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The Hegemony of Accountability in Schools and Universities

Since “A Nation at Risk” was published in the early 1980s, the emphasis in K-12 school reform has been the development of a world-class school system that can be directly linked to increased international economic production and prominence. In other words, corporate interests that have been continually promulgated by the business community have driven school reform efforts. There are many contexts in which this special interest is manifest although one of the most prominent has been the four National Education Summits, controlled and dominated by corporate CEO’s and governors. Simultaneously, higher education institutions have also become corporatized through, for example, joint ventures with profit making businesses, the creation of research parks, increased corporate and political control (often through their foundations) over research, use of temporary and contingent labor, and university administrators as paid corporate board members.

In this environment of corporate takeover of schools and universities many recommended interventions are promoted. In K-12 schools some examples are school choice plans (voucher systems, charter schools), comprehensive school designs based on business principles (such as economies of scale, standardization, cost efficiency, production line strategies), back to basics curricula, teacher merit pay, and strong systems of accountability. In universities some examples are the demand for common general education and core curricula (often not developed or supported by faculty), demands for common tests of student core knowledge, standardized tests of knowledge and skill for professional areas, promotion of “classic” education, and elimination of “new” content areas such as women’s studies, post-modernism, and multiculturalism.

In this paper we will look specifically at the increased and increasing emphasis on accountability in schools and universities. Accountability has become the means of enforcement and control used by states and businesses. This is so since those who declare that schools and universities ought to be a certain way cannot themselves make schools and universities be that way. States and corporations can only demand that others remake schools and authority to carry out this mission is delegated, although not the authority to decide on the mission. The delegation takes the form of uniform outcome measures of productivity, e.g., scores on standardized tests or percentage of job placements, which provide evidence that the authority delegated to teachers or professors is being properly exercised. We will explore this hegemony of accountability, its origins, meanings, and consequences as it has developed in K-12 education and is spreading to higher education. We will conclude with two examples of counter-hegemonic accountability strategies.

The Meaning of Accountability

Accountability is a means of interaction in hierarchical, often bureaucratic systems, between those who have power and those who do not. Accountability is “a state of being in which persons are obligated to answer to others” (Gabbard, 2000, p. 53). Complex hierarchical systems do not permit those in power to be everywhere and do everything at the same time to achieve what they consider to be desirable outcomes. Consequently, authority must be delegated to others, which disperses power to lower levels of the hierarchical system. Those who receive this authority do not receive it in full, however. Power flows through them, but not from them. For example, the authority of accountable persons is limited to establishing the means by which the ends of power shall be achieved.

Specifically, accountability is an economic means of interaction. When power is delegated and dispersed to those within a hierarchical system there is an expected return from the investment of that power in others. Those to whom power has been delegated are obligated to answer or render an account of the degree of success in accomplishing the outcomes desired by those in power. Because of the diffuse nature of many hierarchical systems, accountability depends on both surveillance and self-regulation. The power of surveillance is born out in part by the spectacle that may result from accounting by those to whom power has been delegated. In other words, the powerful in small numbers are surveilling the performance of many (through means such as standardized tests) which in turn become spectacles observed by the many (as in when schools test scores are reported on the front page of the newspaper). (See Vinson & Ross [2001] for a complete discussion of the notions of surveillance and spectacle.) Self-regulation, that is the faithful exercise of delegated authority, is in part based on surveillance and the concomitant possibility of spectacle, but also on the perception of the legitimacy of those delegating power.

Within systems of accountability delegates of power must answer to some higher authority, but the identity of this authority is obfuscated when the interests of the public, “the American people,” are used to obscure the special interests of the few. Additionally, the obfuscation of the identity of those in power and its purpose (i.e., being in the greater good) also serves to convince the many of the value of the interests of the few (Ross, 2001). The implication is that teachers, professors, public schools and universities are accountable to the public, but the higher authority is more specifically the interests of the capitalist state, an inextricable conglomeration of business and government interests.

The Manifestation of Accountability in K-12 Schools

Historically, schools have always been controlled by forces external to them. For example, the Sputnik era brought massive curricular reforms such as Man a Course of Study (MACOS), Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS), and others, and even accountability schemes such as the spelling tests proposed by Joseph Rice in Boston early in the 1900s to rid schools of headmasters considered to be undesirable. Still, the power of accountability in K-12 schools increased dramatically in the early 1980s with the publication of “A Nation at Risk.” That report linked American educational performance to the decline in the “once unchallenged preeminence [of the United States] in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation.” Whether this is really true is debatable (see Berliner & Biddle, 1995) but the report created a powerful rhetoric from which the current accountability movement derives.

The era of big curriculum reform lacked any wide-spread and sustained change on schools, in large part because local conditions mitigated efforts to create standardized content, pedagogy, and classroom processes (Fullan, 1999). The curriculum reform era has been replaced by a standards-based reform era focusing exclusively on outcomes, a basic utilitarian approach that focuses more on ends (e.g., test scores) than means, but that affects both (Mathison, 1991). Much of the impetus and continued support for standards based educational reform comes not from educators, educational researchers, nor the public, but

rather from corporate business. In fact, a main current in the history of education in the United States, is the effort of corporate leaders and their allies in government to shape public education to the ends of business (Callahan, 1964; Spring 2000). As Hursh (2000) argues, under post-Fordist neo-liberal economics, the collaboration between corporations, government and education has intensified. The four National Education Summits held since 1989 have been key events in the rise of the accountability movement in K-12 schools and intensified efforts to transform schools to meet the corporate expectations.

The National Education Summits. In 1989, President George H. W. Bush called the nation's governors together for the first National Education Summit in Charlottesville, VA. They set goals and developed ways to measure progress, but were stymied by resistance to federal interference in local school decisions. Seven years later, governors and top corporate leaders met at IBM's conference center in Palisades, N.Y. and developed an approach for states to accomplish what had eluded participants in the first summit, namely defining what should be taught in local schools and enforcing curriculum standardization through state mandated tests—what is called the “standards movement.” The most recent summits (in 1999 and 2001) have aimed at consolidating “gains” that have been made in the corporate/state regulation and administration of knowledge in public schools, including the successful adoption of a national testing plan, which was President George W. Bush's top domestic priority when he took office in 2001 (see Ross & Vinson, 2002). The 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) is the most dramatic change in the federal role in local education since the early 1960s. Ironically, the Republican Party, which has argued for the abolition of the US Department of Education, is now responsible for the greatest-ever federal involvement in local schools.

This business—government alliance has, however, encountered public resistance to its agenda. At the 1999 Summit, Public Agenda—a public opinion research organization—reported to participants that the movement to raise standards in public schools strikes a responsive chord with the public, but also warned that the issue of standards is not immune to the “normal controversies and complications that accompany any large-scale policy change.”

What is noteworthy about this report, *Standards and Accountability: Where the Public Stands*, is its straightforward description of the agenda that must be pursued if the economic and political elite are to maintain legitimacy—and respond to opposition—as they define the curriculum and pedagogy of public schools. The number one task according to Public Agenda is effective propaganda or as they put it:

Experts and decision-makers often must concentrate on the labyrinth of details needed to make a policy work in real life. But to sustain change that touches people's families and daily lives, leaders need to take time periodically to restate the basic rationale, to remind people of the beliefs and values that underlie reform. When the going gets a bit rough, people need to be reminded of why we're here.

It is important to note that the “we” in this case refers to the summiteers and other opinion-makers like Public Agenda and *Education Week*, the trade weekly that is an ardent proponent of the standards movement, and which collaborated with Public Agenda on its survey of public opinion regarding the standards movement.

While the authors of *Standards and Accountability: Where the Public Stands* make much of the “established and remarkably stable” support for standards-based educational reform in the U.S., they are mindful of “pitfalls that could derail or unsettle support.” First, the report warns that standards advocates should expect unhappiness when the rubber hits the road and students are retained in grade or denied diplomas. Pointing to the dramatic shift in public support for managed health care as people experienced drive-by surgery and denial of treatment options, Public Agenda warns standards advocates that delivering test score increases must be accompanied by the “appearance of fairness” in managing the reform effort.

Now that thousands of students are being forced to repeat a grade or denied diploma, it is likely that the mere appearance of fairness will not be enough to stave off opposition to standards and the high-stakes tests that accompany them. Parents and teachers are the two groups most likely to derail the standards train.

The Public Agenda report—in a somewhat quixotic claim—declares that parents are insignificant players in the standards movement. While parents generally support standards-based reform, Public Agenda says, “most are not especially well-informed or vigilant consumers, even concerning their own child’s progress.” This claim conflicts with reports that the once-sporadic resistance to standards-based educational reforms is blossoming into a broader rebellion. For example, as a result of parent protests Los Angeles school officials recently backed off of a plan to end “social promotions” and in Massachusetts officials were forced to redefine cut scores on state tests that otherwise would have prevented as many as 83% of Latino and 80% of African American students from receiving high school diplomas.

While Public Agenda—and perhaps the corporate leadership of the movement—considers parents to be little or no threat to standards-based educational reform, politicians appear more sensitive to the growing anti-standards, anti-testing pressures. Test boycotts and other forms of resistance have moved the governors of Michigan and California to offer students money (“scholarships” of up to \$2,500) for taking or scoring well on state-mandated tests. Indiana politicians are bracing for an enormous backlash against the state graduation test, which threatens to keep 50% of the seniors in urban districts and a quarter of seniors statewide from graduating this year.

Teachers are the most significant potential pitfall to the standards movement, according to the Public Agenda report. While many school administrators and the top leaders of the teacher unions are solidly on the standards bandwagon, rank-and-file teachers’ pivotal role is rightly acknowledged:

If teachers believe that standards policies are important and well thought out, they can sustain and nourish parental support. If teachers are convinced that standards policies are unfair or destructive, they can undercut parental support with extraordinary speed...District directives are often ridiculed or resented, and experienced teachers have already been through waves of reform, which in their minds produced very little of value. Public Agenda’s research strongly suggests that bringing the nation’s teacher corps firmly inside the movement to raise standards could be the most pivotal challenge of all.

Following the lead of Public Agenda, the top agenda item at the summit was teaching, in particular devising ways in which teacher preparation and pay can be tied directly to the standardized curriculum and tests developed by states.

The influence of dissenting voices, other than parents and teachers, was evident during the most recent Summit when Kurt Landgraf, CEO of ETS, issued a press release that was a direct attack on Fairtest, a group advocating fairness in testing and also supporting a demonstration at the Summit in Palisades, NY.

In the end, the National Education Summits are yet another portrait of power relations in neoliberal democracy. It represents our hierarchical society, where citizens are made to be passive spectators, disconnected from one another and alienated from their own desires, learning, and work. The spectacle of standards, test scores, and summits obscures the role of parents, teachers, and students in decision-making in public education. This spectacle expresses what society can do, but in this expression what is permitted with regard to teaching and learning limits what is possible. Ultimately, the achievement of standards-based educational reform is the preservation of the unequal conditions of existence.

The Liberal-Conservative Alliance. The National Education Summits and the standards-based educational reforms they have nurtured should be understood both within the context of neoliberalism and coalescing

of historically liberal and conservative political and economic principles (Mathison, Ross & Vinson, 2001; Vinson & Ross, 2001). A hallmark of the standardization craze is its remarkable capacity to unite seemingly disparate individuals and interests around the “necessity” of national and/or state educational standards—the standardization imperative. Ostensibly strange bedfellows, including for instance E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Diane Ravitch, Chester Finn, Gary Nash, Bill Clinton, Edward Kennedy, both President Bushes, IBM chairman Lou Gerstner, the leaders of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA), 49 state departments of education, and nearly all governors (Democratic and Republican), join to support standards-based reform and its concomitant “need” to implement systems of mandated, high-stakes testing. Somehow these “divergent” educational leaders manage to pull together around standards-based reform as the medium for “real” public school improvement.

In the past several years the Education Excellence Partnership, which includes the AFT, NEA, The Business Roundtable, US Chamber of Commerce, National Alliance of Business, Achieve Inc., National Governor’s Association, and US Department of Education, have sponsored over 50 full-page advertisements in *The New York Times* promoting the standards agenda and, in particular, the use of high-stakes tests as means to both “motivate achievement” and retain children in grade. (We should note that the use of tests in these ways contradicts what we know from a large body of educational research, which tells us that high-stakes testing reduces students’ motivation to learn and grade retention damages children’s chances to succeed educationally.)

Education policy is being crafted in a milieu distinguished by the pro-standards consensus among an array of both liberal and conservative players and exemplifies how elites manufacture crises (e.g., the widespread failure of public education) and consent (e.g., the way to save public education is through standardized schools driven by high-stakes tests). Accordingly, the commitments of the political-pedagogical right public school privatization, the reduction of national financial support for public education, the promotion of US global corporate hegemony, “creationism,” socio-cultural homogenization around a few dominant “moral” themes, anti-immigration, the assault on organized labor, school prayer, and so on—blend with those of the left—equality, expanded democracy, economic opportunity, social justice, diversity, and so on—to create a clever though fundamentally confusing admixture of multiple contradictions and inconsistencies (Vinson & Ross, 2001).

At its core the pro-standards consensus can be characterized by its commitment to a relatively few defining principles. Advocates argue first that standards-based reform is necessary vis-à-vis school improvement because the current educational “crisis” is rooted in the inability or unwillingness of “failing” schools to offer the same “high quality” programs provided by more “successful” schools. Since the identified purposes, selected content, teachers, and modes of evaluation must be better in some (usually wealthy and majority white) schools than in others (usually less wealthy and majority Latino/a and African American), the implications are unmistakable. Elite educational leaders and policymakers are saying that “other” schools can indeed improve, but only to the extent that they become more like “our” schools. Hence, the one-sided standardization imperative and the subsequent normalization of whiteness, wealth, and exclusionary forms of knowledge.

In short, the standardization alliance argues, in most cases without any evidence, that: (1) today’s students do not “know enough” (no matter how knowing enough is defined); (2) curriculum and assessment standards will lead to higher achievement (although arguably many students achieve highly now—they just do so differently or in ways not easily quantified); (3) national and state standards are crucial in terms of successful US-corporate-global economic competition; (4) standards-based reform should occur with federal guidance yet be implemented under local control (thus keeping both big government liberals and New Federalist conservatives happy); and (5) “higher” standards/standardization will promote equal educational, thus economic and political, opportunity.

Some specific effects on schools and schooling. The National Education Summits and the standards-based reform movement as a whole are quintessential examples of how neoliberal democracy works to thwart meaningful participation of the many by allowing the few to speak for all. The objective appearance of standards-based reforms, which aim to reform schools by focusing on test scores, conceals (partially) the fact that these reforms are the result of the deepening economic inequality and racial segregation, which are typically coupled with authoritarianism. For example, in Chicago, public schools have been militarized—six schools have been turned in military academies and over 7,000 students in 41 schools are in Junior ROTC—and teachers have been given scripted lessons, keyed to tests, to guide their instruction. In a dramatic shift away from democracy, urban schools systems are being taken over by states. In Detroit, a Democratic mayor and Republican governor disbanded the elected school board and then appointed a new board—whose members represent corporate interests and of whom only one is a city resident. In December 2001, another partnership between a Democratic mayor and Republican governor resulted in a state take-over of the 200,000 student Philadelphia school system with the intention of giving Edison Schools Inc., the largest for-profit manager of public schools in the USA, a six-year, \$101 million contract to become a district consultant and run 45 of the city's schools.

The primary justification for the seizure or closing of schools and/or the imposition of standardized curriculum has been poor test scores and high dropout rates. But, standardized test scores are less a reflection of ability or achievement than measures of parental income. Bolon's study of student scores on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) demonstrates a very strong positive correlation between student test scores and average community income (2001). He concludes that, "Once community income was included in models, other factors—including percentages of students in disadvantaged populations, percentages receiving special education, percentages eligible for free or reduced price lunch, percentages with limited English proficiency, school sizes, school spending levels, and property values—all failed to associate substantial additional variance." Analysis of students scores on the Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT) also illustrates this finding (Hoover). Other recent data show that someone taking the SAT can expect to score an extra thirty test points for every \$10,000 in parental yearly income. Dropout rates are directly related to poverty, and none of the powers demanding the school seizure or standardization are prepared to address the question of poverty.

The standards based education reform movement and its dependence on standardized testing is not only good for business, but also good business. While we have argued a socio-political agenda (of mixed perspectives) drives these reforms in education, they also present the opportunity for much enhanced profit making in textbook, educational materials, and test sales and increased stock values. These are corporate business interests intertwined with government officials in no less significant ways than other aspects of public life, such as energy or the environment. There are three major textbook/standardized testing companies in the USA (McGraw-Hill, Harcourt, and Houghton-Mifflin) and all will see sales and profits skyrocket as the new ESEA is implemented. George W. Bush's entanglement with Enron is rivaled by his entanglement with McGraw-Hill, one based on several generations of mutual support between a family of politicians and a family of publishers. Even not-for-profit organizations such as the Educational Testing Service (ETS) have ousted their academic CEO (Nancy Cole), replaced her with a marketing executive (Kurt Landgraf), and created a for profit subsidiary, ETS K-12 Works, which will sell tests and testing services to elementary and secondary schools.

Conclusion. Standards based reform is an effort on the part of some external, although not necessarily official, body to define and establish a holistic system of pedagogical purpose (like Goals 2000), content selection (like state curriculum standards), teaching methodology (like the promotion of phonics), and assessment (like state mandated tests). These intents combine such that: the various components of classroom practice are interrelated and mutually reinforcing to the extent they coalesce around the others and are perceived as inextricable, and performance is completely subsumed by the assessment component, which serves as the indicator of relative success or failure. These external bodies are often official entities, such as governmental agencies (such as the federal government and its newly passed Elementary and

Secondary Education Act) or professional associations (such as the National Council for the Teachers of Mathematics and its Standards for Mathematics) or unions (such as the American Federation of Teachers and its support for the ESEA). These bodies can also be unofficial, such as the Business Roundtable and other special interest groups. The formal status of these external bodies is irrelevant. What matters is that they have power and authority, not necessarily direct means of control of schools and schooling. Herein lies the necessity for accountability, and from the singularity of perspective that advantages the political-corporate rises hegemony.

The Manifestation of Accountability in Higher Education

In comparison with K-12 public schools, American universities have had a relatively independent existence. While long subject to the external pressures, until recently academe had stubbornly held on to its unique role as perhaps the most independent institution in our society.

The intrusion of business interests on the nature and function of universities can be traced to the origins of the research university in US in the late 19th century, particularly in the transformation of the social function of intellectuals (see Ross, 1998). The academic disciplines have a strong reformist tendency, which has evolved over the years as various cultural, social, and economic elements have shaped the professionalization of social science. In his account of the development of the American academic expert, Thomas Popkewitz (1984) notes that the “belief that society as well as individuals could be emancipated through communities of competent professionals initially appeared outside the university” (p. 111). The American Social Science Association (ASSA), which functioned from 1865 to 1909, helped to create communities of inquiry through its publications and other activities, and played an important role in the birth of organizations for specialized academic disciplines such as history, economics, and sociology.

The founders of ASSA were genteel reformers who adhered to the idealism of Emerson and Hegel and reacted against the determinism of European positivism with an unwillingness to admit limits of human freedom and the maintenance of the theological distinction between people and nature. The ASSA was concerned not merely with understanding society, but improving it. As a result, these researchers conceived social inquiry as having two dimensions: (a) understanding and explanation and (b) the activity of reform, including popular education to obtain the allegiance of the masses on particular issues. The task of the organization was to create ways of thinking about the reorganization of social affairs and the authority of social science provided legitimacy for this mission.

ASSA members felt a moral obligation of their class to educate the masses to the nature of good and evil and to guide the evolution of the society. The Association’s leaders were involved in the abolitionist movement and supported John Brown. The Association was formed to work with the Massachusetts Board of Charities to reform the state’s charitable and correctional institutions. The call for social science was to publicize the abuses and to coordinate a decentralized system of almshouse, hospitals and ad hoc relief. (Popkewitz, 1984, p. 112)

The reformist stance of the ASSA, however, came into conflict with the emergent structure of the research university in the late nineteenth century. Social scientists sought the institutional arrangements of the university but found that their activism and incursions into public education created strains within the university and the business community. Daniel Coit Gilman, the first President of Johns Hopkins University, was a charter member of the ASSA. Gilman came to believe, however, that investigation and agitation could not coexist within the university. A university president had to account for the pressures of the university board of trustees, and public criticism and agitation might challenge the interests of the trustees who were typically members of the business community.

In addition, the ASSA “doctrine” that human affairs involved moral agents who were autonomous and masters of their own fate, no longer dominated the cultural outlook. For example,

Leading economists of the time rejected the notion that the social scientist could combine both investigation and popular education. The public airing of disagreement was seen as hindering efforts to affect public policy. Academic debates were to be internal to the professions, aired at professional organization meetings and in scholarly writing. The more efficient means towards reform was through the role of expert-advisor to policy-makers. (Popkewitz, p. 115)

The emergence of the modern American research university encouraged this shift in world view—away from “the volunteeristic and spiritual view of self-help” that underlay the ASSA toward a new social science professionalism that valued sociability, careers, and organized space in which to practice. As a result the tradition of popular education to obtain the allegiance of the masses was dropped as a strategy of social science by the early 1900s and a strategy to influence policy-makers was adopted. While this shifting of strategy narrowed the audience for social science research findings, it did not insulate social science from its cultural, social and political location.

As recent analyses illustrate, the university’s role as an independent institution is increasingly threatened by the interests of corporations in both subtle and obvious ways (e.g., Soley, 1995; White, 2000; Slaughter & Leslie, 1999). “Globalization,” which Bertell Ollman (2001) defines as “another name for capitalism, but it’s capitalism with the gloves off and on a world scale. It is capitalism at a time when all the old restrictions and inhibitions have been or are in the process of being put aside, a supremely self-confident capitalism, one without apparent rivals and therefore without a need to compromise or apologize”—has transformed internal and external relations of university from teaching and research to student aid policies and pouring rights for soft drink manufacturers. Decreased funding for higher education has made universities increasingly susceptible to the influence of big money and threatens the academic freedom and direction of research.

Like their K-12 counterparts, university teachers are losing control over what they teach, how they teach, the topics of their research, the methods used to conduct that research, and the very purposes of academic labor. The automation of higher education, particularly the rise of distance education technologies, is one well-documented threat to university teachers (e.g., Noble, 2001; Ross, 2000). We will limit our discussion here to two examples of official mandates or legislation that attempt to increase accountability but serve to strip university teachers (and researchers) of control over their work: (1) the battle over general education curriculum at the State University of New York; and (2) federal legislation on literacy education.

SUNY General Education Mandate. In December 1998, the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York mandated a core curriculum for all undergraduates, a move that affected 64 campuses and over 200,000 undergraduate students. Ignoring the fact that all SUNY campuses already had some form of general education requirements, Board Chairman Thomas Egan used the same “higher standards” logic to justify the mandate that has been used to promote standardized K-12 curriculum. The Trustees’ 30 credit hour core curriculum—which mandated study of natural sciences, mathematics, foreign languages, Western civilization and American history, as well as humanities and arts, information technology and communication—reflected the ideological slant of the conservative board (appointed by Republican Governor George Pataki). Other Trustees claimed that employers “deserve no less” than the commitment to raising academic standards that the tightly prescribed general education curriculum supposedly represented.

The Trustees’ unilateral action was taken even though the SUNY faculty senate had offered its own

approach to general education—allowing for each campus to develop its own curriculum based on broad guidelines. The Trustee’s action was applauded by conservative interest groups like the Empire Foundation of Policy Research and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (which has fanned the flames of a new McCarthyism in the wake of the September 11th terror attacks, see Berkowitz, 2002) and the National Association of Scholars.

In fact, the Empire Foundation—which is closely aligned with The Business Roundtable, a key player in the high-stakes testing and standardized curriculum movement for K-12 schools—laid the ground work for the mandated curriculum two years earlier, when it blasted SUNY for a supposed decline in standards based on a reported drop in the average SAT scores from 936 to 923 between the years 1987 and 1999. The foundation president Thomas Carroll declared “SUNY might as well abandon the pretense of having any admissions standards at all and simply put up a sign saying, ‘If you can get the cash, come on in’” (SUNY Scores on SAT, 1996). Carroll and the Empire Foundation were unencumbered by the fact that SUNY freshmen were still scoring above national and state averages on the SAT or that solely relying on SAT scores as measure of “quality” of students is a one dimensional approach most college admissions eschew. The fact that SUNY officials dismissed the report as a “bogus exercise” that “took existing data . . . removed those numbers that didn’t support their false conclusions and issued it as a study” did not deter the study from being used to support the mandated core curriculum and efforts the SUNY provost, Peter Salins (who came to SUNY from the Manhattan Institute, an ultra-conservative think tank) and Trustees to institute entrance, junior-year, and exit exams for SUNY students.

The SUNY Trustees’ actions on general education clearly intrudes on what has traditionally been the prerogative of the faculty and fits into a pattern of attacks on academic freedom by the group charged with overseeing the university. (The general education mandate was not the only such intrusion, however. In 1997, SUNY New Paltz and its President, Roger Bowen, came under fire from the Trustees, headed by Trustee Candice DeRussy, for a conference on women’s sexuality. SUNY Chancellor John Ryan reprimanded Bowen, even though Ryan’s own investigatory committee concluded Bowen had acted appropriately by allowing the conference to go forward.)

Legislating What Counts as Literacy Education and Research. The so-called “reading wars” have produced a state definition of reading and of legal scientific research in the field of reading. The skills-emphasis approach to literacy education (often called “phonics”) promotes the idea that children learn best when they are first taught the basic skills of written language, especially those that take apart sounds within words, connect sounds to make words, associate sounds and letters, and identify sight words—this “step-by-step, tightly controlled, direct, explicit, and systematic teaching of a predetermined logical sequence” of beginning reading skills is believed by its proponents to be not merely a successful method but one superior to “whole language,” the teaching approach identified as its primary adversary” (Coles, 2000, p. x)

Advocates of whole language believe that phonics is just one small part of the whole picture of reading. Whole language teachers believe children become fluent in written language in the same way they learn oral language, by employing it in real, meaningful ways, by discovering its communicative functions, and by acquiring a love for the power of literature. Unlike phonics, whole language has no “materials” of its own. It promotes language-based thinking by using materials that inherently contain meaning, that is, that inherently contain an author’s message. It uses real, everyday literature, from books to street signs to personal diaries (Strauss, 1999).

In the 1990s, a powerful combination of governmental (state and federal), business, conservative religious groups and the American Federation of Teachers have been successful in encouraging or requiring the direct, explicit, and systematic use of phonics-based reading instruction in nearly thirty states. In 1997, California went so far as passing a law that bars reading experts associated with Whole Language from

providing professional development for the state's teachers (Coles, 2000; Shannon, 1999). The California legislation required professional development in phonics-based literacy instruction only. Before being listed on an "approved provider" list, potential professional development vendors had to apply to the state and

respond to 25 state criteria, to provide a complete outline with materials to be used in the intended training, and to sign an oath that the vendor would not use the terms "context clues, inventive spelling, or cueing systems." Nor could you encourage the teachers to invite readers to "guess at words." [All these practices are associated with whole language approaches to literacy instruction.] (Shannon, 1999, p. 402)

As a result many leading literacy researchers and practitioners were barred from providing state funded professional development to California teachers. However, as Shannon points out, the California Department of Education committee did approve vendors representing SRA/McGraw Hill, the Wright Group, Language Links, Rigby, the Success for All Foundation in Baltimore, all of which have products to sell teachers in California.

Legislators and policy makers have imposed particular literacy practices based upon what is described by phonics advocates as "indisputable scientific evidence," much of which is based on research funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (part of the National Institutes of Health). Recent, comprehensive critiques of this research reveal that "below a veneer of adherence to scientific standards is an extensive pattern of faulty research designs, data, logic, and interpretations that offers little support for the strong conclusions about the 'scientific' findings that have been proclaimed" (Coles, p. xvii).

The recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (i.e., President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" Act), mandates practices based upon "scientifically based research" for everything from reading to provision of technical assistance to schools to the selection of anti-drug abuse programs. The term "scientifically based research" appears over 100 times in the law (Olson & Viadero, 2002). This policy excludes all ethnographic or other non-experimental research paradigms from funding consideration as well as federal support for practices that are not based upon experimental or quasi-experimental research. In effect, politicians have decided what counts as scientific research and university based researchers who expect access to federal research funds and dissemination will have their research agendas and methods mandated.

Conclusion. These examples illustrate unprecedented incursions into higher education, in places and ways that previously were considered protected by academic freedom. Ironically, the exercise of accountability in higher education may be even more draconian than in K-12 education. In the later case, there is at least the rhetoric of centralized authorities (government-business alliances) identifying the ends, but leaving the means to local agents. In the higher education examples we have described, not only can politicians or their agents demand certain outcomes, they also demand particular means by which to arrive at those outcomes.

Counter-Hegemonic Accountability Practices

Accountability, as we described at the beginning of this paper is about authority—who has it, who does not, and how it is exercised. We have described the ways in which authority is manifest and has become centered in demands by business and political alliances for standardization of processes, outcomes, and the measurement and reporting on these in elementary, secondary, and higher education. The hegemony of accountability derives from the use of standardization to promote the interests of corporate-political elites, although often under the guise of the public good.

Accountability need not be hegemonic and counter-hegemonic accountability practices rely first and foremost on a genuine sharing of authority among the few and the many. Fundamentally, such forms of accountability rely on democratic assumptions. Democracy, here, is not simply procedural such as is evidenced in majoritarianism where we abide by a one person one vote act to determine what is good or right. Nor is democracy primarily constitutional, where majoritarianism is tempered by inalienable moral constraints, such as, for example, freedom from cruelty. Rather, the democratic principles to which we refer are reflected in Dewey's (1916) idea of "a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" or by forms of political action and discourse Gutmann & Thompson (1996) call deliberative democracy. What characterizes these democratic principles is not actions such as voting, but an obligation to engage in careful, public consideration of alternatives for the purpose of creating a better way of life, for oneself and others. As such, counter-hegemonic accountability is achieved through creating and empowering communities with shared interests to work toward greater clarity about and commitment to particular value positions.

In general, participatory forms of evaluation are counter-hegemonic and promote democratic ideals (Mathison, 2001). These are approaches that involve a broad range of stakeholders in the evaluation process, both as sources of information (the essence of participation) and as participants in shaping the purpose, substance, and form of the evaluation process and product (the essence of collaboration). Stakeholders are individuals or groups with a vested interest in that which is being evaluated, so if schools and their components are the focus of accountability, the stakeholders include students, teachers, educational administrators, parents, as well as perhaps colleges and employers. With any evaluand, determining who the stakeholders are, the degree of vestedness each has in the evaluand, and how to balance their input is neither straightforward nor simple. And, how such decisions are made is critical in creating truly participatory, collaborative evaluation, i.e., counter-hegemonic accountability.

Participatory, collaborative evaluation (that is, the genuine involvement of stakeholders) requires some means by which stakeholders can express their views about these various aspects of the evaluation. Obviously, one could survey stakeholders about what they believe an accountability plan should look like. Such needs assessment strategies rely on the individual reflection and production of what it means to be accountable. Seldom, however, is it the case that we determine what we value and how in isolation—more likely we do so in interaction with one another and from outside sources of information such as the media or educational research. Thus, we suggest, the natural and most productive way of determining the specifics of accountability is through face-to-face deliberation. Rather than taken for granted institutional forms driving actions, the deliberative aspect of preparing to do and carrying out the accountability plan provide an opportunity for the creation of institutional practices that require active participation and responsibility for determining what is good, and making it happen. Education is a moral act and accountability can increase our collective ability to reason well and justly about the forms of education in schools.

Counter-hegemonic accountability in K-12 education. A specific example of counter-hegemonic accountability in K-12 education is an "authentic statewide assessment system" proposed by the Massachusetts Coalition of Authentic Reform in Education (CAREMass), a parent collective. This proposal replaces reliance on a single state controlled (and business influenced) test with an accountability system based on local initiatives and systematic reviews of schools. The key elements of this proposal are:

local authentic assessments These assessments are to be based on local school goals with a plan (approved perhaps by the state) for assessing students, making decisions about students, and reporting to all school constituencies.

limited standardized testing, in literacy and numeracy only Such tests will be primarily for curriculum, program, and school evaluation and not for making important

decisions about students.

annual school reporting Each school will report its progress toward its goals. Reports will be based on local assessments and standardized tests and also include outcomes by race and ethnicity, gender, income, and special needs. Provisions for verification of the accuracy of school reports are to be made by the state.

school quality reviews Every five years each school will conduct a self-study, including a visit by an expert external team that could be coordinated by the state or other regional educational agencies. The team will provide a detailed report to assist the school with planning and development.

The CAREMass proposal identifies a significant, but not singular, role for the state and identifies information that will inform the state if intervention at the school or district level is necessary. It also supports the right of local schools/districts to set goals, the means to achieve them, and demonstrate success although not in a way that ignores the common responsibility for public schools to educate all children. But notably, accountability is not solely to state agencies and those whose interest they are acting in, but to the complex communities of stakeholders of each and every school.

First, local schools know students best. Second, the state should not be making decisions about individual students. Instead, the role of the state is to ensure all students' access to high-quality teaching to guarantee their success. In the spirit of democracy and local innovation, schools and districts assume primary responsibility over both assessment and its relation to retention, promotion, and graduation decisions. A central tenet is the accountability of schools and districts to the communities they serve. (Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan & Foley, 2001)

Counter-hegemonic accountability in higher education. Universities and colleges are held accountable through accreditation by external bodies, as a whole (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools; and so on) and within specific disciplines (psychology and the American Psychological Association; teacher education and the National Council on Accreditation of Teacher Education; nursing education and the National League of Nursing Accrediting Commission; and so on). (Accrediting agencies are themselves accredited by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation!) In general, these accrediting bodies impose pre-ordinate criteria and standards of accountability on programs and institutions and have monopolies, i.e., there is one and only one regional or discipline-specific accrediting body from which to seek approval and thus be held accountable for providing quality higher education. This monopoly contributes to the hegemony of accountability in higher education in very substantial ways.

One discipline where the monopoly has been challenged is in the accreditation of teacher education programs. Until recently the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) was the only accountability option, a problem compounded by the creations of partnerships between state departments of education. A new accrediting body, the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) has been created (and is itself accredited by CHEA) and challenges NCATE in a number of ways. At the simplest level, it provides an option so there is not a single, standardized accountability scheme for teacher education programs. But more fundamentally, it challenges the idea that there can be a single standardized accountability scheme for all teacher education programs. TEAC promotes the establishment of context and place specific accountability schemes.

TEAC outlines three “quality principles” that are central to all good teacher education programs:

evidence of student learning with regard to subject matter knowledge, liberally educated, pedagogical knowledge, teaching skill, opportunity to learn to learn, multicultural perspectives, and uses of technology

valid assessment of student learning with a rationale for program connections and demonstrated validity of assessments

institutional learning and capacity for program quality with an emphasis on the university/college commitment to program high quality programs and to seriously examine the degree to which its programs are high quality

Neither the content nor the means of demonstrating success are specified though, and institutions are free to represent their program's success in a variety of ways through what is called an Inquiry Brief. The Inquiry Brief is a research monograph, in which the faculty members present qualitative and/or quantitative evidence that their graduates are competent, qualified, and caring and that the institution has the capacity to offer a quality program. The presumption is that local institutions may have particular goals established to respond to their local constituencies that are (and ought to be) different from place to place and therefore pre-specifying goals, processes, and outcomes obstructs true accountability for what institutions are really doing and why.

For example, pass rates on the most commonly used standardized test in teacher licensure, the PRAXIS, are endorsed as primary evidence of content and pedagogical knowledge by NCATE. In fact, NCATE and ETS (the publisher of the PRAXIS exam) join together to promote enrollment in an NCATE accredited teacher education program as a means to assure a high score on the licensure exam (Gitomer, Latham & Ziomek, 1999). However, recent research on the PRAXIS exam concludes it has poor predictive ability and low technical quality (i.e., distinguishing between good and bad teachers, now and in the future) and is inherently racist (i.e., minority test takers are systematically disadvantaged) (Mitchel, Robinson, Plae & Knowles, 2001). TEAC, unlike NCATE, would permit the inclusion of results on this licensure examination but with context specific interpretations of student scores. For example, if a teacher education program in an urban, largely minority area was working toward increasing the representation of minorities in the teaching profession relatively little or no weight might be given to PRAXIS scores as evidence of accountability, i.e., the successfulness of the program.

Conclusion

Accountability is a means for controlling both procedures and outcomes in complex, bureaucratic environments. Education (primary, secondary and tertiary) is now in large part controlled through accountability schemes that are devised by those outside of schools and universities and represent a coalescing of political-business interests. The hegemony of that accountability lies in the particular interests served (those of political-business elites) which are often at odds with the interests of the public good, and the individuals who inhabit schools and universities. Accountability need not be hegemonic, but counter-hegemonic accountability requires a sharing of power and willingness on the part of the many to assert their right to determine what is good and right. Collective action by the many is necessary to counter the hegemonic interests of the few.

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