

# Preface

## WHY THIS BOOK, AND WHY NOW?

The title of this book is no accident, and we feel that it couldn't come at a more crucial time in the history of democratic societies and the systems of compulsory public education within them. The *industrial complex* construct, introduced by Dwight D. Eisenhower as he left the presidency of the United States of America in January 1961, grew out of his concerns about the further subversion of America's incomplete democratic experiment through the solidification of the corporate state. Having witnessed first-hand the American build-up to World War II and having led Allied Forces in Europe against Nazism and Fascism, both predicated on a strong corporate state, Eisenhower's farewell address should have served as a wake-up call to the American people that the same anti-democratic forces were taking root in the U.S. as well. The military-industrial complex relies on what political scientists call an "iron triangle" that consists of the military (itself a special interest group), private defense contractors, and the U.S. Congress, which facilitates the transfer of public funds into private hands. As that triangle formed, Eisenhower became alarmed as he saw his constitutional authority to conduct American foreign policy increasingly constrained by the nebulous, unelected, and politically unaccountable forces that were calling the shots in foreign and defense policy. Those forces, obscured from the voting public, restructured the economy and the government to serve their financial interests through the formation of a national security state that enveloped every social institution, including, importantly, education.

Since the 1970s, the emergence of neoliberal capitalist hegemony has facilitated the reconfiguration of the American state to support the concentration of corporate power through the upward redistribution of wealth. The solidification of what Giroux (2014) has called a *market society* has repositioned citizenship as consumption, the public good as the maximization of private gain, and everyone and everything as a commodity from which its "surplus value" must be extracted. The model of the military-industrial complex—concentration of unaccountable institutional power, setting public policy according to corporate interests, and outsourcing American foreign and military policy—has become the model for de-politicizing our public and political spaces through the lexicon of *markets über alles*. None of this is new, of course. Reading the record of the debates that occurred during the writing of the Constitution of the United States of America, James Madison, the Constitution's principal architect, urged his fellow framers to create a document that would "protect the minority of the opulent"—White men who owned property—from the majority. Madison and the other framers set the young nation on a course in which the fundamental purpose and structure of the government codified what Adam Smith (2007/1776) criticized in the *Wealth of Nations* as "the vile maxim of the masters of mankind," which Smith articulated as "all for ourselves and nothing for other people" (p. 321).

The history of America is, in fact, a history of tension between the vile maxim and building a more just demos. Yet as scholars such as David Harvey, Henry Giroux, and Noam Chomsky have demonstrated, the rapid institutionalization of neoliberalism since the 1970s has resulted in configurations of corporate-state power so overwhelming that it is becoming increasingly difficult to challenge and subvert them, particularly through a political system that has grown comfortably dependent on corporate largesse. Our political apparatus has become simultaneously financially wealthy and ethically bankrupt as it has succumbed to the vile maxim to protect the opulent minority and increasingly slough off the majority as disposable people. That calculus of disposability has permeated every institution in the U.S.—the political system, the criminal in-justice system, our militarized police, the prison-industrial complex, and of course the subject of our study, the education-industrial complex.

So what institutions form the “iron-triangle” that has produced the education-industrial complex? We argue that triangle includes the various leaders of public schooling from principals to state officials, those who make educational policy and funding decisions at the federal level, and the private corporations that are financially invested in certain market-based educational paradigms. Take for example Bill Gates and his endorsement of the Common Core movement in the United States. Gates provided much of the funding to develop the Common Core and legislate its implementation; meanwhile his company Microsoft teamed up with Pearson (the world’s largest educational publisher) to provide hardware and software to schools to facilitate that implementation (Strauss, 2015). Consider the amount of money made in these educational transactions: Pearson profited more than 1 billion U.S. dollars in 2013 alone (Simon, 2015). Much of this money comes from testing, with states spending between 50 to 100 U.S. dollars for each test that each student takes. A fifth grade student in Texas took three tests (Math, Reading, and Science) in 2011. If a student failed, they could take the test three more times. And Texas has almost four million elementary students being tested in multiple subjects at multiple grades. That’s a lot of students who take a lot of tests, and Pearson cannot help but see the dollar signs. So the lobbyists and government entities manufacture and manipulate crisis (see Berliner and Biddle, 1996), and the money continues to flow into efforts to manage it.

We propose in this book that nothing occurs in a vacuum. The fundamental philosophies and purposes of education have always existed in highly contested historical, social, cultural, ideological, and economic contexts, with policy emerging from dominant configurations of institutional power. Public education has seen many movements come and go, and woven through that history is the question of power, of who benefits from the structures of education and why. We pause in disbelief and dismay when we hear in-service teachers, who work in corporate charter schools and wear uniforms emblazoned with company logos talk about “the company I work for” rather than “the school in which I teach.” We feel a sense of tremendous foreboding when we contemplate our own teacher education programs structuring themselves to meet the data collection demands of accreditors rather than the needs of the children and communities we supposedly serve. The first chapter of this book by Brian Charles Charest entitled *The Way It’s Going: Neoliberal Reforms and the Colonization of the American School* describes a public school in Seattle, Washington that presents the kind of education we wish would permeate the educational landscape.

We wonder at the increasingly corporatized structures of education, from early childhood through higher education, which have been hypnotized by “big data” and audit culture and have repositioned public school teachers and university faculty as “contingent academic labor.” We look askance at our own administrators and colleagues, who as Peter Taubman (2009) suggests, have allowed themselves to become locked into an abusive relationship and race to prove their worth on the terms of the abuser, in this case anti-intellectual governors, state legislatures, the American congress, the Secretary of Edu-

## Preface

cation, and what Diane Ravitch (2010) calls a “billionaire boys club” of “venture philanthropists” led by the likes of Gates, Broad, Walton, and others. Those *philanthrocapitalists* represent the nebulous, politically unaccountable power behind the education-industrial complex.

Particularly in K-12 schools, many classroom teachers feel this tension between what is and what should be. Some may not recognize the impending corporate takeover for what it is, and others may not recognize that teachers, as the oppressed, and as Friere (2003) suggests, have “internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines” (p. 45). Instead, they leave the profession in droves or note the lack of autonomy to be a professional instead of a technician in their pedagogical choices. They no longer can be considered what so many ideally could be, an artist who supports students in their becoming of themselves. Section three of this book presents practical implications in K-12 schooling related to these issues.

Freire claims that “The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.” (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 181). This is not true in the school model that has been slowly morphing since the end of the school houses of the industrial age, and in our current digital age, we must recognize technologies that perpetuate the image of the teacher as technician instead of professional, or even as artist. Unfortunately, dreams of resurgent democratization in cyberspace have been usurped by “a reality of many, many ways to buy things and many, many ways to select among what is offered” (Lessig, 2002, p. 7). In this economic paradigm, digital technologies “empower the strong and disempower the weak” (Morozov, 2011, p. xvii). Thus, digital technologies that could transform knowledge construction and schooling instead are co-opted to reinforce standardization movements with rote lines of curriculum that equate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to the labor needs of corporations.

Given that context, the chapters in this book demonstrate the tensions between the instrumental questions of “how” that have enthralled teacher education and education more broadly, and the much more uncomfortable “why” questions. Why do we continue to accept the descent of education into algorithmic instrumentality? Why do we perpetuate that reductive thinking in teacher education? Most importantly, why do many who know better remain silent and thus complicit in perpetuating a Foucauldian regime of disciplinary power? We argue that grappling first with those complex “why” questions is imperative in moving toward the “how” of praxis. Chomsky (2016) has noted that no institution or system is self-justifying, and where, upon asking the critical “why” questions, institutions cannot justify themselves, they should be dismantled. Perhaps this book might be one place of generative dialogue through which to interrogate the “commonsense” that structures our individual and institutional thinking and practices, and where necessary provoke action to, as Jefferson wrote in the *Declaration of Independence*, alter or abolish them.

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