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THE ECONOMIC CITIZEN

Civic Education and Its Discontents

Joseph R. Nichols, Jr.

Corruption is a fitting word to start this chapter, because corruption is how we got here. The act of corruption involves the action of making someone or something morally depraved—it involves debasement. And, even though corruption can be found in many forms, the corruption I discuss here stems from the general and erroneous assumption that the economic market is the natural state of affairs for human life. Its emphasis on productivity and profit has manipulated our ability to empathize with each other. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1755/1984) argued that wealth inequality corrupts humankind's natural inclinations and replaces natural inequalities with moral ones. In this sense, the economic market debases humankind for material wealth, thereby perverting our better human natures.

When I think further about this corruption, I think about how we have used market forces and the concept of profit to organize our lives. The human experience has a long history of treating people like commodities rather than living, breathing beings who share life together. Thus this corruption is not new—economically powerful groups have profited from the economically disenfranchised for as long as human society has existed. In the American context, the economic obsession with market thinking has turned real people with real lives into dollar signs and commodities.

For example, shortly after President Barack Obama signed legislation to extend healthcare coverage to the uninsured in the United States, the rhetoric around how changes in the law would affect people focused almost exclusively on the economic sphere of their lives.¹ In one stark case, Governor Nathan Deal (2013) of Georgia—who was opposed to the law—argued that providing healthcare outside the market would simply cost too much. Governor Deal pointed out that “these costs stand to hurt our state’s private sector. Because as

all businessmen and women know, the higher your input costs, the lower your profits; the lower your profits, the less you operate, expand or employ” (para. 22). From this perspective, people are dehumanized, treated merely as inputs that lead to or take away from profits. By forcing businesses to provide people with access to affordable healthcare, the change in law increased the input cost of people and, thus, reduced how much one can profit from them.

Under the assumption that the market is the natural state of affairs, the same corruption that frames people as economic units also creates a common-sense logic that propagates individualistic behavior toward economic ends. No area of life is safe from such influence and, as a result, policy decisions that shape how our society is organized are justified by economic means and ends above other considerations. And, because schooling plays an important socializing role in how societies are constructed and perpetuated, this corruption is especially influential in the development of school policy and curricula.

The marketization of public schooling and the corporatization of the curriculum have created the environment necessary for individualistic, economically focused citizens to grow and flourish. This influence is troubling for those who are concerned with democratic ideals, particularly because democracy is the product of associated living (Parker, 1996). If left unchecked, the continued rise of the economic citizen will lead to more economic inequality and further contribute to civic education’s discontent over the decline of democratic society. The following historical narrative about schooling for economic purposes, as illustrated by educational policies in Georgia, has led me to conceptualize the economic citizen.

What Is the Purpose of Schooling in the United States?

Schools in the United States have a long history of chasing contradictory purposes. In the early stages of the republic, the new government required new ways of engagement with civic life; this context helped define what schools should do. For example, Pennsylvanian Benjamin Rush (1786/2006) pointed out that the newly created national government needed an education system that would “lay the foundations for nurseries of wise and good men, to adapt our modes of teaching to the peculiar form of our government” (p. 58). For his part, Thomas Jefferson envisioned a nation of agrarian yeomen who would control their own lives and think about how to organize society. In a letter to diplomat William Jarvis, Jefferson (1820/2009b) wrote that he saw “no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education” (p. 163). Jefferson was so committed to the civic mission of schooling that he attempted—albeit unsuccessfully—to push a public school plan through the Virginia General Assembly.

Though the school conversation in the founding period focused on creating citizens who could uphold the new republic (Labaree, 1997), the ideas that drove universal schooling were not free of inequity. Writing to political leader and educationalist Peter Carr, Jefferson (1814/2009a) noted that his school plan would educate every citizen “portioned to the condition and pursuits of his life,” and that, “at the discharging of the pupils from elementary schools, the two classes separate” (p. 589). It is not without irony that the early school plans like Jefferson’s, though civically oriented, were designed to maintain the aristocratic structures he claimed to deplore which also reinforced racism, slavery, patriarchy, and economic division. Accordingly, the political mission of schooling in early America was to fashion citizens who would maintain the power and privileging structures that defined the American founding period.

With the acceleration of immigration in the early 1800s, the American aristocracy turned to schooling to mitigate cultural pluralism, while, at the same time, Jefferson’s agrarian society of independent yeomen was being supplanted by the consolidation and urbanization of labor around factories. The economic transformation that took place in the mid- to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries corresponded with a xenophobic concern with what immigrants—especially Irish and German Catholics—might do to the American way of life. The convergence of these events resulted in a common school movement, the purpose of which was “to move people from a rural and agricultural economy to urban and industrial ones, while constructing a national culture out of local, linguistic, immigrant or colonial populations” (Feinberg, 2008, p. 91).

Coded language about economic production made its way into how school leaders talked about schools. For example, in a report of the Massachusetts School Board, Horace Mann (1848/2006)—leader of the common school movement—wrote that schools were the “grand machinery by which the ‘raw material’ of human nature can be worked into inventors and discoverers, into skilled artisans and scientific farmers, into scholars and jurists, into the founders of benevolent institutions, and the great expounders of ethical and theological science” (para. 1). Mann believed schools could serve an important economic role, and were a means of fighting inequality by alleviating poverty and securing abundance for all. Common schools, as articulated by Mann, were the welfare tools that would make individuals responsible for their own economic destiny. Mann argued on behalf of the board that each person was responsible for himself and that the “necessaries and conveniences [food, shelter, etc.] of life should be obtained by each individual himself, or by each family for themselves, rather than accepted from the hand of charity, or extorted by poor-laws” (p. 63). Even in its earliest development, the production language in his school reports illustrates the power capital has had over the creation of American public schools.

Cuban (2004) pointed out that business-directed education reform occurred within two periods: the 1890s to 1930s and the 1970s to the present. During the first reform movement educationalists were concerned with systems of efficiency.

By the time widespread industrialization took hold in the United States, the political arguments shaping the founding period had settled into the operational details of a functioning republic. This transition made it easier for industrial forces to shape the expanding public school system around business needs. Though schools in the United States started as civic institutions, the common school movement schools ensured they now had a decidedly economic role to play.

The class structures embedded within the civic arguments of early school promoters such as Jefferson provided the foundation for an economic rationale for schooling. The urbanization of the workforce and the demands of factory production necessitated a supposed remedy for inequality if capitalism was to survive. Following the logic of Mann, capitalists found their solution in the idea that public schools provided an equal opportunity, thereby placing the onus of individuals' economic success on themselves, rather than finding fault in the social structures of the time. Schooling, in this sense, provided the capital class an easy explanation for economic inequality, bolstered by the ideologies of laissez-faire capitalism and social Darwinism (Wyllie, 1959).

During this time, the school reform movement was dominated by proponents of scientific management who appropriated business principles and applied them to schools. For example, Edward L. Thorndike (1903)—an advocate of scientific management and school reform leader in the early 1900s—argued that: “Education agencies are a great system of means not only of making men good and intelligent and efficient, but also of picking out and labeling those who for any reason are good intelligent and efficient. . . . They help to put the right men in the right places” (p. 94). Thorndike’s logic for schooling was straight out of the scientific management playbook. His focus was social efficiency and emphasizing quantifiable and measurable behaviors of students, in much the same way that this approach was applied to industrial work (e.g., Taylor, 1915). According to this philosophy, schools were conceived of as assembly lines that sorted students into their proper places in society.

The educationalists who promoted scientific management in the early 1900s set the foundation for a series of measurement and evaluation reforms that took hold in schools over the next several decades. The advent of World War I accelerated these social efficiency policies. In response to the need to mobilize large groups of troops quickly, the United States Army developed a testing mechanism—the Army Alpha—to determine which soldiers they would deploy to the front lines. The success of Army Alpha for sorting troops and the American victory in World War I had profound implications for schools. According to Hanson (1993), “the war changed the image of tests and of the tested. . . . [The tests] were now legitimate means of making decisions about the achievements and aptitudes of normal people” (p. 212). Testing created a currency for broader corporate influence over American schools.

The system efficiencies put into place during the early 1900s created the landscape necessary for the second period of business-directed reform, which

began in the 1970s with the publication of Lewis Powell's (1971) famous memo *Attack on American Free Enterprise System*. Writing to the chairperson of the United States Chamber of Commerce, Powell argued that the business community had been too apathetic to the public pushback against the market system. The business community, according to Powell, needed to do more to support the American market system, including engaging directly in school policy.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a series of corporate reform movements, the energies of which were directed at the public school system. For example, the Business Roundtable—formed in the early 1970s shortly after Lewis Powell wrote his memo—acted, and still acts, as one of the microphones for business-directed school reform in the United States (Evans, 2015). And, even though myriad policy documents and organizations have turned the market lens toward schools, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), 1983) was one of the most important impetuses in the corporatization of American schools.

As I have argued, schools have shifted from a political to a market rationale. With this shift, school policy in the United States has become more and more concerned with the economic role schools should play in our society. This shift in how we define the purpose of schooling that started during the common school movement has accelerated toward the economic since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* and the policies the report made possible (Mehta, 2013a).

The Economic Is Crowned the King of Schooling

Mehta (2013b) pointed out that policy arguments are won and lost at the level of policy definition. This characteristic of the policy process means that “the way a problem is framed has significant impact for the types of policy solutions that will seem desirable” (p. 291). From this perspective, *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) did more than any other federal policy document to elevate the economic as the overarching logic of schools and schooling; the economy is king. With its bellicose language, promoted through the megaphone of President Ronald Reagan's ideology of laissez-faire economics, *A Nation at Risk* articulated a policy of schooling for economic purposes to the exclusion of all others. The report pointed out that schools are economic instruments through which “all children by *virtue of their own efforts*, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to *secure gainful employment and to manage their own lives*, thereby serving not only *their own interests* but also the *progress of society itself*” (p. 8, emphasis added). Echoing Mann's argument that people are responsible for their own plight, *A Nation at Risk* positioned schooling as the tool that would enable children to determine their own destiny. The logic outlined in *A Nation at Risk*, and underlined in the quoted text, is clear. One's own efforts lead to gainful employment, which allows one to advance one's own interests, which is how society moves forward. The economic logic of *A Nation at Risk* assumed

that society can progress only through individualistic economic pursuits. Thus the credentialing role schooling plays in our capitalist society now places the burden of economic performance on the backs of schools and in the hands of individuals, reifying the myth of meritocracy that undergirds the prevailing common sense of what American society represents. When schools and individuals within schools are labeled as “failing,” politicians, media, and everyday people blame the schools, teachers, or the individuals themselves (see Giroux, Chapter 1). In this sense, “the myth of individualism may be the most disruptive and unsettling in the way it legitimates social isolation and contributes to an increasingly alienated lifestyle” (Callero, 2009, p. 34).

A Nation at Risk manufactured political tropes that identified scapegoats to be readily targeted for failure that aligned neatly with neoliberal ideological positions. The public bureaucracy was to blame because it exists outside of the market’s logic and the common-sense perspective that markets are humankind’s natural organizing tool. Individuals were at fault for the decisions that created their failure. From this perspective, the capitalist system maintained the cover it needed to continue the corruption of expanding inequality.

The economic purpose of schooling established in *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) also set the foundation for a curricular intervention that would serve to foster the development of the economic citizen in schools. For example, the report argued that:

The people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life.

(p. 7)

By connecting skills, literacy, and training to disenfranchisement, the rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk* connected the economic role of schools to an economically defined citizenship. The argument in the report was that good citizens create and access the “material rewards that accompany competent performance” (p. 7), whereas those who cannot create or access such material wealth also fail to perform in their role as citizens.

The economic citizenship model outlined in *A Nation at Risk* was only the beginning. Organizations such as the Business Roundtable, the Heritage Foundation, and the American Legislative Exchange Council, combined with groups such as the National Governors’ Association, acted in tandem to push corporate reforms into schools (Cuban, 2004; Evans, 2015). Because the policy-making process is bound up in sociopolitical culture and its “taken-for-granted paradigms constrain the range of policies that policy makers are likely to consider” (Campbell, 2002, p. 23), no one should be surprised that American schools

have been further poisoned by the capitalist elixir over the last 30 years. School policy in the United States assumes that schooling is the social welfare tool that fosters individualism, creates meritocracy, and serves the production needs of capital. Within this context, the economic king creates the market of schooling it needs to rule.

The King Creates the Market

A Nation at Risk laid the foundation for the economic purpose of schooling and ushered in a wave of reforms. From Goals 2000 to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to Race to the Top (RTTT), the policy landscape in the United States reified the economic purpose of schooling in concrete ways that continue to play out operationally in teaching practice. For example, the academic standards movement, which started as a suggestion in Goals 2000 and was solidified as a requirement in NCLB, was built on the history of 1850s–1930s reform. This process created the information and currency framework needed by capitalism to make manifest the economic purpose of schooling. Value cues—like those expressed through pricing—are vital to capitalism; the standards movement created such a system of cues through which the marketization of schools can take place. Policies such as Goals 2000 and NCLB created mechanisms that policy-makers use to control the production of information and generate the currency of schooling.

By connecting standards to high-stakes assessments, policymakers can measure student, teacher, and school performance against the production needs of capitalism. This system provides economists with the tools they need to make arguments about the human capital role of education and the value-added function schooling plays in the economy (e.g., Chetty et al., 2011; Hanushek, 2011). The standards and high-stakes assessment system in the United States contributes to the meritocracy myth that drives our society—it hides the real problems under the proverbial rug. As Wayne Au (2013) has pointed out, “socio-economic factors simply have an overwhelming effect on education achievement, and this reality is effectively masked by the ideology of meritocracy embedded in high-stakes testing” (p. 14). In other words, student achievement, measured and reported, perpetuates a system set up to meet the needs of capitalist production, not student learning.

RTTT takes the economic purpose of schooling a step further by encouraging states to adopt additional policy prescriptions around four broad areas: (1) standards and assessments; (2) data systems that will illustrate to parents, schools, and other shareholders how students are progressing against the standards; (3) programs for teacher and leader improvement; and (4) school turnaround efforts to help ensure that schools and students meet the standards outlined in the state-level policies. RTTT appears innocuous in its support of student achievement and improvement of student learning; however, the RTTT initiative raises several questions. For example, how do RTTT states define student achievement?

Toward what ends is student achievement directed? And who and what does the improvement of student learning serve?

A close examination of individual states' RTTT applications provides a good sense of how state education policy is defined by capitalism. On the heels of Goals 2000 and NCLB, RTTT solidifies the information and currency framework needed for capitalist production in schools. Like *A Nation at Risk*, RTTT propagates the school–economy connection demanded by American capitalism. At the time this chapter was written, the webpage for President Obama's RTTT initiative advertised the heading “Knowledge and Skills for the Jobs of the Future” (White House, 2015, n.p.) as the purpose of the program.

The Economic Citizen

The remainder of this chapter illustrates how RTTT and state curricular reforms encourage policy prescriptions for schools around the economic. I use the state of Georgia as a case study for this argument because Georgia is representative of the United States' obsession with climbing the economic ladder. Georgia policymakers have used RTTT monies to support a statewide longitudinal data system to measure the economic outcomes of Georgia's public schools. At the same time, the Georgia Department of Education has implemented a college and career clusters/pathways program in its high schools, thus explicitly corporatizing the curricula in Georgia schools. These policy changes are just one more example of how “schooling has been a crucial tool for perpetuating the [American] capitalist system amid rapid economic change” (Tyack, 1976, pp. 384–385). The valorization of the economic in schools—like the reforms in Georgia—fosters an economic citizenship that supports the corruption of democracy, by way of inequity, that is the focus of this book.

Schooling that is defined as an economic tool gives rise to a civic education that defines good citizenship in economic terms. Because schooling in the United States acts as a credentialing mechanism for the capitalist economy, the school is situated as the avenue through which individuals are moved into areas of production. In this sense, schooling in the United States “works to justify economic inequality and to produce a labor force whose capacities, credentials, and consciousness are dictated in substantial measure by the requirements of profitable employment in a capitalistic economy” (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p. 151). Education policy in Georgia connects schooling to economic citizenship in two ways. One is through the creation of a statewide longitudinal data system that measures the economic outcomes of Georgia's public schools. The other is through a curricular program that connects schooling to specific economic pursuits. These programs were developed after the 2008 financial crash and were regarded by policymakers in the state as ways through which Georgia's citizens could solve their economic woes. They both value the American obsession with economic outcomes and extend capital's corruption of schools, thereby perverting

the civic “form of life” promoted by these schools (Wittgenstein, 1953/2009; see also Wright-Maley, 2015).

Georgia’s RTTT-Funded Longitudinal Data System

Georgia applied for and was awarded a \$400 million RTTT grant in 2010. A major component of this grant was funding focused on bolstering the state’s longitudinal data system. The purpose of this system is to quantify the value-added metric of a Georgia public school education in a way that connects that value to the capitalist production needs of the state. The assumption here is that schooling is the welfare and social policy tool the state extends to individuals to make their way in capitalist society.

According to a recent report by Greg Bluestein and Janel Davis of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (2014), Georgia employers cannot find qualified workers to fill the labor market needs of their industries. Instead of viewing this human capital issue as a problem of labor market incentives or the unfair allocation of economic power created by capitalism, policymakers in Georgia and throughout the United States blamed the schools. The problem—building off the language of *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983)—is thought to be the direct result of inadequate schooling.

The solution to this perceived problem is to further connect the business community to the public school system. The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) (2015)—a think-tank focused on the economic role of schooling—has noted that only “two out of every 10 [businesses throughout the country] are using strategic partnerships with education institutions, helping design curriculum, and sponsoring courses and prospects to address workforce gaps” (p. 33). Thus GPEE promotes and lobbies for systems that cement Georgia businesses to Georgia’s public schools so they can better meet industry needs.

The statewide longitudinal data system Georgia has developed via RTTT grant monies provides the technical support Georgia businesses need to partner with education institutions, design the curriculum and implement it in schools, and sponsor specific courses and programs aimed at their workforce needs. According to the Workforce Data Quality Campaign (2014), Georgia’s data system is designed to track students from schools into the workforce. The state has achieved, has mostly achieved, or is in the process of creating school/workforce measurements that:

- Establish metrics for career pathways: These metrics connect the curriculum in Georgia’s public schools to specific career pathways targeting specific industries (which I discuss further in the next section).
- Track graduate employment rates: These data provide the state with information on how various academic programs in Georgia’s public schools and colleges or universities fulfill the employment needs of the state.

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- Measure industry-based skills gaps: These measures connect student data to labor market information so that the state can compare labor market demands with academic programming.
- Create scorecards for students and workers: The scorecards rate various academic programs across the state on how well they align with industry needs so that prospective students of those programs can make decisions before investing time and money in a course of study.
- Provide dashboards for policymakers: This component of the data system articulates school to workforce data to policymakers so they can create education policy around economic needs.

Through its statewide longitudinal data system, Georgia can extend capitalism's rationalizing logic to the schools in ways that were not possible before the technological revolution of the last two decades. The economic data this system produces can provide policymakers with the information and the currency they need to further shape Georgia's public schools. As Hill and Kumar (2009) pointed out, "business wants education fit for business—to make schooling and higher education subordinate to the personality, ideological, and economic requirements of capital, and to make sure schools produce compliant, ideologically indoctrinated, procapitalist, effective workers" (p. 21). The statewide longitudinal data system Georgia has, and is putting into place, allows policymakers to better create capitalist-indoctrinated schooling.

The citizenship experience students have in Georgia's public schools focuses on how they can use the system to meet their own personal economic goals as well as the production needs of the state's business community. This system, mediated by economic disparity, is likely to further promulgate the corruption of democracy. It positions the capitalist-identified scapegoat of schooling in ways that allow for the blaming of schools and individuals for the economic failures of society.

College and Career Clusters/Pathways Program

Along with Georgia's longitudinal data system, the economic purpose of schooling is solidified in the curriculum of Georgia's public high schools through the college and career clusters/pathways program. At the start of their freshman year, students in Georgia's public schools are required to select a career pathway they will complete as they matriculate through high school. The program, of course, is focused on several capitalistic goals and is predicted to produce myriad workforce dividends for the state. According to Lynn Plunkett of the Georgia Department of Education, "one [of those rewards] certainly is to offer opportunities for our students to have good jobs and bright futures . . . [and] building and creating a very sustainable workforce in our state is certainly a benefit of it as well" (Dalton, 2013, para. 5). From this perspective, the college and career clusters/pathways

program is the curricular scheme that gives individual students the ability to navigate the path of economic citizenship laid out by corporate capitalism.

This program in Georgia is governed by House Bill 186 (Georgia General Assembly, 2011), which legislates the purpose of schooling. In the bill, the Georgia General Assembly found that “[Georgia’s] long-term prosperity depends on supporting an education system that is designed to prepare students for a global economy” (p. 1), and it created a curricular system to support that contention. Specifically, the bill outlines two key steps Georgia’s public high schools must take to help ensure their curriculum aligns with the workforce needs of the state.

First, Georgia House Bill 186 mandates curricular reform around the labor market. The bill notes that “local school systems must provide every student with choices that are academically rigorous and aligned to opportunities in high-demand, high-skill, high-wage career fields and to postsecondary career and technical pathways leading to advanced credentials or degrees” (p. 2). Thus the Georgia Department of Education, working with the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, created career clusters/pathways focused on the biggest industries in the state. These pathways include career cultures in the following areas: agriculture, food, and natural resources; architecture and construction; arts, audio-visual/technology, and communications; business, management, and administration; education and training; energy; finance; government and public administration; health services; information technology; law, public safety, corrections, and security; manufacturing; marketing; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and transportation, distribution, and logistics.

Each career cluster is broken into several job areas that the Georgia Department of Education and Chamber of Commerce have identified as important for the labor market needs of the state. To support these career pathways, the state Department of Education has created a series of courses for each pathway, as well as curriculum guides explaining the economic opportunities students will gain by choosing a specific pathway, and has even developed materials for students and parents outlining the monetary and employment benefits and consequences of specific pathways. The purpose here is to focus student and family decisions about the curriculum on the economic gains students can expect from the decisions they make about schooling.

At the same time, the career pathways are rigged toward a corporatist interpretation of specific industries. For example, the energy career cluster does nothing to promote job opportunities in renewal and green energy industries. Three of the four job areas outlined in the government and public administration career pathway are military related. The other job area—public administration—legitimizes specific forms of governance in that it targets urban and regional planners, administration of the state court system, postal services, and community managers (e.g., city manager, county manager). In this sense, students in Georgia’s public schools are forced into curricula defined by the capital needs of the state.

Second, the Georgia General Assembly called on Georgia's business community to partner with Georgia's public high schools around the college and career clusters/pathways initiative. House Bill 186 warranted that "Georgia's strategic industries must be partners in our public education system (secondary and post-secondary) so that they are assured that our high school graduates are prepared for success in the workforce" (Georgia General Assembly, 2011, p. 2). The bill gives the Georgia business community legislative authority to design and implement an industry-related curriculum in Georgia's public high schools while mandating that the schools comply with those demands. The Georgia Department of Education (2013) student guide articulates possible outcomes of such collaboration by noting that the college and career clusters/pathways program will accomplish the following goals:

development of a highly-skilled and educated workforce that contributes to economic prosperity for the individual and workforce needs of the region/state/nation/world . . . increased awareness of the connection between education and work . . . increased number of students receiving a national industry-recognized credential . . . better and more informed educational and career planning decision-making for students and their families.

(p. 4)

The assumption behind this logic is that the college and career clusters/pathways program will create a synergistic relationship between the business community and schooling. According to the capitalist logic driving these reforms, the connection produced by this relationship will result in an education experience that will lead to economic prosperity for individual students and, thus, the economy as a whole. By connecting the statewide longitudinal database to specific curricular programs in Georgia's public high schools, policymakers can forge an economic citizenship model around the needs of capital. Educational reforms such as these follow the market logic outlined in *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983), and are made possible through the policy history of Goals 2000, NCLB, and RTTT. Furthermore, these policy prescriptions make clear to students that schooling is an economic enterprise—that the outcome of their school choices should be economic.

The logic here is laid out very clearly by capitalistic assumptions that remain tainted by the ghosts of social Darwinism. Schools today are conceived as the economic pipeline through which individuals can access material wealth. Students enter schools which provide the curriculum needed to maximize economic gain, and they make choices that lead them to access, or prevent them from accessing, material wealth. In the event individuals cannot access material wealth or the economy produces unequal distribution of economic spoils, this capitalistic logic places the blame on the individuals and the schools. Thus capitalist schooling makes true Horace Mann's erroneous argument that schools are

a means of fighting inequality by acting as the social welfare tool that alleviates poverty and secures abundance for all.

Conclusion

The economic is the king of the American school system. The business-focused obsession with producing workers to meet the needs of capital and further market expansion pervades policy talk about what schools in the United States should do and how they should be viewed: both “for liberals and conservatives, nearly everything is justified through two economic promises: the possibility of upward economic mobility and the necessity of global economic competition” (Saltman, 2013, p. 67). These two promises capture the essence of the longitudinal database and the college and career cultures/pathways program in Georgia. By creating educational pathways and measurement systems that corporatize the curriculum, Georgia school policy individualizes economic success and failure.

Education policy that defines the economic, especially in terms of failure, as an individual construct is not unique to Georgia. Katz (2013) argued that Americans view poverty and economic disparity as a problem of people. The way in which schooling has defined citizenship as an individualistic, economic pursuit is the manifestation of a capitalist paternalism—the notion that the market knows best and that it alone should hand out economic rewards and punishments (Soss et al., 2011). In this sense, economic citizenship “promotes personal responsibility through individual choice within markets” (Hursh, 2007, p. 496). The economic citizen is at home in an environment defined by the market, and the contemporary elevation of this version of citizenship has fomented civic education’s winter of discontent by atomizing and disabling the traditionally social means by which citizens have influenced government.

Capitalism’s corruption is not only a political or economic problem; it is also a spiritual problem. The corruption erodes the very nature of who we are as a people. According to Glass (2000), humanness can only flourish “in an educational process in which people come to understand themselves as precisely the kind of creatures who have the ability and need to produce culture and history” (p. 280). Corporate education reform assumes that culture and history have already been created by the evolution of capital. The market, in this kind of education, *is* the culture, and the accumulation of capital *is* what drives the history. Schooling entrapped in this context strips human beings of their humanness. Education that produces economic citizens also contributes to the commodification of human life. Instead of seeing living, breathing beings who share a human experience, this capitalist form of corruption creates a social system that sees only commodities. Through corporate-defined education, we might profit and become materially wealthy, but we risk chasing profit to the neglect of our humanity and that of others. Schooling that produces an economic citizenry

forces us to choose between giving in to the corruption and fighting futilely against it as atomized and isolated individuals. Either way we will not be at peace.

Corruption is how we got here, but corruption is not where we have to end. In an age of economic disparity, it may seem that capital has been elevated to such a supreme status that it cannot be undone. Yet, regardless of how irredeemable this corrupted system may seem and how pervasive its instruments may appear, pockets of resistance have sprung up throughout the country. The Occupy Education movement is but one example of how we can reclaim public schools in the United States from corporate reformers (“Occupy education,” 2012). And, even though the movement has addressed a number of structural changes such as school privatization and high-stakes testing brought about by business-led reform, the central concern in this chapter is the corporate curriculum.

Reclaiming the curriculum was highlighted in a *Rethinking Schools* editorial that argued that “it is equally urgent that we bring this occupy spirit to the struggle to reclaim classrooms and schools from the imposition of scripted, standardized, corporate-produced curriculum” (“Occupy education,” 2012, para. 11). Through curriculum initiatives like the college and careers clusters/pathways program in Georgia, capitalism rationalizes schooling in ways that further link education to the needs of corporations and, thus, creates more inequality as wealth evaporates toward the 1 percent (Sleeter, 2014). In this sense, the capitalist school system creates a pipeline whereby citizen-as-worker students are the wealth-generating pawns that enrich the wealthy.

Reclaiming the curriculum is hard work. Though the corporate assault on schools has created curricular structures that advantage the capitalist agenda, Sleeter (2008) has shown that teachers who teach strategically can accomplish democratic goals. The key is to teach children how to think critically about questions of power, privilege, and justice so that they can create a more humane world in which to live, in much the same way as Giroux describes in Chapter 1. Curriculum initiatives such as RadicalMath (2007), the Zinn Education Project (2015), and UCLA Center X (2015) all provide powerful examples of the kinds of teaching frameworks teachers can use to teach democratic concepts that confront the corporately defined, standards-based learning environments that pervade American public schools.

In conjunction with teaching strategically, we must use our political agency to effect change in our school communities and claim the public square of schooling for democratic purposes. Because schooling helps fashion citizens and plays a role in constructing society, we must view public schools as the space where the manifestations of capitalism and democratic values compete for legitimacy. Tienken (2013) has called for teachers, parents, and students concerned about corporate-based education reform to “refuse to play in the corporate boardroom” (p. 312). Paying attention to this corruption is important. Fighting against the corruption revealed to us by critics like Rousseau (1755/1984) and even Adam Smith himself (1759/2010) is our moral obligation—indeed it is a moral

imperative—because, in the words of Thich Nhat Hanh (1987), “letting people profit from human suffering or the suffering of other beings is something we cannot do” (p. 102). The way in which we fashion citizens determines the kinds of societies we create. Unjust societies profit from human suffering; just societies alleviate it. By corporatizing citizenship, schools act as peddlers of injustice. If we do, indeed, value justice, then we cannot continue to perpetuate economic citizenship and all that it represents.

Note

1 In this chapter, I will refer to the economic spheres of people’s lives and the economic purposes and arguments about schooling simply as “the economic.”

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