publicized. Administrators and teachers in high-income school catchments zones tend to believe that higher scores are due to their management and instructional competencies (Brantlinger, 2003). Such deceptive boasting is not as corrupt as the deliberate manipulation of the student test pool done to make a district and its administration look good. In an article graphically entitled, "Flunk 'em or get them classified," Anne McGill-Franzen and Richard Allington (1993) exposed administrators' practice of classifying students as disabled in order to eliminate them from the test pool and retaining students ineligible for classification so their scores could be averaged into a lower grade level. These actions resulted in dramatic improvement in school or district test scores, but had negative consequences for retained and classified students.

**The pluralist, democratic dream of diverse children coming together in public schools is forsaken.**

### **Benefits for Professionals and the Professions**

15.1 Educated professionals both receive and award the credentials that give their class power over much of social life (Bourdieu, 1996; Eagleton, 1990). Historically, expanding numbers of specialists and technical experts correspond to burgeoning abnormalities and pathologies (Caplan, 1995; Capshew, 1999; Kutchins and Kirk, 1997). Special education provides evidence of proliferating disability categories and swelling ranks within them. Many concur that high incidence disabilities (e.g., learning

disability, emotional disturbance, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) have more to do with the nature of schools than the nature of individuals (Apter, 1996; McDermott and Varenne, 1996; Mercer, 1973; Smith, 1997). Classification by experts leads to Others' out-group status (Goffman, 1963). Poor children and children of color are over-represented in special education (Artiles and Trent, 1994; Brantlinger, 1986, 1993; Connor and Boskin, 2001; Harry, 1994; Patton, 1998), as they are in low tracks (Ansalone, 2001). Psychologists have been criticized for naturalizing oppressive standards for social adjustment (Schnog, 1997) and calling difference "deviance" when it is located in Others. They also see traits as fixed rather than influenced by school structures and practices (e.g., social determinism in Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* [1994]).

15.2 Some question the expansion of specialized fields (Brown, 1995; Danforth, 1996; Gordon and Keiser, 1998), and the ever-tightening standards that secure professional monopoly of the highest ranks (Gouldner, 1979; Wright, 1985). Barry Troyna and Carol Vincent (1996) call the elevation of social service professions an "ideology of experts" (131). As professionals gain authority, autonomy is reduced for others (Bourdieu, 1996; Eagleton, 1990; Mills, 1943). Michel Foucault (1977) theorizes that middle-level bureaucrats in schools, penal institutions, and other social agencies use the major disciplinary instruments of hierarchic surveillance, normalizing sanctions, and examination; mechanisms recognizable in the adoption of high-stakes tests and other components of the accountability and standards movement. Professional norms are made to appear universal and objective through technical and scientific (ideological) story-telling. The pretense of knowledge as authorless, disinterested, and value-free is what Thomas Nagel (1986) calls the view from nowhere. Apfelbaum (1999) locates such knowledge in those at the powerful center of social life. Foucault (1980) notes that universal intellectuals who contribute to an understanding of social life have been replaced by specific intellectuals who have credentials and technical expertise to work narrowly within academic disciplines. Such "faceless professionals" are "competent members of a social class going about their business" (7). James Martin (1998) reminds readers of Gramsci's observation that even intellectuals from working classes cease to serve their original class interests and play a conservative role by supporting the status quo.

15.3 In modern times, social divisions are institutionalized. Social class formation intersects with the structure of social agencies (education, welfare, judicial, penal, mental health), which are regulated by governmental acts. Legislators pass laws and professionals develop protocols for practices that comply with the laws. Most of these regulations have a differential impact on high- and low-income people.

Official regimentation depersonalizes human actions, while at the same time solidifying hierarchical relations. For example, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1990) authorizes disability categories and due process guidelines for treatment supposedly to ensure equal and appropriate treatment. States mandate high-stakes tests and accountability measures apparently for the purpose of bringing low achievers up to speed. So, as officials monitor those under their control, doling out rewards and sanctioning failure, personnel at each bureaucratic level simply comply with established procedures to "do their jobs." Power imbalances between local actors do not appear to be the result of intentional acts. Thus, class power disparities and hierarchies are disguised as they are perpetuated. All the while, professionals do benefit from ever-tightening standards to secure their monopoly of high ranks.

15.4 In the end, professionals have a social class position. Erik Olin Wright (1985) postulates that what he calls the "new middle class" is a contradictory class who do not benefit from corporate profits to the same extent as elite classes; still their financial and social interests are tied to the market. Hence, they gain from a market economy and market thinking (Dale, 2001; Rizvi and Lingard, 2001). The current trend in teacher education is to expect professors to fall in line with political and business agendas (Pinar, 2000).

**The current trend in teacher education is to expect professors to fall in line with political and business agendas.**

Bourdieu (1996) maintains that with their material power and ideological control, affluent people use schools to sanctify social divisions – to impose the symbolic violence of ranking and segregating. Subordinates are

positioned as educational consumers in need of services; dominant classes are promoted as experts who provide service. For professionals to work there must be constituencies to serve. A professional class would still be employed in egalitarian societies; yet, the swelling of an underclass or of people "at risk" or "with needs" means employment security for credentialed experts who have the specific expertise needed in the increasing bureaucratization of social services.

### **Benefits for Members of the Educated Middle Class**

16.1 Although schools in the United States always have relied on standardized tests to chart student progress, under the standards and accountability movements, testing has intensified and the stakes for failing and passing have increased. A close-to-home explanation for the onslaught of tests is that they provide opportunity for those who do well on tests to prove their superiority. Disparate test results reaffirm common sense notions that positive personal attributes account for school success – that middle-class children are intellectually superior and/or have better work ethics. Documenting poor children's

inadequacies reaffirms the belief that their relegation to lesser school circumstances is necessary and not discriminatory. The stronger the measures used to prove inferiority and the more replications of the extensiveness of Others' flaws, the more credible the arguments about status differentials, hence the more justification for distinguishing practices that separate "advanced" children into exclusive neighborhood schools and high-ability groups and tracks (Brantlinger, 2003). Because middle-class children typically have no trouble passing tests, they do not need to worry about the graduate exit exam hurdle. Indeed, they benefit from the diploma's scarcity. When every student can earn a diploma, it has little value as a credential. To have worth, status markers must be scarce. Adults of this class vote to limit access to diplomas and other enriched school conditions — they legislate measures and control institutions in ways that perpetuate distinctions; plainly put, they "hog resources" (Sleeter, Gutierrez, New and Takata, 1992: 173). Richard Rorty (1997) argues that "suburbanites, who know social mobility advanced their parents' fates, see nothing wrong with belonging to a hereditary caste," and having a "secession of the successful" by preventing the mobility of Others (86). Disparate test scores explain school inequities as related to school proficiencies to both the haves and the have-nots — that is how hegemony works.

16.2 Although educated middle-class people may believe they have no corporate connections, they are a contradictory class who tie their fate to competitive corporate practices (Wright, 1985). They have social and material advantage in school and post-school situations. So, one answer to the question of who benefits from gateway exams is that those who win in education and occupation seek increasingly conclusive evidence of their superiority to justify taking home larger and larger shares of the national economic pie. It is no coincidence that those found to be inadequate are the least powerful citizens. At a time of rising wages for the educated middle class (U.S. Census, 2001), stratified outcomes strengthen the image of Others' faults and justify uneven wage structures and growing income gaps. The affluent need evidence of their worth to provide a grounding for privilege. Dominant classes depend on storied reasons (ideologies) for Others' failures because cut-throat competition and slanted playing fields are not admired or condoned. Selfishness and greed are subject to approbation by religious and secular standards (Bersoff, 1999). According to Roy F. Baumeister (1996), "The desire to think well of oneself is one of the most fundamental and pervasive motivations in human psychological function" (27). Draconian measures adopted to document Others' inferiority can be understood as attempts to maintain, restore, or improve the self-evaluation of perpetual winners.

16.3 Although the United States is the largest imperial power in history, this fact rarely is mentioned. Nor do Americans refer to themselves as

capitalists (Kailin, 2000). As with typical neoliberal discourses, when capitalism is addressed, it is framed in democratic or Enlightenment terms as individual rights, freedom, and progress rather than as imperialism (Sleeter, 2000). This viewpoint ignores issues of power and does not name who is and who is not advantaged (Epstein and Steinberg, 1997). Aijaz Ahmad (1992) claims that economic realities surround and saturate us; that corporate repressions, the rise of a compliant bourgeoisie [college-educated, managerial class], and strengthened market mentality regarding schools are interrelated.

### **The Next Essential Question: Does Anybody Win?**

17.1 Americans naively believe that modernity means a progression of peoples and countries toward independence and general improvement in material and social conditions. Development of democratic market economies generally is perceived as an unquestionable public good. Yet, economic and political/social goals diverge. Liberty in the market has not meant liberty for most people. Corporate global control has diminished rather than increased national or personal independence (Appadurai, 1996).

**Liberty in the market  
has not meant liberty  
for most people.**

Capitalism's global rampage has gone mostly uncontested as trans-global corporations negotiate away national governments' regulations. Dennis Carlson and Michael Apple (1998) refer to Gramsci's theory that advanced capitalist societies are in an era of factory mass production in which consumerism has emerged to drive industrialization and public institutional organization. Consumption patterns caused by relative affluence have decimated the world's forests, which has disastrous consequences for indigenous peoples, wild life, and global ecology including global warming and volatile weather patterns. In reference to the tremendous growth of suburbs and extensive use of cars, James Howard Kunstler (2000) tallies up the disastrous economic, environmental, social, and spiritual costs that America pays for its consumer-crazed lifestyle. Globalization has meant an increasing concentration of extreme wealth in relatively few international families and increasing poverty and hopelessness among large sectors of world society (Anyon, 2000; Garmarnikow and Green, 2000).

17.2 In thinking about recent political and economic trends, "drift" captures the idea that things happen without public deliberation or conscious planning on the part of a broad base of citizens. By claiming that declining environmental and social conditions are inevitable, trans-global corporations deny their intentionality and avoid being held accountable for contributing to dire social and natural outcomes. Class inequalities have not been made a pressing national concern by either party; indeed, they are barely acknowledged (O'Brien, 1998). Yet, Rorty (1997) claims that the citizen self-respect needed for participation in

democratic deliberation is incompatible with large social divisions.

**Disparate economic and social conditions pit citizens against each other; the struggle is less often between classes than within them.**

Disparate economic and social conditions pit citizens against each other; the struggle is less often between classes than within them. Elites

compete with each other for the rewards of high-paying and high-status positions (Newman, 1998). Subordinates struggle among themselves over limited resources and access to power. Internal strife among impoverished people, whether based on racism or convenient outlets for expressions of anger and frustration, does not benefit anyone. It is based on false consciousness of class interest and misperception of one's enemy.

17.3 Not coincidentally, the burgeoning development of trans-global corporations has occurred simultaneously with the schools' emphasis on dispensing only knowledge valued by business. With this market agenda for education, teachers are to be "passive, objective, and efficient distributors of technical information" (Leistyna, 1999: 7). Teacher educators tend to have pre-service teachers learn an aggregate of measurable academic skills and thus have a conservative impact on teacher practice (Brantlinger, 1996; Hatton, 1997). Knowledge is standardized and commodified so it can be assessed by high-stakes measures and translated into credentials and differentiated status (Saavreda, 2000). Bourdieu (1984) claims that school knowledge is mainly useful as cultural capital that produces social class distinctions. Thus, knowledge is power (Foucault, 1980). David Labaree (1997) argues that under current conditions of schooling, students can succeed [pass tests, get good grades] without learning. Carlson and Apple (1998) warn that the narrow academic focus of modern curriculum has negative effects on identity formation, so both successful and unsuccessful students pay a price for schools' excessive competition and strict emphasis on credentialing. Barry Osbourne (1996) argues that the unfair sorting of technocratic education has a negative impact on unsuccessful students and, like Rorty, he claims when inequalities escalate, democracy is under threat internally. Unregulated and expansive business development, corporate intervention in schooling, and attempts to legislate control over school outcomes result in a reproduction of the current social class and wage structure that bind students to the existing social order (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbraidsen and Murillo, 2002; Neill, 2000; Sleeter, 2000).

17.4 Julie Kailin (2000) argues that high-stakes testing, retention, and accountability standards are new ways to create notions of failure and keep the masses back. She questions how such reforms can be constructive, when, for example, in the city of New Orleans, 91 out of 103

schools are considered below adequate (failing) schools in which the official response is to subject students, teachers, and administrators to stringent repercussions. Monty Neill (2000) calls high-stakes tests a bad reflection of even the better parts of standards. He delineates that this testing movement causes: (1) a narrowing of curricula through the elimination of curricular depth because tests cover general factual knowledge; (2) increased student dropout or push-out rates; (3) a weakening of constructive test purposes; (4) intensified mechanistic school (busy) work; (5) bureaucratized, centralized school power; (6) disempowered teachers; (7) alienated students; and (8) standardized minds.

### **Conclusion: Opposing High-Stakes Testing (and Dominance)**

18.1 My big picture view of who benefits from high-stakes testing frames "winners" in a way that challenges the neutrality of educated middle-class people. This framing may shed light on the lack of effective resistance to standards and accountability initiatives, in spite of widespread discontent about them (note the preponderance of critical presentations on the 2003 American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting program). Prominent educators and scholars have taken a stand against the high-stakes juggernaut. Deborah Meier (1994, 2000) asks that the purpose and nature of schools be examined in order to better align their means to their ends; she insists that high-stakes measures are not the answer to achievement disparities. Others warn that implementing differentiating educational policies and practices force certain children into debilitating roles (Mehan, Hubbard and Villanueva, 1994; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan and Lipton, 2000; Noddings, 2000). Linda McNeil (2000) urges educators not to consent to punitive measures advocated by a corporate elite whose main concern is personal profit and not children. Alfie Kohn (1998) insists that administrators "respect the moral bottom line" and not give in to requests of self-centered school patrons (576). The unnamed editors of *Rethinking Schools* (2000) recommend that schools should be responsible to communities, not the marketplace, be actively multicultural and anti-racist, be willing to promote social justice for all, be geared toward learning for life and the needs of democracy, receive adequate and equal resources, and collaborate with parents and community members. Looking beyond schools, they insist that communities be revitalized.

18.2 In considering what might work to increase equity in modern times, general principles can be drawn from such intellectuals as Karl Polanyi (1957), who claims that reciprocity (the giving and receiving according to need), the dominant mode of exchange in traditional societies, should be the principle for modern ones. John Rawls (1971) recommends distributive justice so the neediest in society are the first to get scarce resources. Eva Feder Kittay (1999), the mother of a disabled child, looks

at the dependency work of women and writes that her aim is to "find a knife sharp enough to cut through the fiction of our independence" (xiii). Similarly, Christine Koggel (1998) suggests instead of asking what independent, autonomous agents need, a relationship approach to equality asks what moral persons embedded in relationships of interdependency should have to flourish.

18.3 Due to the routinized forms of non-involvement of teachers in real decision-making and the disruption of top-down high-stakes reform pressures, Kathryn Herr (2000) advocates asking teachers to name their own concerns. Elizabeth Saavedra (2000) recommends that teachers not privilege external expert knowledge aligned with corporate interests, refuse to become disempowered technicians, quit allowing themselves to be pathologized, discontinue unhealthy competitiveness with each other, and fight oppressive control forced on them by somebody else's idea of reform. Seeing the need for solidarity and authentic partnerships among teachers, Saavedra (2000) suggests they join teachers' movements. An example of teacher activism is the Florida teachers who traveled six hours to return their bonuses (for students' high scores) to Governor Jeb

Bush in order to focus attention on what they see as a misuse of the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test to rank schools (FairTest, Winter

**Activism requires commitment, hard work, and especially the bravery to leave the privileged center of mainstream life and confront it.**

1999-2000b: 5). Teachers' fight for equity and social justice must be joined by others. For activism to succeed it must have the critical mass necessary for an effective social movement (Marwell and Oliver, 1993; Meyer and Tarrow, 1998; Tarrow, 1998). Activism requires commitment, hard work, and especially the bravery to leave the privileged center of mainstream life and confront it. Social movements are necessarily extra-institutional; for durable change they must disrupt rather than interrupt dominant practice (Katzenstein, 1998).

18.4 Although I assign a thinking and theorizing role broadly to all humans, it is necessary that those paid to set trends in academia or lead in schools should be held most accountable for deep, critical thinking about improving the life circumstances for citizens. Throughout his work, Gramsci called for intellectuals to be consciously reflective social analysts. His test for this type of intellectual production was the extent to which it fused with the life of the masses and mobilized them to think critically about their circumstances (Martin, 1998). This means that intellectuals should interrogate their own tacit knowledge and class-embedded ideologies. Paulo Freire (1970, 1973, 1985) infused consciousness raising into literacy instruction. Edward Said (1994) claimed that real intellectuals are moved by metaphysical passions about disinterested principles of justice and truth — they denounce corruption,

defend the weak, and defy imperfect or oppressive authority. C. Wright Mills' (1963) intellectuals had impassioned social visions. Valerie Scatamburlo (1998) echoes Karl Marx's call for ruthless criticism of everything that exists – that is not afraid of its own conclusions or of conflict with existing power relations. David Harvey (1996) argues that although it is dangerous in academia to confess to being "meta" about anything, he believes the grand metanarratives about social equity (e.g., Marxism) and Enlightenment ideals of equality and justice are relevant to today's society. Valerie Walkerdine (2000) recommends creating new spaces in which people can reinvent themselves [and Others] in more positive ways. She notes that as subject positions change for women, men must be prepared to cope with the loss of a particular kind of masculinity. In a similar vein, new roles and identities must be developed for the traditionally oppressed and the traditional oppressors.

18.5 Hence those of us in the center of mainstream social life must be willing to give up material and status advantage so that egalitarian ideals might be realized. We scholars should not be exempt from our own critical insights (Bourdieu, 1998). In terms of readiness for change, Harvey (1996) asserts: "It transpires that there is not a region in the world where manifestations of anger and discontent with the capitalist system cannot be found" (430). Rather than drifting passively (Eliasoph, 1998), it is time to take stock of trends and make deliberate democratic decisions about the future (Elster, 1998). Gabriele Oettingen (1996) suggests that people generate positive fantasies and mental images depicting future events and scenarios; that optimism has beneficial effects on motivation, cognition, and affect. Michael Schudson (1998) advocates the need to capture the national imagination with a large moral mission. In this article, I have asked "who benefits" from high-stakes testing, and have shown how we, as members of the educated class, are complicit in maintaining hierarchies. I ask readers to join a counter-movement to oppose stratifying measures and work to overcome hierarchical and excluding relations in school and society.

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