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EDUCATING FOR PROFIT, EDUCATING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

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Abstract: After reviewing current proposals for standardized testing in K-12 education (United States) and for imposition of free-market economic and business models on higher education (Texas, Florida, and the United Kingdom), I argue that both types of proposals rest on flawed pedagogical assumptions and tend to undermine educational practices that promote the development of global citizens. I suggest that John Dewey was aware of the type of challenges now faced by educators and that he provided tools for blunting the force of these proposals and moving educational practice toward more desirable ends.

Keywords: testing, higher education, K-12, John Dewey, global citizenship, business model, NCLB

It is now a commonplace that we are living in a time of unprecedented technical change. National borders are becoming permeable in some places, irrelevant in others; electronic networking is rapidly altering long-settled social and political landscapes; the amount of available information is increasing exponentially; existing moral norms are being stressed to the breaking point. These and other factors are now challenging educators in ways that would have been inconceivable a mere two or three decades ago.

Assuming that it is the role of education to increase awareness of existing opportunities and relationships, to test received values, to aid in the creation of new ones, and to provide tools for life-long learning, how can educators hope to respond to these pressing challenges? In the United States and the United Kingdom, legislation has been put in place and proposals advanced that claim to address these issues.

I believe that these initiatives should be of concern not just in the countries indicated, but to educators everywhere because they move educational philosophy in the wrong direction, toward attenuated and restricted practices that are inappropriate to our developing situation. What is needed instead is increased attention to the social foundations of education—to the resolution of social problems that inhibit learning. What is needed is a vigorous expansion of investment in educational possibilities. What is needed is the type of broad-based educational approach that honors music, the visual and plastic arts, history, geography, and social studies as well as reading and mathematics. For these are the tools that will be needed by the new global citizens of the 21st century.

K-12: No Child Left Behind

In the United States, the "No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB) was designed to meet some of these 21st century challenges by raising the level of literacy and numeracy. Signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002, NCLB required that all children in public schools be tested in reading and mathematics each year from the third through the eighth grade. Results have been mixed in some schools, and dismal in others. Content and context rich curricula—art, civics, history, social science, geography, music, literature—have in many places been sharply reduced or eliminated as a result of the time required by preparation for standardized tests (an activity also known as "teaching to the test"). According to a survey conducted by the Center on Education Policy, "71 percent of the nation's schools reduced instruction time for subjects such as history, the arts, and music to focus on reading and math" (Grey 2010, 10). Teachers are demoralized and students are entering colleges and universities unprepared for the work that will be expected of them. Worse, an increasing number of schools with experienced and dedicated teachers have been classified as "failing" as a result of poor test scores which are due to inclusion in the testing pool of special needs children or immigrant children whose first language is other than English. The Obama administration is now proposing special waivers for schools at risk of failing to measure up to the faulty standards imposed by NCLB, but the flawed central concepts remain in place.

In the September 29, 2011 issue of the *New York Review of Books*, Diane Ravitch, an Assistant Secretary of Education under President George W. Bush and an early supporter of NCLB, published a searing account of the consequences of the legislation. She pointed out that NCLB has had the effect of stigmatizing "almost every one of [the nation's] schools" (Ravitch 2011, 32), that closing schools has needlessly disrupted communities, and that even the standards now imposed on schools that seek a waiver from NCLB regulation have never been subjected to field testing. And of course there is the matter of the shrinking content and context-rich curriculum—art, music, geography, history, and so on.

Higher education: The "Browne" and "Seven Solutions" reports

Similar experiments are now underway within some sectors of public-supported higher education. In the United States and the United Kingdom governments have responded to these technical, social, political, and moral challenges in ways that would have the effect of significantly altering the current profile of higher education. In Texas, for example, the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation has called for the state's public universities to implement seven major proposals (the "Seven Solutions" report). Teachers would be paid on the basis of the number of students taught and results of student (consumer) satisfaction surveys; the percentage of A's and B's would be limited; teaching and research would be defined as distinct professional tracks; and research would be defined and rewarded in terms of dollars attracted from business, government, and individual donors.

As if these proposals were not sufficiently disturbing, the report also includes a suggestion that formula-driven state funding—which amounts to a defined payment to a university for each of its students—would instead go directly to the consumers (also known as students) rather than to the universities. Students (consumers) would then be more or less

in the driver's seat regarding the design and implementation of the university curriculum. They would presumably reward (with their taxpayer-funded dollars) popular courses and vote less popular ones out of existence by starving them of funds. Universities would compete with other universities (public universities competing with religious colleges, for example), departments would compete with departments, and professors would compete with their colleagues, all for tuition dollars. The governor of Florida is now studying the "Seven Solutions" report for possible adoption by institutions of higher learning in his state.

In the U. K., the Browne Report presents a similar scenario. Students (consumers) would choose universities, and even university courses, on the basis of putative "employment returns." Courses associated with projected higher future earnings would be allowed to charge higher enrollment fees. The university would be redefined in strictly economic terms, that is, as contributing to a higher level of gross domestic product. "What is at stake," writes Stefan Collini (2010, 25), in a two part essay in the *London Review of Books*, "is whether universities in the future are to be thought of as having a public cultural role partly sustained by public support, or whether we move further towards redefining them in terms of a purely economistic calculation of value and a wholly individualist conception of 'consumer satisfaction.'"

Both reports are based on the assumption that public higher education should be modeled on the successes of for-profit universities such as the University of Phoenix. One problem with this assumption, however, is that the University of Phoenix has an overall graduation rate of only about 16 percent, according to standards set by the U. S. Department of Education (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Phoenix). The business model of the University of Phoenix relies on continuing a provision of the G. I. Bill, passed by the U. S. Congress in 1944, which stipulated that there would be few restrictions on which institution veterans could enroll in with government funds. "Student choice" remained the model for subsequent "Title IV" legislation that extended government grants to non-veterans. Today, for-profit universities take in about 25% of all Title IV funding, while educating only about 10 percent of U.S. college students (Beha 2011).

As near as I can tell, in none of this—the legislated practices and current adjustments of NCLB, the "Seven Solutions" report or the Browne report—is there any reference to the social foundations of education. NCLB does not provide remediation for the fact that poverty is still one of the major impediments to learning among primary and secondary school children. It does not take into account what Jonathan Kozol has termed the "savage inequality" that exists between rich and poor school districts.

In none of this is there talk of the role of the arts and the humanities in educating for global citizenship. In none of this is there acknowledgment of the fact that exclusive emphasis on reading and math alone will not prepare students for life in an increasingly complex global environment. In none of this is there a sense of the fact that most seventeen year old freshmen students are not yet equipped to make the kinds of choices that will contribute to a well-rounded course of study and to their development as informed citizens. And in none of this is there recognition of the fact that for traditional students, at least, college years tend to be a bridge from late adolescence to early adulthood—a time of self-exploration, a time of examining the values of the parental nest, of discovering new social and cultural horizons—in short, a unique opportunity for education.

Imposing a business-economic model on education

Ravitch (2011, 34) has noted this turn toward business models as a part of the various efforts to "reform" K-12 and post-secondary education in the United States. This involves, as she puts it, "a small group of rich and powerful people poised to take control of public education, which apparently has for too long [in their opinion] been in the hands of people lacking the right credentials, resources, and connections." More particularly, at the K-12 level, this will mean a diminished role for teachers and their unions, a diminished role for educational administrators and educational researchers, and an increased role for the those forces in the private sector who view the primary role of education as serving the needs of a putatively free economic market.

At the level of higher education, it will mean increased transfer of public resources to the private sector by decreasing the already low level of state support for public colleges and universities and placing what support remains in the hands of consumers (students) who will for the most part be unprepared to resist the pull of education-on-the-efficiency principle or "lowest common denominator" course selection. Under the "Seven Solutions" plan the student/consumer will be allowed to spend tax dollars at religious colleges and universities, thus reducing support for public education even further. It will lower the quality of instruction by increasing class size and decreasing the attractiveness of specialized offerings such as honors courses. It is doubtful, for example, that highly motivated students will enroll in honors courses once the number of A's and B's is limited to a specified percentage of those enrolled. The role of the university is, in short, being re-defined: its apparent future is to produce as many graduates as possible, as rapidly as possible, and as cheaply as possible.

I hope that it will not be taken as overly cynical to point out that despite the hazards to education, there is a great deal of money to be made in producing and marketing educational testing materials of the sort that are the cornerstone of NCLB. There will also be a great deal of money to be made in the private sector should even more public tuition funds be placed in the hands of individual students, as proposed by the "Seven Solutions" and the Browne reports. That much is clear from the successes of the University of Phoenix, where 30 credit hours, or the equivalent of one academic year, costs the student (or the taxpayer) approximately $12,000. The amount the university spends per student, however, averages a little over $3,000. The difference goes for such things as advertising and shareholder profit (Beha 2011, 53, 54).

John Dewey's alternative

It is worth repeating that this situation—the history and current reform trajectory of NCLB, the "Seven Solutions" and Browne reports, and the current state of for-profit education from which the two reports draw their inspiration—should be of concern not just to educators in the United States and the United Kingdom, but elsewhere as well. For what is denied are components that John Dewey and other progressive educators have described as being at the very heart of the educational process. Dewey expressed this clearly enough in his 1929 essay, *The Sources of a Science of Education.* He wrote that

> education is itself a process of discovering what values are worth while and are to be pursued as objectives. To see what is going on and to observe the results of what goes on so as to see their further consequences in the process of growth, and so on indefinitely, is the only way in which the value of what takes place can be judged. To look to some outside source to provide aims is to fail to know what education is as an ongoing process (Dewey 1996, LW, 5:38).

Dewey continually warned that imposition from some non-educational "outside source" of the aims of educational policies would result in impoverished educational experiences. In the essay just quoted, he argued that the sources of a science of education do not lie in the wholesale application of the findings of the physical or social sciences. Nor, we might add, do they lie in business models. The sources of a science of education lie in what actually occurs in educational settings. Educational practice provides its own characteristics and its own opportunities.

Among those opportunities, increasingly so, is enhanced appreciation by our students of the problems and prospects of current globalizing tendencies. Global citizenship is of course a complex and slippery concept that involves many ramifications—legal, environmental, ethical, economic, and political, to name a few. What is clear, however, is that the lives of our students will be affected by developments in these areas, and that they will need to develop the tools that are required for intelligent choices in the face of novel and uncertain circumstances. If Dewey and other progressive educators are correct in their assessment, then our students will need to understand the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of the choices they will be required to make in the areas of business, industry, government, education, and so on. And in order to make those decisions they will need to be informed in the areas of art, music, history, civics, languages, and other disciplines for which literacy and numeracy simply provide support.

NCLB and the two reports take education precisely in the wrong direction, given the current trajectories of globalization. Much of the world's population in fact lives their lives within a context of social models that emphasize relations, rather than a context of atomic, independent, rational consumers. It is in this sense that NCLB and the two reports look backward to an older individualism, an individualism, as Dewey reminds us, that was the result of a revolt against aristocracy, an individualism that has yet to come to terms with economic models that are evolutionary, rather than mechanical.

Dewey's approach to education thus looks forward without fear to the changes we will experience in this new century, a century in which education will be considered a life-long process. NCLB and the two reports look backward: they regard education as a product to be purchased by a rational consumer in a free marketplace. Dewey regarded education as an opportunity to take the measure of new technical advances, to test and try them with the aim of ascertaining their worth. He regarded education as an exercise in developing the habits of citizenship, responsibility, and contribution to the public good.

The new global citizen

The new global citizen must be broadly informed, flexible in terms of perceived opportunities, and capable of re-inventing him or her self several times, both personally and professionally, over the course of a lifetime. The new global citizen must be comfortable in

more than one language, seek out aesthetic experiences that expand his or her horizons, and be acutely aware of the ways in which cultural practices, including his or her own, change in response to novel conditions. The new global citizen must be committed to the idea of working together across traditional boundaries of class, culture, nation, and religion, in order to respond to perceived problems. The new global citizen must be a pragmatist in the sense in which Charles S. Peirce understood the meaning of concepts in terms of their conceivable practical consequences, rather than as the result of tenacity, a priori reasoning, or appeal to authority. In NCLB and the two reports, one from the United States and the other from the United Kingdom, we find none of this.

In 1929 Dewey wrote that

> [T]he chief obstacle to the creation of a type of individual whose pattern of thought and desire is enduringly marked by consensus with others, and in whom sociability is one with cooperation in all regular human associations, is the persistence of that feature of the earlier individualism which defines industry and commerce by ideas of private pecuniary profit (Dewey 1996, LW, 5:84).

In this remark we get a distillation of the difference between educating for profit and educating for global citizenship.

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