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The “Highly Qualified Teacher” Trope

Education Policy and Democratic Teacher Development in the Face of Risk, Uncertainty, and Blame

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Abstract

The descriptor, 'highly qualified teacher,' serves as a trope in educational reform rhetoric that invites interrogation if it is to be vaunted as a key signifier of utopian thinking about improving American education in our times. Such interrogation may be furthered by informed awareness of the past, critical attentiveness to the present, and engaged openness for a future that reaches towards democratic aspiration as its guiding ethos. A trilateral orientation of historical awareness, policy critique, and democratic educative theory are linked to interrogate how 'quality' as a construct is constrained and distorted in talk about '21st century skills' and teacher quality as guarantors of global economic competitiveness. Of primary concern is how the distortion manifests in the face of risk and uncertainty as features of a 'culture of blame' under a neo-liberal logic that replaces democracy with corporatist control. The 'highly qualified teacher' trope is interrogated and subverted as it is contrasted with a 'democratic conception of professionalism' and 'wide-awakeness' in 'the nightmare that is the present'.



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trope [Fr. *trope*, L. *tropus*, Gr. *tropos*, a trope or figure, a turn, *trepō*, to turn.] *Rhet.* a word or expression intentionally used in a different sense from that which it ordinarily possesses; a figure of speech.¹

Introduction: The Debate over Teacher Quality

The ‘highly qualified teacher’ trope currently in vogue in education reform rhetoric invites interrogation if it is to be vaunted as a key signifier of 21st century thinking about improving American schooling. Teaching quality is, of course, an important matter, but questions of how it should be defined and whether any singular definition should be formalized are arguable. The trope derives from the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which essentially mandates the means (degrees, certification credentials, and testing) by which public school teachers may be pronounced as having attained ‘highly qualified’ status, with leeway afforded to states with regard to alternative preparation routes and with regard to teachers in ‘public charter schools,’ to whom a state’s laws may apply differently (see, e.g., Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2008).

Despite its vagueness and incoherence, the trope has insinuated itself into discourse about improving teacher practice and is being used in a way that conforms to a high-stakes testing regimen now linked to teacher evaluation. Teacher education programs are affected as well, since alignment with state requirements spawned by anxiety over the status of their teachers may be displacing viable democratic alternatives. The effect may be that teacher educators teach precisely what states prescribe and institutions of higher education realign their programs to meet such demands. As Au (2010) points out, the current policies surrounding high-stakes testing, now linked to evaluation of public school teacher quality and qualifications, are “anti-democratic by design” (p. 11).

Quality and qualified are, in fact, not equivalent terms (Mullen & Farinas, 2003). Berliner (2005) notes that “quality is an ineffable concept,” that defining it “always requires value judgments about which disagreements abound,” and that “the language used to rally the politically faithful is kept purposely ambiguous, with the term highly qualified providing no concrete referents for anyone to understand what is so ardently being promoted” (p. 206).² He suggests that the use of the trope under NCLB may be “political spectacle (Smith, 2004); pure theater with no other purpose than to look like something positive is happening, when it is not” (Berliner, 2005, p. 205). As Berliner (2005) observes, “it is hard to make the case that America’s teachers in general are not qualified” (p. 205), even though this is precisely what is implied by NCLB and echoed in more recent teacher evaluation reform rhetoric.

¹ *The New Grolier Webster International Dictionary of the English Language* (1972), p. 1058.

² It is important to note here, however, that a newly energized teacher quality evaluation industry has emerged, and has produced frameworks such as TAP™ (The System for Teacher and Student Advancement), operated by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, and the Danielson Framework, implemented in Chicago Public Schools in coordination with the Consortium on Chicago School Research.

To assess the concept of teaching quality in such a scenario requires assessing the policy context in which teacher education and teaching are situated. This context is influenced domestically by foundations, think tanks, institutes, government agencies, commercial providers of educational services and products, other business groups, advocacy groups, public press, and media corporations. Current U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has played a powerful role in dramatizing the tone of this context. Paulson and Khadaroo (2010) report that reform momentum "seems to be achieving critical mass with Duncan's market-based approaches" and that Race to the Top funds (\$4.3 billion) have given him "unprecedented" control in "lifting caps on charter schools and tying teacher evaluations to student achievement" (p. 2).

Duncan is following the Renaissance 2010 reform model used for Chicago Public Schools (CPS), a model that Saltman (2007) contends was "pushed by the long-standing and concerted efforts of business groups" and the neoliberal ideology they espouse; "believes a racialized economic grab to profit from [the closing of] public housing and public schooling and to seize desirable real estate" in a "land grab" that displaces poor people, especially those of color; and "exemplifies a shift in educational and political governance in a highly undemocratic direction" (p. 120). Lipman's (2004) account details how Duncan closed "'low-performing' schools" in Chicago's "African American West and South Sides over furious protests by families and teachers" (p. 67) in 2002, just months after he had praised these schools for academic improvement. It was then announced that they would be reopened as private-public ventures called "Renaissance Schools" (p. 67). Lipman (2004) recounts "the grassroots analysis of community residents and teachers" regarding this policy, namely, that these schools were closed "to force out African American families in order to pave the way for gentrification" (p. 67). She also states that "despite promises of significant community input in the schools' redesign, reports are that parents and long-time community members have been closed out of the process (Weissman, 2002)" (as cited in Lipman, 2004, p. 67). Lipman exposes the reform as a class issue: "post-2001 policies have continued to further gentrification and displacement, appealing to, and advantaging, the middle class at the expense of low-income families" (p. 67).

She further characterizes the CPS policy agenda as "part of a politics of race and class that serves global city development and economic restructuring and has a life of its own in Chicago's racialized history" (pp. 68-69), noting that "the discourse of control and authority may also be a preemptive response to an urban context simmering with potentially explosive contradictions of wealth and poverty, development and abandonment, and blatant economic and social power alongside disempowerment" (p. 69). Preemption, it should be noted, serves as a common motif in our times. Tying evaluation of teacher quality to the test scores of disadvantaged students without alleviating the circumstances that create disadvantage is also one way to disempower both teachers and the unions that protect and defend them. Hursh and Lipman (2008) document how Renaissance 2010 policies "have increased corporate and governmental intervention into daily life and exacerbated economic, social, and spatial inequalities along lines of class, race, and ethnicity" (p. 107) as an "organized body" of "powerful corporate and financial elites" are installed "as direct actors in shaping public school policy and directing its implementation" (p. 109).

The executive director of the Chicago International Charter Schools was recently quoted as saying that replacing public schools in Chicago with charter schools made Duncan realize "that [autonomy] was what makes charter schools successful" (as cited in Paulson & Khadaroo, 2010, p. 5). The authors note, further, that a Consortium of Chicago School Research (CCSR)

study “showed that kids from schools he closed simply ended up in schools that were just as bad or worse” (p. 5). As a result of Duncan’s influence, nevertheless, thirteen states now allow more charter schools and six states that had previously “prohibited evaluating teachers based on student achievement” (Paulson & Khadaroo, 2010, p. 7) have since eliminated such prohibitions, with at least eleven more states now mandating this linkage. The most dramatic option of Race to the Top and similar federal grant competitions is the turnaround model used in Chicago, recently evidenced in the firing of the principal and teachers at Central Falls High School in Rhode Island in February, 2009 (Brogadir, 2010). Paulson and Khadaroo (2010) contend that this event made teachers everywhere feel “betrayed” (p. 6). This was followed by the mass firing of teachers in Washington, D. C. public schools in late September, 2009, where the teachers were “escorted out of school buildings by police,” (Welsch, Suiters, & Collins, 2009), in essence criminalizing them.

Berry and Darling-Hammond (n.d.) view the situation differently, speaking of a “teacher quality gap” and asserting that NCLB’s mandate of a ‘highly-qualified’ teacher “for every child in every core academic class” represents a “first-of-a-kind federal teaching quality intervention... crafted to remedy one of the most egregious injustices in our public school system: Poor students and those of color are most likely to be taught by inexperienced and underqualified teachers” (p. 1). The authors argue that a number of issues must be addressed, however, before this mandate can be fulfilled. Their first concern is “a sleight of hand on teacher qualifications” that occurred under the previous administration but is continuing today, where states were “encouraged” by the U.S. Department of Education “to redefine certification in ways that eliminate teacher education coursework, student teaching, and ‘other bureaucratic hurdles,’” thus “flying in the face of research showing that teachers who undergo traditional preparation and certification produce higher student achievement gains” (p. 2).

Berry and Darling-Hammond (n.d.) also highlight diversity as an issue, rejecting the use of multiple-choice tests to measure teacher qualifications, since this type of test fails to evaluate “actual teaching skills or performances necessary to teach diverse students effectively” (p. 2; see also Berry, 2002). The authors advocate for a new system much like the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) model to arrive at “an authentic assessment of practice” vis-à-vis diverse learners (p. 2). Finally, they draw attention to the “woeful disregard for teacher working conditions,” arguing that simply paying teachers more is insufficient, i.e., that “the conditions have to be in place to give them a chance to succeed,” since improving both student achievement and teacher retention are strongly affected by “school leadership, time for high quality professional development, and teacher empowerment” (p. 3). Given their concern over teacher attrition, especially its costs, they call for a “national teacher quality and supply policy” (p. 4). Their concern is specific to the lack of qualified teachers as a supply issue for resource-poor schools. Framing the lack of teacher quality and qualifications as a general crisis, then, displaces the attention and action needed to turn resource-poor public schools into resource-rich public schools, which would, the authors argue, draw ‘highly qualified’ teachers to these schools and foster school improvement in many other ways as well. Importantly, the authors note that research has shown “that about one-third of teachers leave the profession due to dissatisfaction, caused primarily by problems in leadership, autonomy, and time” (p. 7).

While debates about evaluating teacher quality raged in educational journals and websites after NCLB was passed in 2001, it is Secretary Duncan’s reformist zeal that lit the fire of true controversy in the public eye with regard to his ‘turnaround’ initiatives (Aarons, 2010). A flurry

of media activity surrounded this agenda in the months leading up to the opening (and closing) of schools in 2009: e.g., "Duncan outlines school reform agenda" (Stansbury, 2009); "Duncan's call for school turnarounds sparks debate" (Gewertz, 2009); "Administration takes aim at state laws on teachers" (Dillon, 2009); "Teacher quality under the microscope" (Stansbury, 2009).

Duncan's (2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d) remarks in a series of speeches set a new tone for educational reform rhetoric and for the direction of national education policy. In a (2009a) speech at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, he said that what he liked most "about our best charters is that they think differently" (p. 2) as he proposed a \$52 million increase in charter school funding for 2010 and advocated changing current laws to "allow federally-funded charters to replicate" (p. 2) as "laboratories of innovation that we can all learn from" (p. 3). Describing options available to him, he notes that school takeovers, where "the children stay, and the staff leaves," are very important "if you really want a culture change," which, he added, "may very well be a requirement of the grants" (p. 4).

A second option is a 'Restart' model (EPLC, 2010),³ with schools handed over to "a charter or for-profit management organization" (Duncan, 2009a, p. 4) with autonomy to innovate. A new entrepreneurial managerial class is thus apparently slated to oversee American schooling, a class less bound by bureaucratic control and more at liberty to 'think differently,' given its newly authoritative status: this class has literally been *invited* to take over American schooling (see Duncan, 2009c; Hursh & Lipman, 2008; Saltman, 2007). A third option involves school closures, and a final option "keeps most of the existing staff but changes the culture" in other ways, including the establishment of "a rigorous performance evaluation system" (Duncan, 2009a, p. 4) linking teacher evaluation to student scores on high-stakes tests. Stressing the need to start early "to build teams that will take over schools in the fall of 2010" (p. 4), Duncan offered the use of Title I funds to accomplish this feat. His job, as he sees it, is "to drive the public consensus toward the desired outcome" (p. 5) while exhorting charter school organizations to go forth and multiply.

At Teachers College at Columbia University, Duncan (2009c) called for "a sea change" (p. 1) in how schools of education function, claiming that "by almost any standard," both colleges and departments of education "are doing a mediocre job of preparing teachers for the realities of the 21st century classroom" (p. 1). Among his concerns is the "massive exodus of Baby Boomers from the teaching force in the next decade" (p. 1). The result of this 'exodus,' he asserts, is that "teaching is going to be a booming profession," but he insisted that his real concern is a shortage of "great teachers in the schools and communities where they are needed most" (p. 1). This raises the stakes for the issue of how 'great teachers' are defined and who has the power to say what 'highly qualified' actually means. It also indicates the potential for massive growth in teacher education, however it is framed, as an 'industry.'

Granting that "teaching has never been more difficult," he speaks in crisis mode of a profession that "has never been more important," in a scenario where "the desperate need for more student success has never been so urgent" (p. 1) as he poses the question: "Are we

³ The Education Policy and Leadership Center Notebook of September 13, 2010, describes these initiatives in terms of "federal guidance" that "established four bold school reform models: Turnaround, Restart, School Closure or Transformation" (p. 2).

adequately preparing future teachers to win this critical battle?” (p. 2). As Mathison (2008) notes vis-à-vis the rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), 1983), Duncan’s rhetoric amounts to “apocalyptic predictions mixed with military metaphors” (Mathison, 2008, p. 8). He challenges “every teacher education program today to make better outcomes for students the overarching mission that propels all their efforts” so that we equip a “new generation of well-prepared teachers” to “significantly boost student learning and increase college-readiness” (Duncan, 2009c, p. 2), implying (a) that this element is presently missing in the mission of such institutions and (b) that not only teacher evaluation, but the evaluation of teacher education programs as well, should be linked to student test results.

Under this accusatory assault, it is hard to remember that his rhetoric is aimed at public schooling that does *not* meet public accountability standards under NCLB, amounting to approximately 5% and differentiated from the vast majority of public schools by ‘savage inequalities’ that are ‘the shame of the nation’ (Kozol, 1992, 2005). Such disparities reflect social, cultural, political, and economic issues affecting poor and minority populations in substandard schools, particularly a lack of political will to ease social injustices, not the issue of teacher quality overall. Duncan (2009c) offers the reminder that “America’s taxpayers already generously support teacher preparation programs,” and warns that “this investment should be well spent” (p. 2), even if that means, in Saltman’s (2007) terms, “pillaging public education for profit” as “public investment” in those schools having “the largest reproductive role of turning out managers and leaders” coexists with “a pattern of destroying and commodifying schools” that are less favored under current policies (p. 13).⁴

Duncan (2009c) calls on graduate schools of education “to research and test what works to improve student learning” (p. 2), invoking scientifically-based educational research to guarantee success. He rehearses critiques of public schooling as he questions why teacher education programs have “historically been so difficult to reform” (p. 3). He advocates for “real change, based on the real outcomes of children,” which he sees as a “revolutionary” idea (p. 4). Finally, he commends teacher education programs that “have opened their doors to alternative certification programs” (p. 4), thus contradicting Berry and Darling-Hammond’s (n.d.) claim that “teachers who undergo traditional preparation and certification produce higher student achievement gains” (p. 2).

The debate recounted here, then, reflects disputes over what teaching quality means and how it should be assessed; the role of certification and alternative routes in ensuring quality outcomes; how teacher education should function in this regard; and whether any space exists outside of charter schools for autonomy, given the unquestioned assumption that we can specify what constitutes effective teaching and effective teacher preparation, using charter schools as ‘laboratories of innovation’ (Duncan, 2009a, p. 3). Apparently, ‘revolutionary’ answers are being sought by this administration for top-down implementation in public schools nationwide, thus further eroding the very autonomy so lauded in Duncan’s comments. These issues are all part of the small picture. The big picture, however, is even more complicated.

⁴ See also Walter C. Parker (2005), Teaching against idiocy, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(5), p. 344, in which Parker makes a distinction, for purposes of thinking about democracy, between ‘taxpayers’ and citizens.

Social Context and Social Change

While the milieus in which teaching takes place are local and thus variable, they are also affected by socio-cultural, political-economic, ideological, technological, and other changes in the national and now global context as well. The impacts of social change on schooling are complex and should be considered in their entirety when assessing education policy. Changes often emerge as a result of specific events, and constellations of change can dramatically transform these milieus. Events triggering abrupt change(s) can definitively shift official and public thinking about purposes and processes of schooling, thus affecting thinking about teaching quality as well. Changes in U.S. culture from the 1970s to the 1990s, for instance, led to reifying standards and accountability in schools across the nation; critics contend that this continues to have perverse effects on teaching and learning today (see, e.g., Hursh, 2008; Mathison & Ross, 2008).

In current education policy discourse, the (un)official frame for the ‘highly qualified’ teacher is one who gets good test results, accompanied either by rewards for fitting the frame (e.g., ‘merit’ pay) or by punitive sanctions for failing to do so. One punitive sanction is pronouncing those who are guilty of “(supposed) wrongful failing to act” (Lau, 2009, p. 662)—i.e., not raising test scores sufficiently—as not *belonging* in the teaching corps (Yarrow, 2009). Critics see this frame as serving particular political-economic purposes and/or question the criteria for assessment. The historic ‘struggle for the American curriculum’ (Kliebard, 2004) has been supplanted by a struggle for producing the ‘highly qualified teacher’ as a newly branded icon and a reproducible commodity. Winning this struggle as framed depends upon a discourse grounded in certainty of outcome—i.e., guaranteeing ‘quality’ through officially prescribed qualification processes, definitive assessment criteria tied to student test scores, and stringent control of teacher education programs and teacher practice. Finally, the trope is linked to an official enunciation of purpose, singularly envisioned in terms of preparing (future) workers to compete for global economic advantage and thus to repair the damage to the national economy caused by what Barber (2001) calls “a capitalism run wild because it has been uprooted from the humanizing constraints of the democratic nation-state” (p. xii).

One effect of this discourse, critics argue, is to further erode teacher autonomy, which becomes a victim of this struggle as the official enunciation of purpose shuts out a democratic alternative. Education policies supporting corporate agendas, critics claim, are thus enforced through a totalized approach constituting a system of surveillance that Vinson and Ross (2003) see as a ‘new disciplinarity’ for teachers (see also Lipman, 2004). The U.S. has become a ‘surveillance society’ (Klein, 2007, p. 303), where even the semblance of autonomy, linked in important ways to teaching and learning, evaporates. Under such a regimen, democracy itself is at risk.

Culture in the U.S. is constrained by its moorings in a capitalist political economy and is ‘manufactured’ by corporate media to some extent, but may also be profoundly affected by shifts in civic temper resulting from or coinciding with change-events where such shifts congeal to form a zeitgeist. September 11, 2001, was just such an event, and, together with other transformative events rolling over the American public like ‘shock waves’ (Nicholson-Goodman, 2009, p. 4) as television became a delivery service for terror (Danner, 2001), forged what Massumi (2002) terms an ‘event-space’ (p. 75). In this space, the effects of social change, like *risk*, *uncertainty*, and *blame*, intensified as they were fueled by a dramatic shift in civic temper:

e.g., a ubiquitous call for ‘unity’ displaced sensitivity to diversity, while a new privileging of the wealthy, coupled with enormous investment in military response, subverted attention to addressing social needs and drained resources for meeting those needs.

Civic temper was, in fact, inflamed as belonging per se was questioned—recall, e.g., the wave of patriotic zeal to re-assert our national identity and repair our wounded national psyche (Mailer, 2003); accusations from the so-called ‘right’ that ‘dissenters’ were *un-American*, even *anti-American*; and the ‘othering’ of Muslims, categorically stereotyped as terrorists or terrorist-sympathizers. Barber (2001) frames the event in terms of an ongoing battle between “wild terrorism” (Jihad) and “wild capitalism” (McWorld) (p. xxiii) that squeezes democracy out of the picture. While Kellner (2005) sees this framing as “too negative” in the sense that it fails “to adequately describe the democratic and progressive forces within both,” he grants that Jihad and McWorld also show tendencies “opposing and undermining democratization” (p. 89).

Kellner (2005) sees this scenario as “marked by a conflict between growing centralization and organization of power and wealth in the hands of the few,” and “opposing processes exhibiting a fragmentation of power that is more plural, multiple, and open to contestation” (p. 91). Kellner (2005) therefore concludes that “it is up to individuals and groups to find openings for progressive political intervention and social transformation” (p. 91) as he offers cultural, social, and technological literacies as viable responses to the conflict and urges the use of “information and media technologies to discuss what kind of society people today want and to oppose the society against which people resist and struggle” (p. 108). Massumi (2002), attending to the intricate theoretics of such technologies, contends that capitalism, given its global technological complexes, now represents the “global usurpation of belonging” as he lays out a methodological challenge “to rethink and reexperience [*sic*] the individual and the collective” (p. 88).

Teachers have been portrayed, in partisan education policy discourse, as a negative collective force requiring surveillance and control, an internal enemy putting the nation ‘at risk’ (NCEE, 1983). Current discourse positions teachers *individually* as primary guarantors of—or conversely, hindrances to—success in a national struggle for global economic advantage, focusing solely on this struggle—and distorting it (Hirtt, 2009)—as the purpose of schooling. At the same time, the teaching profession is stuck *collectively* in a metaphorical public pillory, regardless of how ‘highly qualified’ individual teachers are or how ‘effective’ their teaching may be. Such rhetoric targets the individual teacher’s classroom as the locus for improvement (Garman, 2009) in the pursuit of *McWorld’s* economic interests—betraying the national interest of cultivating a democratic society—while the profession as a whole is lambasted as undeserving of either credit or respect.

The strategy of establishing a link between national economic crisis and purportedly low educational performance has produced a public negativity towards and anxiety about public schooling that empowers calls for privatization. The linkage also establishes service to the economy as a sufficient function of an American ‘education.’ Civic preparation—including attention to issues of diversity and concerns for social justice—is supremely important in a society with democratic aspirations (West, 2004). Under neoliberal influence, which relegates decision-making to the markets as a means to mask the political with “the guise of the non-political” (Beck, 1992, p. 185), these concerns are either ignored or dismissed as irrelevant; so is the holistic development of the child, whose status is now reduced to that of a (mere) future

worker whose role is to support the American economy. American schooling, one might argue, has been colonized.

My specific focus here is how the ‘highly qualified teacher’ trope is positioned in a culture transformed by risk, uncertainty, and blame, and my specific concern is with teacher education. These forces are reflected in official rhetoric that reifies the ‘highly qualified teacher’ trope by scapegoating public school teachers as the categorical source of imminent risk. Such rhetoric further intensifies public anxiety, contributing to a zeitgeist that undermines democracy. Gutmann’s (1999) ‘democratic conception of teacher professionalism’ (p. 80) is worth exploring, then, as a way to reframe the challenges of schooling and teaching in a ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992) embedded in a ‘culture of blame’ (Lau, 2009) during an ‘era of uncertainty’ (Porter, 1999), because it speaks to the issue of public deliberation of educational purpose and policy.

A deliberative democratic approach is warranted, further, given the global policy war being waged against public schooling. Apple (2004) argues that perceptions of public schooling have been manipulated to favor “profound rightist transformations” (p. 13) now treated as “common sense” under an ethos of “conservative modernization” (p. 14). Proponents in the U.S., he contends, have attempted to restore an “imagined past,” a mythical golden age in American schooling, and “have now redefined the terrain of debate of all things educational” (p. 17). This ‘imagined past,’ sadly, is contradicted by the history of American education and ignores both the promise and the challenges of schooling in an immensely diverse nation.

Critical pedagogy is a means for confronting forces that imperil a democratic vision of educational purpose and practice (see, e.g., Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2004, 2005; Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Hill & Kumar, 2009; Hursh, 2008; Kellner, 2005; Lipman, 2004; Mathison & Ross, 2008; Saltman, 2007), but must avoid “*romantic possibilitarian* rhetoric, in which the language of possibility substitutes for a consistent tactical analysis of what the balance of forces actually is and what is necessary to change it” [emphasis in original] (Whitty, as cited in Apple, 2004, p. 14). I provide here a ‘tactical analysis’ of the forces of risk, uncertainty, and blame as effects of social change converging within a volatile and vulnerable culture to form an *anti-* or *post-*democratic early 21st century zeitgeist in the U.S., now linked to a teacher evaluation policy that is “anti-democratic by design” (Au, 2010, p. 11). I then examine critical education discourse elaborating the relations between neoliberalism, democracy, and schooling. I briefly consider the ‘highly qualified teacher’ trope in its policy context, and, to conclude, I analyze Gutmann’s (1999) ‘democratic conception of teacher professionalism’ (p. 80) as a way to reframe what it might mean to be ‘highly qualified’ to teach in a pluralist society (still) aspiring to democracy (West, 2004).

Social Forces and Social Change

The Risk Society

Beck’s (1992) risk society—where “the exceptional condition threatens to become the norm” (p. 24)—has particular features affecting social thinking and social behavior: e.g., a vacillation between public hysteria and public indifference both during and following crises (p. 37); a “loss of social thinking” (p. 25) resulting from “the *commonality of anxiety*” displacing “the *commonality of need*” so that “*solidarity from anxiety* arises and becomes a political force” [emphasis in original] (p. 49); and an orientation based on the “not-yet-event as stimulus to

action” (p. 33) that creates and sustains public anxiety, even as public distrust of ‘risk experts’ grows.⁵ These features necessarily inhibit our ability as a society to function reasonably and address crises responsibly. The production and dissemination of risks and hazards reshape the balance of power between the political and the ‘non-political,’ which includes schooling.

Beck (1992) explains that as hazards proliferate, “*totally new types of challenges to democracy arise*,” so that the risk society “harbors a tendency to a *legitimate totalitarianism of hazard prevention*” [emphasis in original] (p. 80). He warns that “the continued existence of the democratic political system” is threatened as it is “caught in the... dilemma of either failing in the face of systematically produced hazards, or suspending fundamental democratic principles through the addition of authoritarian, repressive ‘buttresses’” (p. 80). Beck (1992) is addressing environmental risks and hazards, but his analysis is just as salient and cogent for risks and hazards caused by threats to the nation’s security, however they are framed. He foresees that “[b]reaking through this alternative is among the essential tasks of democratic thought and action in the already apparent future of the risk society” (p. 80).

This transformation may be seen as a hollowing-out (a de-politicization) of the political—Habermas’ ‘new obscurity’ (1985, as cited in Beck, 1992, p. 190). A “sub-politics” (Beck, 1992, p. 185) takes shape as the non-political becomes politically relevant, but *not* politically accountable: “techno-economic innovation... remains in essence removed from political legitimation” (p. 184)—i.e., “removed from the rules of public inspection and justification and delegated to the freedom of investment of enterprises and the freedom of research of science” (p. 185). As a result, Beck argues, “waves of current, announced or emerging changes pass through and convulse society” as “*hectic changes* in the techno-economic system ... put human imagination to a test of courage” (p. 185). He observes that under a risk paradigm, “society is caught in a whirlpool of change that richly deserves the title ‘revolutionary,’” but such a transformation “occurs in the form of the *non-political*” [emphasis in original] (Beck, 1992, p. 185). In the risk society, Beck (1992) offers, “the discontent with politics” derives from “a misproportion between an authority to act” that “plays political,” but is actually “powerless,” and “a broad-scale change of society, closed off to social decision-making, that approaches unstopably but quietly in the guise of the non-political” (p. 185).

Power is thus taken over by “the ‘anarchy’ (Arendt, 1981) of the (no longer) unseen side effect” (p. 187). This ‘anarchy,’ however, is not accidental: i.e., it results from politics ‘migrating’ “into the *gray area of corporatism*,” where political decision-making is “pre-fabricated” by powerful special interests, but defended within the realm of the political as though it had emerged from “official arenas” [emphasis in original] (p. 188). While “the staged events of politics bring about the *fiction of a steering center for modern society*” [emphasis in original] (p. 192), Beck (1992) sees “this authoritarian understanding” (p. 192) of the political being diminished *to the extent* that democratic rights are established, exercised, and honored. Making more *use* of democracy appears to be a viable response to this dilemma; some argue that schooling is the place to begin (e.g., Parker, 2005).

⁵ I have focused on many of these characteristics in other work (see Nicholson-Goodman, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010), but here my main concern is with the changing relations between the political and non-political as characterized by Beck (1992).

Civic preparation is the foundation for knowing, using, and honoring democratic rights. Schooling directed solely to the development of a ‘globally competitive’ labor force cannot fulfill this function. Democratic education is thus *required*. Beck (1992) foresees that “political decision-making processes... can no longer be understood as the enforcement or implementation of a model determined in advance by some wise man or leader,” and urges instead that “the decision-making process” should “be understood as a process of *collective action*,” which indicates both “collective learning and collective creation” [emphasis in original] (p. 191). This is consistent with Gutmann’s (1999) democratic education, grounded in a deliberative notion of democracy. The only possible response to a risk society paradigm shift is to develop a highly informed and democratically-inclined citizenry willing and able to use its democratic rights. Such a response may not be feasible without expanding our thinking about the purposes of schooling and the role of the teacher to include democratic aims. The question of *who* defines risk and *how* it is defined reflects immense power in such a society. The crux of the issue is whether public schooling can fulfill this democratic function in an ‘era of uncertainty’ (Porter, 1999).

An Era of Uncertainty

Porter (1999) posits that an ‘era of uncertainty’ in education policy, beginning in the 1970s, changed official approaches to schooling in profound ways. He attributes these changes to the influence of neoliberalism as he compares policy changes over time in the U.K. and the U.S. He sees the neoliberal ethos as an effort by “leading governments” and “major international development agencies to deliberately neutralise the school as an independent and democratising institution” (p. 7). He describes the international scene, after the Berlin Wall fell, in which this ethos emerged, affecting “the great majority of individual governments,” now “required” to adopt “the ideology of the free market” (p. 8), and warns of the danger this ideology poses to education in democratic societies:

There are signs that the common concern with market success will be expressed in an increasingly uniform approach to education, with governments reflecting the extreme policies that have emerged from some of the world’s leading economies. ...the pursuit of unbridled competition is... particularly damaging when applied to education. The outcome in relation to... the school, has been a profound loss of capacity to fulfil [*sic*] the political, social and cultural functions that have previously characterised [*sic*] their role in a democratic society. (Porter, 1999, p. 8)

Porter (1999) describes education policy and its impacts on schooling in terms of two ‘phases’: the first, an ‘era of confidence,’ beginning at the end of World War II and lasting through the early 1970s; the second, an ‘era of uncertainty,’ beginning with “the economic downturn of the 1970s in Western democracies” (p. 11) and extending forward. The era of confidence involved “the expansion of educational institutions, a belief in the efficacy and transforming power of education and educators and a high degree of consensus about aims and outcomes between policy-makers and practitioners” (p. 11). The era of uncertainty, in contrast, he argues, “is marked by deep concerns about economic progress and social cohesion” (p. 11). Porter (1999) sees this latter era as “a time when the consensus in education disappears and is replaced by an adversarial relationship between policy-makers and practitioners and a major

diminution in the influence of the school” (pp. 11-12). The boundary between the two is marked by linking the economy to schooling and situating *both* in a moment of crisis.

The effects of neoliberalism on schooling, he offers, include: adversarial relations between policy-makers and practitioners, as noted, resulting from a purported cause-effect relationship between poor national economic performance and (supposed) low national educational achievement; accountability as a rationale for massive centralized governmental control over the educational system and for “detailed control over the work of teachers in public education”; the creation of “a market within the school system” so that “schools [are] thrown into competition for ‘customers’ and their income directly related to their success in the market place”; and a system of “government assessment of ‘product quality’” (test results) which are then made public for political purposes (p. 23).

In Porter’s (1992) view, these effects began with the political-economic policies of Thatcher in the U.K. and Reagan and Volcker in the U.S. in the late 1970s,⁶ but they have held steady since, and are evident in the reform rhetoric of Secretary Duncan (2009a, 2009b, 2000c, 2000d) and in the neoliberal ideology underpinning the policies mandated by NCLB. Porter’s (1999) analysis is consistent with critical education discourse on the subject, examined in detail below. The adversarial nature of relations between policy-makers and practitioners is based on a framing, as noted, where economic crisis is linked to educational crisis, the latter of which may, however, be ‘manufactured’ (Berliner & Biddle, 1995) for political purposes. The adversarial element is magnified by the emergence of a ‘culture of blame’ (Lau, 2009).

A Culture of Blame

The ‘culture of blame’ (Lau, 2009) has its own unique tendencies affecting teaching as a profession. Lau highlights ‘moralization’ as a primary feature of this culture—i.e., “the social condemnation of (supposed) wrongdoing or wrongful failing to act, with the (supposed) consequence of having entailed misfortune harmful to the public good” (p. 662). Lau (2009), referring to prior work on blame as a phenomenon, asserts that “the moralization of danger continues today, only that danger now comes in the form of risk, which constitutes ‘a new blaming system’” (p. 662).⁷ He offers that “blaming takes the form of moral othering,” that ‘blame targets’ include teachers, and that “the blaming is cast in the name of values” like “public accountability” and “the protection of rights” (p. 663). He notes that “civil servants have in recent years... been morally othered” (p. 664). Teachers are increasingly castigated as civil servants responsible for maintaining public well-being and fostering a prosperous future, but failing to do so and thus deserving of blame.

For Lau (2009), the “historical precedent” for this was “the liability revolution-litigation explosion in America,” and he sees the culture of blame as “a replication of it on the level of the

⁶ See also David Harvey (2005), *A brief history of neoliberalism*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press. It is important to note that for a variety of reasons, Harvey sees the neoliberal state as “an unstable and contradictory political form” (p. 64).

⁷ Lau explains that Mary Douglas (1992) studied blame in tribal/religious societies, but proceeded from that work to formulate a paradigm for analyzing ‘contemporary blaming’ (as cited in Lau, 2009, p. 63). Lau works from Douglas’ ‘contemporary blaming’ to theorize a ‘culture of blame’ here. See also Mary Douglas (1992), *Risk and blame*, London, U.K.: Routledge.

public sphere” (p. 664): “just as the revolution-explosion began in the 1960s in a conducive sociopolitical environment, the culture of blame has arisen in the conducive ascendance of neoliberalism” (p. 664). Elaborating this culture in terms of “the modernist mentality,” he considers the work of Weber and Bauman, for whom “modernity first and foremost” is understood as “a state of mind” (Lau, 2009, p. 666). Lau (2009) cites Bauman’s view of this mentality, which is “characterized by ‘an incessant drive to eliminate the haphazard’ and ‘the unaccounted for’, and ‘to replace spontaneity...by an order drawn by reason and constructed through... controlling effort’, leaving ‘no unattended sites to chance’” (1992, as cited in Lau, 2009, p. 667). Thus, Lau claims, “uncertainty and indeterminacy are mortal enemies of the modernist mentality” (p. 667). Both require space for judgment, and thus, autonomy.

The culture of blame entails a pairing of beliefs deriving from “the fetishization” (Lau, 2009, p. 667) of this mentality. The first is the “predictability-preventability fetishism” (p. 667), involving the belief that ‘scientifically-based’ educational research produces such a sophisticated level of predictability that it can eliminate (prevent) the possibility of human error or human failure. The goal of this fetishism under neoliberalism should be understood in terms of producing proficient teachers, proficient students, and proficient (future) workers. It is thus conceived as a totalizing force for the ‘good.’ Second, the “methodization fetishism” (p. 668) involves the belief that this ‘preventability’ can only be derived from a total commitment to (scientifically) perfected educational method. As Lagemann (2000) points out, however, education research is ‘an elusive science,’ and its history is ‘troubling’ (see also Mathison, 2008). Further, teachers have various reactions and responses to this ‘abuse’ of research (Nicholson-Goodman & Garman, 2007).

These dispositions nevertheless lead advocates to embrace a *science* of education that can purportedly perfect educational achievement (defined solely by test scores), given the appropriate state of mind on the part of practitioners. This achievement is in fact *dependent* on this state of mind, which pairs an unquestioning adherence to perfected method and an avowed commitment to prevention of failure (again, defined solely by test results). Both entail reliance on science-based research as a cure-all to resolve deficiencies in the modernist project of schooling. This embrace of perfection constitutes an ideology, since the nature of this achievement is ill-defined and may be used to deceive and manipulate the public, especially its most vulnerable citizens (see, e.g., Berliner, 2005; Hursh, 2008; Kohn, 2008; Lipman, 2004; Saltman, 2007). Further, the tools for measuring this achievement ignore social, economic, and physical deprivations that hinder academic achievement (Bracey, 2009). Some critics argue, therefore, that the tools themselves are designed to first blame and then punish public schools *and* their teachers for ‘wrongdoing’ when students fail to ‘measure up.’ Consider, e.g., a study that asks whether teachers classified as ‘disheartened’—40% in a 2009 study by Public Agenda and Learning Associates—should be encouraged to “find another line of work” (Yarrow, 2009, p. 23).⁸ This ideology, further, ignores potent deficiencies in the political economy and public culture in which schooling is embedded.

These dispositions are deemed necessary for achieving a predetermined (by a sufficient increase in student test scores) but non-specified (in terms of actual ‘quality’) level of teacher

⁸ See also Johnson, J., Yarrow, A., Rochkind, J., and Ott, A. (2009), *Teaching for a living*, New York, NY: Public Agenda, online: <http://www.publicagenda.org>.

proficiency that can be relied upon as a certainty. Thus, the ‘highly qualified teacher’ is positioned as a *reproducible* guarantor of ‘achievement,’ given the appropriate training and state of mind, and this is used to legitimize the presumption that achievement in schooling *can and should* produce ‘highly skilled workers’ for the 21st century global economy (Duncan, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007; Yarrow, 2009). From this perspective, however, teachers must be stripped of the protections they have historically fought for—unions and tenure. It is revealing that the same ethos that rhetorically supports the elevation of ‘highly qualified’ teachers to superior professional status also requires that, as workers, they be subjected to the whims of the market and isolated as individuals. It should be noted that union-busting and the elimination of organizing capacity are neoliberal strategies for advancing private ownership of schools, with regard neither for the notion of schooling as a public commons and a public good, nor for the question of how the public may be served—or ill-served—by such a transition.

One problem this blaming poses is that the neoliberal ideology underpinning current educational reforms “is now being touted as the radical solution to historic underachievement of ‘deprived’ communities” (Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. x). Deprived persons, groups, and communities may welcome privatization, and this, it must be granted, is due to the historical failure of schooling in the U.S. to solve the ills affecting those deprived of social, economic, political, and educational opportunity. Schooling alone cannot achieve such ends, but “Americans have thought it easier to instruct the young than to coerce the adult” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 2), and the result has been that “the utopian tradition of social reform through schooling has often diverted attention from more costly, politically controversial, and difficult societal reforms” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 3). Resisting privatization as *the* solution may thus be criticized as also resisting educational equity and excellence for all. As a result, advocacy of public schooling has been put in a defensive posture (Mathison & Ross, 2008). Examining critical education discourse about the effects of neoliberalism on education policy and practice is therefore warranted, and is divided into three parts in the following section: (1) political culture, privatization, and cultural politics; (2) critical capacity, business control, and global education policy; and (3) effects on school subjects: teachers and students.

Neoliberalism, Democracy, and Schooling

Political Culture, Privatization, and Cultural Politics

Giroux and Giroux (2004) examine two events affecting democracy and education in “post-civil rights America” (p. 1). The first involves contemporary American political culture. The authors contend that democracy has been “emptied of any substantial content” and now “appears imperiled because individuals are unable to translate their privately suffered misery into broadly shared public concerns and collective action” (p. 1). They frame civic engagement as “impotent” and public values as “expendable” due to “the growing power of multinational corporations to shape the content of most mainstream media” (p. 1). They see “political exhaustion and impoverished intellectual visions” being “fed by the increasingly popular assumption that there are no alternatives to the present state of affairs” (p. 1).

Lipman (2004) challenges “the prevailing ‘truth’ that capitalist globalization and neoliberal social policies are necessary and inevitable” (p. 12). Granting that “globalization and

economic restructuring have erected a new set of constraints on education,” she argues, however, that such constraints “are not absolute” as she confronts “discourses of inevitability” (p. 11). In her view, “policy responses are conditioned by the relative strength and mobilization of social forces... and the political culture of specific contexts,” making education policy a “part of the ideological environment” supporting or contesting “global trends to deepen economic and social polarization and the immiseration of the majority” (p. 12). The answer may lie in an informed citizenry asserting its democratic rights, which requires political will, but education policy is “closed off to social decision-making” (Beck, 1992, p. 185).

During the devastating early post-9/11 period, disregard for the needs of the poor and the working classes, for issues of exclusion related to racial or ethnic minority status, for human rights, civil liberties, and due process became visible in both official and public political discourse (Nicholson-Goodman, 2007, 2009, 2010). Public concerns were instead redirected to fear and anxiety about terrorism and to their espoused cure—i.e., greater security via intensified scrutiny of persons in both personal (formerly ‘private’) and public spaces, and the doctrine of ‘preemptive’ war (see, e.g., Barber, 2004), the epitome of Beck’s (1992) ‘not-yet-event as stimulus to action.’ This redirection also reflected a shift of focus from *need* to *anxiety* in the risk society.

In that moment, the undermining of democracy became readily apparent to progressives across the country. As a result, its “demise” (Giroux & Giroux, 2004, p. 9) became a vivid image compelling the call to ‘educate for democracy’ (see, e.g., Boston, 2005; Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, 2004; Meier & Wood, 2004). Giroux and Giroux (2004) ask academics to “face the daunting challenge of creating new discourses, pedagogical practices, and collective strategies” to “offer students... the hope and tools necessary to revive the culture of politics as an ethical response to the demise of democratic public life” (p. 9). They argue that we must “help students come to terms with their own power as individuals and social agents” (p. 9).

As the cry to educate for democracy gained momentum, some academics sought to initiate this change through higher education. Giroux and Giroux (2004) highlight Bourdieu’s notion of academics as “indispensable” (p. 53) for “creating the pedagogical conditions that both furthered social and economic justice and challenged the forms of symbolic and material domination being exercised globally... under neoliberalism” (pp. 53-54) as he exhorted them to intervene in public affairs via media and social involvement for the sake of raising public consciousness, i.e., to act politically “to organize and become a collective force for fighting against a range of injustices” (p. 54). The authors applaud Bourdieu’s notion that “for academics to become engaged intellectuals they had to repudiate the cult of professionalism” (p. 54).⁹ They speak of “dangerous times” in which they see “a new type of society” taking shape “unlike anything we have seen in the past”—“a society in which symbolic capital and political power reinforce each other through a media apparatus largely controlled by ten major corporations” serving as “a cheerleading section for dominant elites and corporate ruling interests” (p. 56). This society, they attest, is “increasingly marked by an attack on democracy, a poverty of critical public discourse, and... a virulent contempt for social needs and the public good” (p. 56).

⁹ See also Henry Giroux (2004), *The terror of neoliberalism*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, p. 133.

The attack on democracy in this ‘new social order’ did not go unnoticed (Giroux & Giroux, 2004, p. 4), but attacks on public and higher education persist, they contend, as “the culture, values, and relations of neoliberalism” redefined society in such a way that “the relationship between critical education, public morality, and civic responsibility” (p. 66) fall prey to the economic interests of those who profit most from global economic advantage. Under neoliberalism, “citizens lose their public voice as market liberties replace civic freedoms,” and the result amounts to “class and racial warfare against the poor, immigrants, and people of color” (p. 67) since their ‘market liberties’ are minimal to non-existent. Lipman (2004) also argues that such policies “are deeply implicated in a cultural politics directed to regulating and containing African American and some Latino/a youth and their communities” (p. 4).

The second event affecting democracy and education invoked by Giroux and Giroux (2004) involves “the nation’s increasing skepticism (even overt hostility) toward the educational system at all levels” (p. 1). Examining this distrust, they sketch a history that places cultural and economic tensions at center-stage in the mid-1970s, redirecting civic temper against public schooling. Allowing that equal educational opportunity was not only “one of the defining principles” of the civil rights movement, but also “a focus of that era’s most potent victories” (p. 2), they recall the backlash that followed as white voters from the middle and working classes reacted negatively to affirmative action and busing. Conservatives attracted this constituency by attacking public schooling and higher education, the authors maintain, redefining schooling as a “private rather than a public good” (p. 2). Thereafter, “privatization and choice became the catch phrases dominating educational reform,” making public schooling and higher education favored targets “of neoliberals, neoconservatives, and fundamentalists advocating market interests over social needs and democratic values” (p. 2). The attack on public education fully emerged, they argue, with the reframing of the educational imperative under the auspices of a conservative restoration¹⁰ in *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983). Conservative rhetoric reframed public schooling as a “big government monopoly,” deriding it as “bureaucratic, inefficient, and ineffectual, producing a product (dimwitted students)... singularly incapable of competing in the global marketplace” (Giroux & Giroux, 2004, p. 3). The purpose of schooling was thus *officially* reconceived in terms of producing a corporate labor pool.

Lipman (2004) also sees the “dramatic recomposition” of the American workforce as having “profound implications” (p. 9) as policies for urban education “support the policing and exclusion of youth who have been made superfluous in the new economy and undesirable in the public space of the city” (p. 4). As ‘gentrification’ is pursued in the name of urban renewal, she sees a “geography of inequality” emerging (p. 27).¹¹ Granting improvements “in some schools” and “additional opportunities for a small percentage of students,” she contends that these policies

¹⁰ See also Dave Hill (2005), State theory and the neoliberal reconstruction of schooling and teacher education, in Gustavo E. Fischman, Peter McLaren, Heinz Sünker, and Colin Lankshear (Eds.), *Critical theories, radical pedagogies, and global conflicts*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., pp. 23-51. Instead of the ‘conservative restoration’ mentioned above, Hill speaks of a “neoliberal restoration” (p. 25), where “the current logic of capital requires less room for dissent, less room for critique, less room for oppositional school and teacher education curricula, less room for ‘teachers as intellectuals’... to challenge the hegemonic project of capital...” (pp. 41-42).

¹¹ See also David Harvey (1996), *Justice, nature, and the geography of difference*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.

nevertheless “reproduce and intensify” inequalities—both economic and social—as well as “racial exclusion and containment” (p. 4). Giroux and Giroux (2004) describe how neoliberalism establishes this new social order: it “destroys those institutions that maintain social provisions, privatizes all institutions associated with the public good, and narrows the role of the state to both a gatekeeper for capital and a policing force for maintaining social order and racial control” (p. 72). The situation is not much better elsewhere in the world (see, e.g., Hirtt, 2009; Hursh, 2008).

Hursh (2008), for instance, cites studies showing how “markets and choice” came to be embraced in other countries “as a means of improving education” (p. 66). This ‘embrace’ entered public discourse, according to Robertson, because “the choice/markets agenda has been shaped by the criticism of schools as inefficient bureaucracies that are unresponsive either to community or individual interests” (2000, as cited in Hursh, 2008, p. 66). Under neoliberalism, inequality is blamed on “individuals’ inadequacy, which is to be remedied not by ‘increasing dependency’ through social welfare, but by requiring that individuals strive to become productive members of the workforce” (Hursh, 2008, p. 67). He warns that neoliberal governments seek to lower education funding to “fit the needs of the economy,” even though “neoliberal policymakers have skillfully packaged the reforms” so that they appear to be “promoting equality” using “discourses emphasizing increasing education fairness” (p. 67). He maintains that the legitimacy of neoliberal governments is retained “by blaming schools for the essential injustices and contradictions of capitalism, while they preserve inequalities through other policies, such as taxation and social spending reductions” (p. 68).

Hursh (2008) also notes that emphasizing individual as opposed to societal responsibility has led to lowered expectations for the social obligation “to provide an adequate education” (p. 68). Minimizing such expectations, he contends, added momentum to the privatization movement, while diminishing the perceived value of the local public school. School choice, he avows, encourages parents “to transfer their children from school to school” and thus undermines not only “their allegiance to the local school,” but also “their incentive to engage in public discourse regarding the nature and purpose of schooling” (p. 68). In this scenario, schools are blamed for economic inequality, while standardization, testing, and school choice claim to improve “education for all” (p. 69). The neoliberal aim of reducing the state’s size and its role in public services, further, are coupled with the conservative belief that the state should “intervene less in individual’s [*sic*] private lives,” and as a result, “governments have been careful not to directly intervene in the everyday practices of schools” (p. 69). Thus, promoting the efficacy of “testing, accountability, and choice” allows the state to “govern schools from afar... what Stephen Ball (1994) describes as ‘steering from a distance’” (as cited in Hursh, 2008, p. 69).

Hursh (2008) sees privatization as “the ultimate goal” (p. 86) of such reforms and addresses it as a movement. To illustrate, he points to Milton Friedman’s *Public schools: Make them private*, which advocated vouchers as a way “to transition from a government to a market system” (1995, as cited in Hursh, 2008, p. 87); and Richard Eberling’s *It’s time to put public education behind us*, which advocated privatizing “the entire educational process from kindergarten through the Ph.D.” (2000, as cited in Hursh, 2008, pp. 87-88). Advocates of this view, he remarks, anticipate that “the high number of schools designated as failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) will lead to calls for privatizing schools” (p. 88).

The near-eradication of public schooling in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina is a case in point (see Saltman, 2007). The authors of *Dismantling a Community* protest that

Over the past twelve months...a network of conservative anti-government activists have moved with singular intensity to patch together a new vision for K-12 education that they hope will become a national model...It is a vision that disdains the public sector and those who work within it. It is a vision based on competition and economic markets. It is a vision of private hands spending public funds...Most disturbing, it is a vision that casts families and students as “customers,” who shop for schools in isolation from—and even in competition with—their neighbors. It is a vision that, like the game of musical chairs, requires someone to be left without a seat. (Center for Community Change, 2006, as cited in Hursh, 2008, p. 89)

Reed argues that “the goal of this change is acceptance, as the unquestioned order of things, that private is always better than public” (2006, as cited in Hursh, 2008, p. 89).

In *No Child Left Behind: A Parents’ Guide*, Hursh (2008) points out, the rationale for “standardized testing and privatization” involves “the incompetence of public school teachers,” thus blaming teachers “for the failures of the educational system” (p. 90). Blaming teachers is linked to blaming teacher unions, and is not surprising, he argues, in light of neoliberal “antipathy” (p. 90) towards the latter. The use of AYP to measure schools, he asserts, “often discriminates against schools serving students of color and/or living in poverty” (p. 91), and thus against the teachers who serve them. Lipman (2004) also observes that as teachers attempt “to help students see knowledge as a tool to analyze the world,” they face “contradictions and conflicts” between those efforts and “the process and practice of preparing for standardized tests” (p. 111).

Since federal and state governing bodies make “most of the significant educational decisions” under NCLB, Hursh (2008) asserts that “individuals are cast as consumers who can choose among the choices provided by an educational marketplace” (p. 94). As a result, he maintains, “civil society is weakened and is held accountable by the government rather than the other way around” (p.94). In his view, high stakes tests used to assess schools have increased high school dropout rates, have neither made curricula “more rigorous” nor closed achievement gaps, and are, in fact, “doing the opposite” (p. 95). He affirms Darling-Hammond’s conviction that what is truly needed is “to remedy the ‘inequalities in spending, class sizes, textbooks, computers, facilities, curriculum offerings, and access to qualified teachers’” (2006, as cited in Hursh, 2008, p. 95).

Kumar and Hill (2009) highlight the transformation of educational reform discourses, especially “fundamental concepts” (p. 1), to serve political purposes. The use of “rhetoric such as ‘education for all,’” they argue, is a “euphoric façade” masking “a definitive retreat of the state as a provider of education,” and this ruse is true both in the developed and the “so-called developing world” (p. 1). Nick Grant (2009) concurs, stating that education increasingly “takes the form of global *edubusiness* run by *edupreneurs* as part of the investment by capital in service economies” [emphasis in original] (p. vii). Around the world, “prepackaged learning materials, imposed curricula, and rigid, micromanaged schemes of work characterize a learning process in both private and public spheres which is passive, lacks dialogue, and intimidates speculative learning and discovery” (Grant, 2009, pp. vii-viii). Under such circumstances, Grant (2009)

offers, “teaching becomes mere ‘delivery’ of externally preset activities” (p. viii). In such a scenario, one has to question the meaning of teaching quality.

In Kumar and Hill’s (2009) view, the education system is “anti-egalitarian” and the global “restructuring” of education systems is an element of “the ideological and policy offensive by neoliberal capital” (p. 1). They note that the “privatization of public services,” coupled with “the global diktats of the agencies of international capital” have established “competitive markets” in schooling that are “near-global” (p. 1). They see these markets as “marked by selection and exclusion” and “accompanied by and situated within” a “rampant” growth of inequality at national and international levels (p. 1). Examining data on the increasing impoverishment of poor schools and the increasing enrichment of already-rich schools as a result of ‘choice,’ Hill and Kumar (2009) consider one study of the effects of introducing “quasi-markets into education systems in the United States, Sweden, England and Wales, Australia, and New Zealand” (Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998, as cited in Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. 14). The findings show that “marketizing” schooling, i.e., “increasing ‘parental choice’ of schools... exacerbates racialized school hierarchies” (pp. 14-15). School choice, they argue, leads to increased “inequalities between schools” due to the fact that “in many cases the ‘parental choice’ of schools has become the ‘schools’ choice’ of the most desirable parents and children—and rejection of others” (p. 15). In their view, “business values and interests” are displacing “democratic accountability and the collective voice” (p. 17).

Critical Capacity, Business Control, and Global Education Policy

Hill and Kumar (2009) also argue that developing critical thinking capacity suffers under “the increasing subordination” and “commodification” (p. 18) of schooling. This impacts both K-12 schooling and higher education. The authors offer that “other than at elite institutions, where the student intake is the wealthiest and most upper-class, there is little scope for critical thought” (p. 18). They warn of a government-led narrowing of the curriculum already implemented in higher education in the U.K., where “most potentially critical aspects of education”—including “sociological and political examination of schooling and education,” as well as “questions of social class, ‘race’ and gender”—have been ‘expelled’ “from the national curriculum” (p. 18).

These topics have been replaced, they note, as “*teacher training*” displaces “*teacher education*” [emphasis in original] (p. 18). This “change in nomenclature” is important, they offer, “both symbolically” and as an “accurate” description “of the new, ‘safe,’ sanitized and detheorized” pre-service teacher preparation; further, this trend is occurring “across the globe” (p. 18). The power of this “new public managerialism” is reflected as “the language and management style of private capital” displace “the ethic and language and style of public service and duty,” leaving education subjugated to “international market goals” (p. 20).

A Campaign for the Future of Higher Education (CFHE) report “slams the commodification of higher education” (Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. 20), as it protests that

...students are neither customers nor clients; academics neither facilitators nor a pizza delivery service. Universities are not businesses producing consumer goods. Knowledge and thought are not commodities, to be purchased as items of consumption...Education is not something which can be “delivered”...it is a continuing and reflective process, an essential component of any worthwhile life—the very antithesis of a commodity. (CFHE, 2003, as cited in Hill & Kumar,

2009, p. 20)

Kumar and Hill (2009) explain this ‘commodification’ in terms of a global “capitalist class” (p. 2) with multiple agendas:

(a) a business agenda *for* education that centers on socially producing labor power... for capitalist enterprises; (b) a business agenda *in* education that centers on setting business “free” in education for profit making; and (c) a business agenda for education corporations that allows edubusinesses to profit from national [and] international privatizing activities. [Emphasis in original] (p. 2)

Unlike Ross (2008), who argues that neoliberalism “is not new,” but rather just “the current version” of an attempt by the wealthy few “to restrict the rights and powers of the many” (p. xi), Kumar and Hill (2009) differentiate between classical liberalism and today’s neoliberalism. The difference, they argue, “is that the former wanted to roll back the state, to let private enterprise make profits relatively unhindered by legislation” and “the tax costs of a welfare state,” whereas “neoliberalism demands a strong state to promote its interests” [emphasis in original] (p. 3). “The strong interventionist state is needed by capital,” they assert, especially vis-à-vis “education and training,” to produce “an ideologically compliant but technically and hierarchically skilled workforce” (p. 3).

Hirtt (2009) confirms this as he considers the prospects for “a global education policy,” arguing that in slightly more than a century, schooling “has been transformed” from “an instrument of state ideology” to “a machine serving global and international economic competition” (p. 214). He points to the creation and then expansion “of technical and professional education,” followed by rapid “massification of secondary education” (p. 214). He contends that this pales in comparison to “the upheavals caused by the economic crises of the 1970s and the acceleration of technological change” that led in the 1980s “to much more radical reforms” approved by “powerful supranational organizations of modern capitalism” (p. 214). He documents six “common trends” in the formulation of global education policy: (a) decentralization and deregulation merged with centralized state control over the specifics of educational achievement and objectives; (b) slowing down increases in educational spending (despite growing need); (c) substituting ‘skills training’ for ‘general knowledge of culture’; (d) a retreat from “massification” of education, displaced by “so-called ‘second chance’ education” (“work-oriented vocational training”); (e) emphasizing vocational training, work-related teaching, partnerships between schools and private companies, and entrepreneurial education; and (f) developing education and educational services as a market (“the Education Business”) (pp. 214-215).

Granting that general knowledge—despite its value for helping us understand “our common world culture” (Hirtt, 2009, p. 219)—has never truly been considered of vital concern in relation to the economy, he sees neoliberal criticism of general secondary education programs as being too intensely focused on “the acquisition of knowledge” as nostalgia for a time when “this type of education was reserved for children of the upper classes, to prepare for their role as future leaders” (p. 219). The new “quest for employability,” he observes, has led to an attack on general knowledge “from all sides” (p. 219). Further, he warns that we may “totally misunderstand the concept of the ‘knowledge society’ if we believe” that what “the future economy needs is a highly skilled workforce” (p. 221). Rather, he offers, we are seeing a “polarized evolution of the labor market” in which, “of the thirty occupations with the greatest

rate of job creation,” high levels of education are required for only 22 percent, while for “almost 70 percent” (p. 221), what is really required is only “short- to medium-term on-the-job training” (pp. 221-222).

Nevertheless, this focus on ‘employability’ has led to advocacy for “a shorter period of general education, better tailored to market needs” (European Commission, 1993, as cited in Hirtt, 2009, p. 222; see also, National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007). In short, market interests apparently dictate that schooling requires *less*, not more, knowledge. Education policy, Hirtt (2009) asserts, is stimulating a “rapid development of the education business” (p. 222), with education systems now offering “a new identity for school and business,” resulting in “the ‘marketization’ of education” (p. 223).¹² This new “alignment,” he asserts, will intensify inequalities of “access to knowledge” (p. 224), with profound effects for the subjects of schooling, namely, teachers and students.

Effects on School Subjects: Teachers and Students

Mathison and Ross (2008) examine the U.S. standards-based educational reform (SBER) movement, tracing its history and effects. Ross (2008) maintains that determining the purpose(s) of education is difficult to establish in a pluralist society, so that “even when schools are performing well, it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to deliver” all that is expected of them because “contradictory purposes” (p. ix) are necessarily involved. Pursuing Dewey’s notion that “all societies use education” for “social control” to “shape the dispositions of children” (Ross, 2008, p. x), he offers that we need a common “vision in mind” (p. x) before we can decide on educational purposes. Accepting Dewey’s logic, he asserts that the “aim of a democratic society is the production of free human beings associated with one another on terms of equality” (p. xi).

Ross (2008) notes the keen awareness of the Constitution’s framers of “the ‘threat’ of democracy” as he invokes the Federalists’ expectation that “the public would remain compliant and deferential to the politically active elite” and “Chief Justice John Jay’s ‘maxim’” that “the people who own the country ought to govern it” (p. xi). He states that “politicians and political theorists have argued *against* a truly participatory democracy” [emphasis in original] (p. xiii) for more than two centuries, and makes the case that those “perspectives have nurtured a neoliberal version of democracy that turns citizens into spectators, deters or prohibits the public from managing its own affairs, and controls the means of information” (p. xii). He casts this as “the prevailing conception of ‘liberal-democratic’ thought” that serves as “the philosophical foundation for current mainstream approaches to education reform,” under which “a specialized class of experts identifies... our common interests... and plans accordingly” (p. xii).

He invokes “a critique of inequality” evident in Jefferson’s and Dewey’s thinking in which “the root of human nature is the need for free creative work under one’s control” (p. xi), raising the issue of autonomy. For Ross (2008), differences in how we conceive of democracy inhibit reaching consensus, since “longstanding contradictions” (p. xiii) confound our thinking about this. Conceding that public schools “always have been and will continue to be battlegrounds for conflicting visions of what our society should be,” he avows that public

¹² See also James B. Twitchell (2004), *Branded nation: The marketing of Megachurch, College, Inc., and Museumworld*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

schooling is “necessary to reverse antidemocratic trends that have accelerated” under SBER, trends that have “intentionally” transformed both “the nature and purposes of public schools and our society” (p. xiii). Ross (2008) therefore sees the preservation of public schooling as “a necessary part of preserving democracy” (p. xiii).

Mathison and Ross (2008) refute SBER’s underlying premise: namely, that curriculum and instruction are improved by “uniform, externally formulated goals along with content standards and a strict accountability system” (p. xix)—noting that the history of U.S. educational reform demonstrates the lack of connection between changes in educational policy and changing how schools operate.¹³ They argue that NCLB has been able to effect changes in schooling because “the advocates of SBER have been successful in reconfiguring the *discourse* of educational reform” [emphasis in original] (p. xix) to circumscribe the purposes of schooling. Further, they assert that focusing “merely on what is tested” (p. xix) has narrowed the curriculum and that “teachers’ [*sic*] have been de-skilled (e.g., their professional autonomy is eroded)” as they are required “to teach from scripted lesson plans... keyed to test content” (p. xx). The discourse of SBER has, they contend, “reshaped the way we think about students as learners, teachers as professionals, the nature of the curriculum,” and “appropriate indicators of ‘educational progress’” (p. xx). This movement differs from prior educational reforms, they observe, in that it “is not a fragmented approach... but rather a systematic—even totalizing—approach,” i.e., it “has standardized the goals of schools, redefined the work of educators (and students), and passed into law a system of rewards and sanctions to ensure compliance” (p. xx).

Mathison (2008) links SBER to a history of concern about quality that fostered testing as an industry early on. She notes that “the commercial publication of tests is critical since many of the efficiencies of the testing industry... resulted from efforts to gain market share” (p. 4). Linking testing to eugenics, she sees “early American work on mental measurement” as “deeply informed by a presumed genetic bias for intelligence and differences” (p. 5). She contrasts the work of French psychologist Alfred Binet—who did not see intelligence as “heritable” and who “thought that tests were a means for identifying ways to help children having difficulty” (p. 5)—with the work of American psychologist Henry H. Goddard, for whom “morons” were a “primary interest” and who, along with “other American hereditarians disregarded” (p. 5) Binet’s principles. “By ‘scientifically’ proving that recent immigrants and blacks scored lower than whites due to an inferior mental endowment,” she avows, Goddard “catered strongly to the nativism and prejudice of many Americans” (p. 6). She affirms the ‘sociopolitical nature’ of assessment, which serves to “differentiate individuals for the allocation of scarce resources such as jobs, postsecondary education, and scholarships” (p. 6). She critiques SBER as “a new level of federal intervention” and “a consistent and ongoing partnership between politicians and corporations” (p. 9).

While Popham (2008) approves of SBER as an idea for improving schooling, he sees “two monumental mistakes” (p. 15) in its implementation: first, allowing a “state’s curriculum specialists to identify the educational outcomes on which the state’s SBE program will be based,” since they have “identified far too many educational outcomes... to be taught in the time available” (p. 15); and second, the “selection of the wrong types of tests” to determine whether

¹³ See also Kliebard (2004), *The struggle for the American curriculum*, and Tyack & Cuban (1995), *Tinkering toward utopia*.

students have “learned what they were supposed to learn” (p. 15). He finds “the state-level tests... *instructionally insensitive*, that is, incapable of detecting effective instruction even if it were present” [emphasis in original] (p. 15). Kohn (2008) concurs, noting the tension between grade-focus and learning-focus and offering the insight that both grades and standardized testing sort children, but that neither is designed to “tell us whether teaching and learning have been successful” (p. 28). Kohn (2008) sees multiple problems with standardized tests, warning that while their “features represent the very opposite of meaningful assessment,” they are anything but “irrelevant” to classroom practice, since “they have a very powerful impact on instruction, almost always for the worse” (p. 29). The core problem, for Kohn, is that “teachers feel increasingly pressured to take time away from real learning”—“the practical result” being that “intellectual life is squeezed out of classrooms” (p. 29).

Jones (2008) laments the distancing between education policy-makers and “classroom realities,” and their view of schools “as problems to be fixed or abandoned rather than as democratic human enterprises needing support” (p. 57). He rejects the idea that schools should be seen as “mini-corporations responsible simply for a bottom line of test scores,” believing that this creates a “depersonalized climate” in which “children are often thought of in terms of their ability to test well rather than as the whole, complex people that they are or for the potential they have” (p. 57). The “existing school accountability system fits schools like a straitjacket” (pp. 57-58), in his view, constraining “the flow of ideas and innovation,” and he offers that school reforms in recent decades have neither been effective in “transforming schools,” nor in “improving the school experience for many disadvantaged students” (p. 58). He therefore sees these state and federal policies as “terribly counterproductive” (p. 58).

Questioning “meaningful” professional development for teachers, he believes that this concern “is especially salient to whether schools are capable of enabling all students to meet higher standards of performance” (p. 67). While he affirms that “the quality of the teacher is at the heart of student learning,” he identifies several obstacles to sound practice: a lack of “time, resources, and high-quality professional development opportunities”; “a training model that asks for faithful implementation of an innovation rather than an inquiry into how the innovation might be adapted to meet the needs of the specific context”; and the use of “allotted professional development time to do the work mandated by new accountability systems, rather than to develop their own professional knowledge and skills” (p. 67). Little urges the use of “promising forms of professional development” that “engage teachers in the pursuit of genuine questions, problems and curiosities, over time, in ways that leave a mark on perspectives, policy, and practice,” thus communicating “a view of teachers not only as classroom experts, but also as productive and responsible members of a broader professional community” (1993, as cited in Jones, 2008, p. 68). Teacher empowerment, Jones (2008) points out, should entail shared governance for “lasting organizational capacity” (p. 68) so that schools can move “past the condition in which individual teacher responsibility rather than collective responsibility is the norm” (p. 69). He concludes that “the current model of using high-stakes testing is a recipe for public school failure, putting our democratic nation at risk” (p. 70).

Mathison and Freeman (2008) find “a tension created by teachers’ desire to be professionals, to act with integrity,” and “to give every child a chance to succeed” (p. 81). They argue that “centralized curricular mandates and high-stakes tests force teachers to act in ways they do not think are professional” (p. 81). The authors also raise the issue of autonomy, granting that this has been limited at best, since teachers have had to work “within authoritarian and often

petty school cultures” (p. 82). They note the limits within which teachers work—i.e., that they have little say in the curricular standards they “are required to adopt” (p. 83). The authors assert that when teachers perform curricular alignment activities, “their attention is focused on ensuring compliance with the state expectation—they are not encouraged to engage in a critical review of the content standards” (p. 83). Further, they observe, the way “curriculum coordinators and school leaders direct” this alignment process ensures that “teachers’ discussions stay at this micro level” (p. 83).

The authors cite McNeil’s observations: first, that “constraints on teachers’ work” cause teachers to “exclude their richest knowledge from their lessons” (2000, as cited in Mathison & Freeman, 2008, p. 84); and second, that required reforms force teachers to “choose between their personal survival in the system or their students’ education” (2000, as cited in Mathison & Freeman, 2008, p. 85). They warn that “teachers talk of leaving the profession, of quitting the system that strips them of their professional rights and responsibilities and that requires them to work in ways they do not see as beneficial to students and themselves” (p. 89). Cala (2008) finds that “state and national standardized testing reforms” (p. 149) are also damaging to students. Noting that “fourth and eighth grades are the critical testing years,” he observes that, in these grades, teachers “are fleeing the profession or requesting grade-level changes” (p. 152).

Developing the Trope: Antecedents of NCLB

Mullen and Farinas’ (2003) review of official formulations of teacher quality and qualifications in their policy context is useful here because these authors question the place of multiculturalism and social justice in the designation, ‘highly qualified teacher.’ Distinguishing ‘qualifications’ as “legal requirements for a credential” from “teacher quality,” they note a “dissonance” between criteria employed by “the legislature (and teaching commissions),” on the one hand, and those “espoused by conservative foundations and multicultural researchers” (p. 318), on the other. This ‘dissonance,’ they offer, leads to “controversial questions about the validity of criteria used for recognizing exemplary teachers and the potency of teacher education” (p. 318).

They see a “new urgency” under NCLB for defining the characteristics of this label, since it “ties federal funds to hiring teachers that meet its specific definition of exceedingly competent” (p. 318). Thus the trope becomes a lever for schools to pursue economic self-interest. The authors further point out that the criteria under NCLB, “which solely emphasize the academic prowess of teachers,” are seen by many as being “at odds with the more holistic National Board for Professional Teaching Standard’s (NBPTS’s) preeminent parameters” (p. 318).

The authors note that the development of criteria to assess teacher quality derived from the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983), recalling that NBPTS “was formed in 1987 to address the poor teaching that was allegedly putting the U.S. at risk of failure” (p. 319). Highlighting the fact that teachers formed a “a majority of its board of directors,” they see “five core areas” defining “the expected standards for accomplished teaching: (1) commitment to students and their learning; (2) knowledge of subjects and effective pedagogy; (3) responsibility for managing student learning; (4) systematic thinking about practice; and (5) affiliation with learning communities” (p. 319). A 2001 National Research Council (NRC) report analyzed the work of several teaching commissions seeking to standardize criteria for assessing teacher

quality and “judged NBPTS’s to be the model framework” (Mullen & Farinas, 2003, p. 319). The authors contend, however, that “disparity and ambiguity are illustrated by NBPTS’s emphasis on the value of diversity and NCLB’s circumvention of the issue” (p. 319).

According to Mullen and Farinas (2003), this incongruity “makes it difficult to rate teachers’ qualifications” or even just to rate teachers as “unqualified, underqualified, qualified, or highly qualified” (p. 319). They see a shift of focus occurring because “conservatives have used the standardization and testing of content knowledge” to suppress “the multicultural movement and its emphasis on social justice and diversity” (p. 319). Cochran-Smith and Fries, they note, “persuasively argue that the criteria and evidence for establishing highly qualified teaching are not well conceptualized,” i.e., that policies regarding “the expectations for identifying and rewarding greatly skilled teaching” have been “increasingly altered” (2001, as cited in Mullen & Farinas, 2003, p. 319).

Mullen and Farinas (2003) observe that the 2001 NRC analysis of “leading national boards of professional teaching standards” (p. 319) shows that, while the appearance of NBPTS themes at first glance appears to be consistent, the language of the standards undergoes subtle changes. The NRC found that “the use of a consensus model in developing teacher standards resulted in several central themes: teachers are committed to their students and students’ learning; teachers have deep subject matter knowledge; teachers manage and monitor student learning; teachers are reflective about their teaching content and methods; and teachers are members of a broader community” (2001, as cited in Mullen & Farinas, 2003, p. 319).

Since such themes “are interwoven throughout the fabric of the history of education” (p. 319), the authors’ complaint—i.e., that multiculturalism is not addressed in such standards—leads them to question the political context of the process of defining ‘qualified teaching’ and to challenge a single presumption of meaning. They note that teaching standards have been variously produced by each of the professional teaching commissions—National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS]; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future [NCTAF]; and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE]—and that this has ignited “a myriad of definitions” (p. 320).

Today, according to the NRC report, this trope “serves as an umbrella term for *expert*, *accomplished*, *effective*, and *good*” [emphasis in original] (2001, as cited in Mullen & Farinas, 2003, p. 320). The report further observes that the way ‘highly qualified’ is defined is “grounded in the prevailing zeitgeist of the society (NRC, 2001)” (as cited in Mullen & Farinas, 2003, p. 320). Attending to the ramifications of the ‘prevailing zeitgeist’ is an important component, then, of making sense of how the trope is used. Thomas and Schubert offer that “professional standards not only promote the ‘bureaucratization of teaching’ but also skew the nation’s ability to distinguish a quality teacher” (2001, as cited in Mullen & Farinas, 2003, p. 320). Mullen and Farinas (2003) remark that identifying “exemplary qualities of teaching” “in relation to the limited lenses of teacher certification and qualification and student achievement on standardized tests,” excludes “the critical, democratic vision of educators and the capacity to ‘challenge social assumptions about what is worth knowing’” (p. 320). Engendering democratic vision and the capacity to challenge social assumptions are precisely the concerns of democratic education. An important consequence of this policy trend is the delimitation of teacher autonomy for *exploring* what is worth knowing (e.g., Schubert, 2006, 2009).

Choosing to highlight ‘qualified’ in place of ‘quality,’ Mullen and Farinas (2003) explain that the notion of ‘qualified’ “underscores teacher preparation, certification, and credentialing,” but does not “automatically substitute for ‘quality teaching’” (p. 320). Further, they point out that “little agreement exists about those characteristics that best define a qualified teacher beyond standards set by national teaching commissions” (p. 320). Addressing the historical development of this changing definition, they note that influential conservative groups “describe traditional credentialing processes as obstacles that prevent talented people from entering teaching and liberal social agendas as distracting from student achievement (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001)” (p. 320). Mullen and Farinas (2003) recall that *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) “implied a direct correlation among student test scores, the country’s economic health, and the quality of the teaching workforce” and they see this as “igniting debate about raising expectations for educational standards, particularly highly qualified teaching” (p. 321).

The report was aligned with the effort to advocate and establish school choice as officials sought to privatize schooling in the U.S. under the newly-emerging ethos of neoliberalism. The authors point out that this report “led to the redefinition of teacher quality based on the belief that teacher education programs offer poor academic training and that the nation’s teachers are in ‘the bottom quarter’ of graduates” (p. 321), a claim reiterated in a (2007) report by the National Center on Education and the Economy that maintains that teachers are drawn from “the bottom third” (p. 12), and thus are still found wanting. In the 2007 report, a radical restructuring of the U.S. educational system is therefore recommended, and is linked to using international benchmarks, now supported as well by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and under implementation in a number of state-level pilot projects (ECS, 2008).

Mullen and Farinas (2003) point out that “the fragmentation arising from innumerable definitions of exemplary teaching” led legislators to codify what would now be labeled ‘highly qualified’ teaching under NCLB, which mandated that, “as of 2002, all Title I funded states comply with its definition of ‘highly qualified,’ and all teachers in core academic areas, including those in non-Title I schools, conform to those standards by 2005” (p. 324). NCLB equates ‘highly qualified’ with “being licensed through a state certification process,” with newly hired teachers required to have “a bachelor’s degree and satisfactory exam results, and secondary teachers, a university degree or advanced certification” (Mullen & Farinas, 2003, p. 324). What the authors question is not this requirement, but rather what is left out, and they lament that the “U.S. Congress has set the bar, prioritizing superior content knowledge over pedagogy and other areas of expertise” (p. 324), such as diversity.

Mullen and Farinas (2003) acknowledge that the standards set nationally for initial teacher licensing by INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium), for advanced teacher certification by NBPTS, and for teacher education accreditation by NCATE “require teachers to adopt practices that demonstrate an appreciation for diversity” (p. 324). However, they find that these standards suffer by comparison “to multicultural researchers’ criteria identifying the characteristics of highly qualified teachers” and that the “differences... are not due to direct contradictions,” but rather “result from the fact that the standards set by the teaching commissions (NBPTS, INTASC, and NCATE) “are not nearly as comprehensive or as detailed as those advocated by leading critical multiculturalists” (p. 325). Pardini “finds that the pressures of accountability have overwhelmed the capacity of many teachers to incorporate cultural differences and social justice into their lessons” (2000, as cited in Mullen & Farinas, 2003, p. 326). Civic temper also comes into play: “Bohn and Sleeter (2001) assert that this

departure from multicultural education has been exacerbated by ‘an increasingly repressive climate’ of ‘growing xenophobia’” (as cited in Mullen & Farinas, 2003, p. 326).

Difficulties arise between policy intent and policy consequences under NCLB, the authors contend, because “highly qualified teachers must teach an increasingly diverse student population while meeting intellectually rigorous standards,” “achieving higher credentials,” and demonstrating “proficiency by showing a marked improvement in student scores on high-stakes’ tests” (p. 326). They note the implications of this trend: “as of the 1990s, the national spotlight on teacher effectiveness as quantifiable has become more glaring,” while simultaneously, “the very emphasis on multiculturalism that is needed within our increasingly diverse schools has declined” (p. 327). Their concern centers on incorporating diversity into the policy dialogue about effective teaching, since the linkage between teacher effectiveness and students’ test scores creates a scenario where multiculturalism has been pushed “out of the national spotlight” (p. 327). They conclude that “future policy making efforts would need to conceptualize the diversity element within the teacher qualification standards, including the role of change agent on the part of the qualified teacher” (p. 327).

The authors, then, do not oppose a standardized definition of ‘highly qualified’; instead, they question the place of multiculturalism in that definition (see also Berry, 2002). However, the notion that ‘the highly qualified teacher’ as codified by NCLB could be described as a “change agent” (Mullen & Farinas, 2003, p. 327) for multiculturalism and social justice is highly questionable in our times. Unless schooling is reconceived with democratic principles, thinking, and action in mind, teachers and the schools they serve will continue to fail as agents of social change (Porter, 1999). Democratic education might serve as an alternative to the status quo. Gutmann’s (1999) work on deliberative democracy, democratic education, and a democratic conception of teacher professionalism therefore merits attention.

Democratic Education and Teacher Professionalism

Gutmann’s (1999) ‘democratic conception of teacher professionalism’ (p. 80) is situated in a democratic theory of education that is deliberative—i.e., capable of bridging moral disagreements over the processes of schooling, but without neglecting or minimizing the democratic purpose(s) of schooling.¹⁴ Her framing of constraints on education policy is instructive: “the enforcement of any moral ideal of education... without the consent of citizens subverts democracy” (p. 14). In her view, “a democratic theory of education recognizes the importance of empowering citizens to make educational policy *and also* of constraining their choices among policies in accordance with those principles—of non-repression and non-discrimination—that preserve the intellectual and social foundations of democratic deliberations” [emphasis mine] (p. 14). This is her standard for “the democratic ideal of education” (p. 14).

¹⁴ See also Amy Gutmann & Dennis Thompson (1996), *Democracy and disagreement*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. The authors argue that making democracy more deliberative requires attention to “the educational system,” which they see as “the single most important institution outside government” (p. 359) for this purpose.

Her view of education as including “every social influence that makes us who we are” (p. 14) is key to conceptualizing what might make a teacher ‘highly qualified’ in a democratic society, since political economy, public culture, civic temper, and social change(s) all have immense influence and may contribute to a zeitgeist that reshapes the relations between education and society, thus impacting schooling and teaching in specific ways. To understand the role she espouses for the teacher in democratic education, we must first understand her rationale for situating democratic education within a deliberative notion of democracy.

In Gutmann’s (1999) view, a democratic theory of education “makes a democratic virtue” out of what she sees as “our inevitable disagreement” over educational problems (p. 11). This ‘virtue’ derives from the likelihood that entertaining public debate over these problems is “much more likely to increase our understanding”—not only of education, but also of each other—than if we leave school management to the ‘experts,’ even “the most enlightened ones” (p. 11). Granting that the resulting policies will not “always be the right ones,” she nevertheless maintains that they will “be more enlightened... than those that would be made by unaccountable educational experts” (p. 11). She sees “the primary aim” of such a theory as requiring “a commitment to democratic values” (p. 11). The guiding principles, she contends, “help us judge (a) who should have authority to make decisions about education, and (b) what the moral boundaries of that authority are” (p. 11).¹⁵

Gutmann (1999) is not seeking “to achieve social agreement on a moral ideal of education,” but rather “to find the fairest ways for reconciling our disagreements, and for enriching our collective life by democratically debating them” (p. 12). In her view, mediating disagreements through public deliberation must also acknowledge two principles—non-repression and non-discrimination—required for empowering citizens both “to make educational policy” and to realize “the democratic ideal of education” (p. 14). She presents a frame based on “a democratic state” responsible, *inter alia*, for “allocating educational authority in such a way as to provide its members with an education adequate to participating in democratic politics” (p. 42). She argues that integrating “the value of critical deliberation among good lives” means that “we must defend some principled limits on political and parental authority over education, limits that in practice require parents and states to cede some educational authority to professional educators” (p. 44).

The first of these ‘limits’ is “*nonrepression*,” which “prevents the state, and any group within it, from using education to restrict rational deliberation of competing conceptions of the good life and the good society” [emphasis in original] (p. 44). This limit “secures freedom from interference only to the extent that it forbids using education to restrict *rational* deliberation or consideration of different ways of life” [emphasis in original] (p. 44). The second is “*nondiscrimination*,” which means that “all educable children must be educated” [emphasis in original] (p. 45). This limit “extends the logic of nonrepression, since states and families can be selectively repressive by excluding entire groups of children from schooling or by denying them an education conducive to deliberation among conceptions of the good life and the good society” (p. 45). She notes that “repression has commonly taken the... form of discrimination in

¹⁵ See also Nicholas C. Burbules (1995), Authority and the tragic dimension of teaching, in J. W. Garrison and A. G. Rud, Jr. (Eds.), *The education conversation: Closing the gap*, 29-40. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

schooling against racial minorities, girls, and other disfavored groups of children," and that "the effect of discrimination is often to repress, at least temporarily, the capacity and even the desire of these groups to participate in the processes that structure choice among good lives" (p. 45). She submits that these two principles "simultaneously support deliberative freedom and communal self-determination" (p. 46).

Gutmann (1999) raises the question: "What role should we attribute to teachers?" (p. 76). She conceptualizes their role "as supporting a complementary division of labor between popular authority and expertise; democratic governments perpetuating a common culture, teachers cultivating the capacity for critical reflection on that culture" (p. 76). Offering that "teachers serve to shed critical light on a democratically created culture," she views "the claim to educational expertise by teachers" as both "relative"—vis-à-vis the role of "democratic governments in cultivating a common culture"—and "partial" in that this expertise "does not comprehend all of what matters" (p. 76) in schooling. In her view, "the professional responsibility of teachers is to uphold the principle of nonrepression by cultivating the capacity for democratic deliberation" (p. 76). This principle thus "not only constrains democratic authority, it also supplies democratic content to the concept of professionalism among teachers" (p. 76). She sees teachers as both obligated and authorized "to further democratic education by supporting the intellectual and emotional preconditions for democratic deliberation among future generations of citizens" (p. 76). In order to accomplish this feat, teachers must have some degree of autonomy, and Gutmann raises the issue of how much autonomy teachers should have to fulfill their democratic obligations as she turns her attention, first, to the role of unions, and second, to the role of external (state and federal) authorities.

Gutmann's (1999) argument for autonomy is framed in terms of the role of teacher professionalism, insisting that "understood as the degree of autonomy—or insulation from external control—necessary to fulfill the democratic functions of office, professionalism completes rather than competes with democracy" (p. 77). She questions whether teachers have too much or too little autonomy. She contrasts what she terms "the ossification of office" (too little autonomy), granting that this is a condition from which "by almost all accounts, the teaching profession in the United States suffers," on the one hand, and "the insolence of office" (too much autonomy), which she frames as "authority over the rest of us far in excess of what their professional expertise warrants" (p. 77), on the other.

Her "democratic conception of professionalism" is useful because it "provides principled guidance in avoiding two theoretically elegant but politically dangerous answers, which reflect alternative visions of democracy" (p. 80). The first of these she terms "directed democracy," related to sanctioning "the authority of unions over democratic communities to the extent that unions better represent educational expertise, even if unions thereby control the form and content of public schooling" (p. 80). The alternative is a vision of "strong democracy," related to sanctioning "all policies that result from negotiations between democratic communities and unions, even if the policies leave teachers with little or no autonomy in the classroom" (p. 80). Her alternative "is that teachers' unions be granted enough educational authority to overcome ossification of office but not so much as to convert teaching into a profession that...is characterized by insolence of office" (p. 80). This 'resolution' requires further elaboration.

For Gutmann (1999), support for teacher professionalism means that "democratic communities must delegate a substantial degree of control over what happens in classrooms" and she makes the case that if "teachers cannot exercise intellectual independence in their

classrooms, they cannot teach students to be intellectually independent” (p. 82). However, she also contends that “too much independence... can be as bad as too little” (p. 82) as she considers the role of teachers’ unions:

If the democratic ideal of professionalism suggests that school boards and principals treat teachers as partners in determining school policy, then it also suggests that unions demand fewer fixed policies regarding curriculum, discipline, and work schedules, and more participatory structures within which teachers can join administrators and school boards in shaping these policies. (83-84)

She views teachers’ unions as “an interim solution to the problem of professional ossification,” expressing her regret that “the interim is likely to last a long time given the obstacles now standing in the way of teachers gaining a greater role in shaping school policy” (p. 84). A far greater threat to democratic education than that posed by unions, in her view, are the “obstacles” that have been “erected” (p. 84) by state and federal governments and agencies, some of which she sees as “unnecessary barriers to achieving an appropriate degree of autonomy for teachers” (p. 85). Since she was writing in the 1990’s, it is understandable that she would not see just how extensive this threat might become. The value of her work here is in its sophisticated purity: her attention is devoted exclusively to the necessary requirements for democratic education to move forward. In terms of the communication between schools and communities, between educators and laypersons, she is insightful as she laments that

Layers of administrative decisions now insulate the policies of school boards and the preferences of ethnic communities within local school districts from the potentially critical perspective of teachers, and vice versa, overwhelming a potentially creative tension within democratic education between communal and professional authority, whereby communities and teachers are encouraged to take each others’ educational priorities and programs seriously. (87)

The ‘creative tension’ that Gutmann highlights here is the spark underlying community life and social action in a democracy, a tension that can only be resolved by authentic (as opposed to media-manufactured-and-proliferated) public deliberation. It is this spark that is missing in many of our educational debates over the purposes and practices of schooling in the U.S., since they are usually centered on reactions and responses to overarching policies now emanating from the ‘official arenas’ of federal intervention that mask corporate intrusion—the intrusion of “the political in the guise of the non-political” (Beck, 1992, p. 185).

Conclusion

I have invoked Gutmann’s (1999) ‘democratic conception of teacher professionalism’ (p. 80) to reframe the ‘highly qualified teacher’ trope because this conception exposes two stances on teacher development that pose serious dangers for democracy under neoliberal influence. The first involves an ‘ossification of office’ (p. 77), where teacher autonomy evaporates under (forced) submission to policy changes whose purposes and outcomes are questionable at best. The second ensures an ‘insolence of office’ (p. 77), albeit under official monitoring and control on behalf, not of teachers, but of the corporate and governmental authorities overseeing them. This ‘insolence’ emerges from alignment with neoliberal policies reflecting the “new public

managerialism” (Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. 20) tied to class privilege that thwarts equality, but teachers may neither be conscious of the privileging of their class status as ‘professionals’ in this respect, nor to what this ‘managerialism’ has displaced, unless they have the benefit of the kinds of critical pedagogy utilized in foundations classrooms across the nation.

This imposition of the worst of both worlds is somehow assumed to guarantee success in all educational endeavors. Those who fail are those who deserve blame. This is formally embodied in the idea that teachers who are ‘disheartened’ by shortcomings in the systems and by the conditions under which they work should *leave the teaching profession* (Yarrow, 2009). Thus the trope becomes iconic, lighting the way for the elimination of all human error and validating Castel’s observation that “the modern ideologies of prevention are overarched by a grandiose technocratic rationalizing dream of absolute control of the accidental” (1991, as cited in Lau, 2009, p. 668). Lau (2009), for his part, contends that

It is important to note what formal rationality is meant to replace, namely, individual discretion and judgment, which are seen as indeterminate and uncertain, hence leaving room for human error. Formalized methods will enable complete elimination of human error and deliver what the modernist mentality craves for, namely certainty in the attainment of set ends. (p. 668)

In such a scenario, it is desire for the comfort of certainty—not deliberation about which ‘set ends’ are desirable—that takes center stage, but we would do well to remember that the ‘comfort’ promised by those espousing certainty is one feature of fascism, and that education has, both in the past and present, served the ‘set ends’ of totalitarian as well as democratic states. This desire for the comfort of certainty is not only educationally inappropriate and intellectually dangerous, but also humanly impossible in a world that is characterized by *uncertainty*. Risk and blame are inevitable components of the human condition, but they cannot light the way to the improvement of schooling and teaching. The determination, then, of what constitutes a ‘highly qualified teacher’ is a question of both perspective and of circumstance, and the zeitgeist spawning this trope in early 21st century American culture is a matter of extreme importance for the project of democratic education, which is sorely needed in our times.

I have reviewed some important questions and issues here, but ongoing inquiry will be required to determine *in context* (as context changes) what it means to be a ‘highly qualified teacher’ in a way that reflects a democratically-oriented conception of teacher education and teacher professionalism. Instead of prescription, I offer a refusal of things ‘as they are’ (Greene, 1988, 1995; Grumet, 1988) and submit just a few recommendations that I hope will always be useful, but that specifically offer relevance today in relation to the effects of social change(s) and to the anti-democratic zeitgeist so much in evidence. Recently, I framed the surround within which educators labor in post-9/11 America as a ‘wilderness’ space (Nicholson-Goodman, 2009), given the anxiety-producing events, social changes, and structural and social forces that have brought it into being in its present form. Although teachers and teacher candidates need to confront the production and maintenance of this space in terms of the status quo and the powers it protects, their wilderness experience does not need to be—nor should it be—a solo journey. As Beck (1992) argues, ‘democratization’ requires “collective learning” and “collective creation” (p. 191). Therefore, my recommendations are anchored in the collective, even though my relationship to students is based on the unique needs and aspirations of each individual.

First, it is imperative that teachers and teacher candidates be treated as autonomous beings—as humans, professionals *and* citizens—rather than as abject low-status recipients of higher wisdom handed down from above either by academics or by policy-makers removed from schools and classrooms. It is imperative that we awaken and support *their* agency to expand their range of pedagogical choices and curricular approaches as we assist them in developing mature democratic visions of educative purposes and processes. One role of teacher education, therefore, should be to foster a more democratic vision of education—i.e., to restore a “consciousness of agency” (Greene, 1995, p. 35) in what increasingly seems like an impossible scenario for its revival. This agency, however, cannot be so inflated as to take precedence over the needs and concerns of diverse constituent communities, or insolence of office may result. Deliberation over opposing needs and concerns among various constituents of schooling is as essential as respect for teacher work in order to avoid ossification of office.

Public deliberation requires opportunity for practice in a safe environment, which may be fostered to a limited extent in foundations classrooms. However, in society at large, deliberation must necessarily include both constituent communities affected by particular policies and also teachers, since they are obligated to carry out these policies. One way to provide this opportunity might be to take students of education to public hearings likely to involve heated discussions of educational policy and/or practice. This may help them acclimate to a public many of them may never have heard from, and to understand the emotional intensity of the issues we speak of in foundations classes as academics attuned to the challenges and conflicts of interest involved. Shared governance—i.e., governance that involves teachers in policy-making, should it ever truly emerge—will be necessary but insufficient unless constituencies affected by such policies also have a seat at the table close enough to power to make themselves heard and to demand response. In short, the deliberative process, however imperfect, is the sole repository of democratic authority, and access to this process requires expansion in our times. Teachers and teacher candidates must have opportunities to observe and to participate in such deliberations. In our classrooms, they should also have the opportunity to recount what such experiences mean to them via post-event discussions.

Second, teacher candidates need opportunities to participate in communities of learning in our classrooms (Bruner, 1996), working collaboratively with peers on critical and/or controversial classroom projects as a means of preparing to work in collaboration with colleagues and constituent communities once they have donned the mantle of professionalism. These efforts should be geared towards ‘wide-awakeness,’ i.e., opening to the *possible* in their relations with self, with others, and with the world (Greene, 1995, p. 35), but again, should not be left merely to repose in “*romantic possibilitarian* rhetoric” (Apple, 2004, p. 14). We should strive instead to teach them “the importance of thinking tactically and strategically” (Apple, 2004, p. 41). This may be accomplished if their learning experiences are grounded in democratic thinking—i.e., in working to develop “a more principled understanding of our educational purposes” (Gutmann, 1999, p. 4), while also considering structural and ideological barriers to ‘envisioning and enacting’ democracy as a way of life in actual school practices (Henderson & Kesson, 2004). Schools of education increasingly need to find multiple ways to connect in-service teachers with pre-service teachers outside of schools, and to connect both with constituent communities.

Critical analysis of the socio-cultural, political-economic, and ideological histories behind education trends and reforms should be blended, then, with studied awareness—

developed by sharing observations from field experiences, professional practice, and interactive experiences with constituents and communities—of the inner workings of schools and school cultures and the intimate connection between school cultures and a political-economic surround that now keeps public schools and their teachers captive to a post-democratic vision of educational purpose and process. This kind of analysis is crucial for their development as individuals, as citizens, as members of broader learning communities, and yes, as (future) workers in the public sector engaged in what should be treated—and enacted—as an honorable profession.

Critical pedagogies aimed at social critique need to include not only media and technological literacies, but also forms of cultural criticism that make social changes, cultural differences, and the effects of global capitalism intelligible to them, including an understanding of consumerism as a displacement of civic and ecological awareness. Above all, they need not only to understand, but to have opportunities to practice the principles of non-discrimination and non-repression (Gutmann, 1999, pp. 44-45) so crucial to a pluralist society, and to envision themselves in a more egalitarian relationship with those whose class, race, and/or ethnicity have positioned them as 'disadvantaged' in a society enduring 'savage inequalities' (Kozol, 1992). These are the tasks that foundations professors undertake in their courses, and they must have their space in the post-9/11 American curriculum for teachers and future teachers. In order to democratize what has already been 'marketized' (Hirrt, 2009), we must begin by *conscientizing* (Freire, 1970) teachers themselves, and fight, if we must, to *educate*, rather than just *train* them (Hill & Kumar, 2009). We have the space to construct such critical learning communities in our classrooms, and we must use it to democratize teacher awareness of policy and its effects on practice, and to raise the bar of expectations so that democratic education may be realized.

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