



Saltman, Kenneth. (2009). The Rise of Venture Philanthropy and the Ongoing Neoliberal Assault on Public Education: The Case of the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation. *Workplace*, 16, 53-72.

The Rise of Venture Philanthropy and the Ongoing Neoliberal Assault on Public Education: The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation

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In the past decade educational policy and reform has come increasingly under the sway of a new form of philanthropy. Venture philanthropy is modeled on venture capital and the investments in the technology boom of the early 1990's. VP not only pushes privatization and deregulation, the most significant policy dictates of neoliberalism¹ by championing charter schools, voucher schemes, private scholarship tax credits, and corporate models of curriculum, administration, and teacher preparation and practice, but Venture Philanthropy is also consistent with the steady expansion of neoliberal language and rationales in public education, including the increasing centrality of business terms to describe educational reforms and policies: choice, competition, efficiency, accountability, monopoly, turnaround, and failure. Venture philanthropy in education whose leading proponents include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation departs radically from the age of "scientific" industrial philanthropy characterized by Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford. These traditional philanthropies, despite pursuing a largely conservative role of undermining radical social movements, nonetheless framed their projects in terms of the public good and sought to provide individuals with public information through schools, libraries, and museums.

Venture philanthropy treats schooling as a private consumable service and promotes business remedies, reforms, and assumptions with regard to public schooling. Some of the most significant projects involve promoting charter schools to inject market competition and "choice" into the public sector as well as using cash bonuses for teacher pay and to "incentivize" students.

VP treats giving to public schooling as a "social investment" that like venture capital, must begin with a business plan, must involve quantitative measurement of efficacy, must be replicable to be "brought to scale", and ideally will "leverage" public spending in ways compatible with the strategic donor. In the parlance of venture philanthropy grants are referred to as "investments", donors are called "investors", impact is renamed "social return", evaluation becomes "performance measurement", grant reviewing turns into

“due diligence”, the grant list is renamed an “investment portfolio,” charter networks are referred to as “franchises” -- to name but some of the recasting of giving on investment. Within the view of venture philanthropy, donors are framed as both entrepreneurs and consumers while recipients are represented as investments. One of most significant aspects of this transformation in educational philanthropy involves the ways that the public and civic purposes of public schooling are redescribed by venture philanthropy in distinctly private ways. Such a view carries significant implications for a society theoretically dedicated to public democratic ideals. This is no small matter in terms of how the public and civic roles of public schooling have become nearly overtaken by the economic neoliberal perspective that views public schooling as principally a matter of producing workers and consumers for the economy and for global economic competition.

Although educational philanthropy and venture philanthropy in particular represent a very small portion of the roughly \$600 billion annual expenditure on education in the United States, venture philanthropy has a strategic aim of “leveraging” private money to influence public schooling in ways compatible with the longstanding privatization agendas of the political right, conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institution, the Fordham Foundation, corporate foundations such as ExxonMobil, and corporate organizations such as the Business Roundtable and the Commercial Club of Chicago. The central agenda is to transform public education in the United States into a market through for-profit and non-profit charter schools, vouchers, and “scholarship” tax credits for private schooling or “neovouchers.” Venture philanthropies such as New Schools Venture Fund and the Charter School Growth Fund are being financed by the large givers and aim to create national networks of charter schools, charter management organizations, and educational management organizations (EMOs). These organizations are explicit about their intent to transform radically public education in the United States through various strategies. Along these lines the venture philanthropists are also working in conjunction with large urban school districts and business groups to orchestrate such plans as New York’s New Visions for Public Schools, Chicago’s Renaissance 2010, and similar mixed income/ mixed finance schools and housing projects in Portland, OR, and Boston, MA and elsewhere. These coordinate the privatizations of schooling and housing and gentrify coveted sections of cities. VPs are aggressively seeking to re-imagine teacher education through online and onsite initiatives and educational leadership on the model of the MBA. The key players of venture philanthropy in education -- including but not limited to such leaders as Gates, Walton, Fisher, and Broad -- are able to exercise influence disproportionate to their size and spending power through strategic arrangements with charter and voucher promoting organizations, think tanks, universities, school districts, and schools. The seed money that underfunded schools desperately seek allows the venture philanthropists to “leverage” influence over educational policy and planning, curriculum and instructional practices, and influence the very idea of what it means to be an educated person. Though the implications for educational reform are vast, there has been scant scholarship on Venture Philanthropy in education.²

The Obama administration’s approach to education shares the venture philanthropy perspective and agenda imagining public schooling as a private market within which

schools must compete for scarce resources. The neoliberal ideal of public-private partnership can be found at the center of this agenda as charter schools are being aggressively supported as a means of injecting “competition” and “choice” into the public sector. In fact, the Obama administration has taken the cue from the largest venture philanthropy the Gates foundation. The central project of the Gates foundation in the first decade of the new millenium has been charter school expansion. As soon as Obama was elected in fall of 2008 Gates redirected their educational influence in the direction of graduation rates. Obama’s announcement in the summer of 2009 of the “Race to the Top” competition among public school districts and states for a limited pool of money does not only replicate the punitive educational doctrine of the Bush administration but it also is informed by the Eli Broad prize, discussed below, which uses competition between locales for limited scholarship money in an attempt to steer educational policy. In what follows here I criticize the major Broad educational reform projects and by extension the Obama administration embrace of the same policies and assumptions about education.

The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation

A crucial part of venture philanthropy’s aim to radically transform public schooling on the model of the market involves remaking administrator preparation on the corporate model. The Eli and Edythe Broad Education Foundation is the most active and aggressive Venture Philanthropy with this focus. Broad is funding educational leadership training projects to recruit corporate, military, and non-profit leaders to public education. The Broad Foundation is also seeking to deregulate teacher and administrator preparation programs that will take such programs away from the purview of universities and put them under the control of private non-profit companies that largely embrace corporate ideology. Broad is funding scholarships for schools and students that pay out for “achievement gains.” The Broad initiatives are unified in an emphasis on standardized test-based performance achievement tracking, a goal of creating test databases for long-term tracking of student test scores to direct educational policy and to determine the effectiveness of teacher and administrator preparation programs. The Broad Foundation is also working to expand privatization in the form of charter schools and to “franchise” charter management organizations. While on the surface these initiatives may not seem closely related, they share a common set of ideals and a cohesive vision for public schooling that can best be understood as an expression of neoliberal ideology applied to education.

In education, neoliberalism has taken hold with tremendous force, remaking educational common sense and pushing forward the privatization and deregulation agendas. The steady rise of business language and logic in pedagogy, policy, curriculum, and administrative doctrine suggests the sweeping extent to which neoliberal ideals have succeeded in taking over educational debates. Neoliberalism appears in the now commonsense framing of education exclusively through presumed ideals of upward individual economic mobility (the promise of cashing in knowledge for jobs) and the social ideals of global economic competition. The “TINA” thesis that has come to dominate politics throughout much of the world (There Is No Alternative to the Market) has infected educational thought as the only questions on reform agendas appear to be

how to best enforce knowledge and curriculum conducive to national economic interest and the expansion of a corporately managed model of globalization as perceived from the perspective of business. Despite the financial crisis and utter failure of unfettered deregulation of private markets in education neoliberal assumptions continue to reign supreme as much of the market based educational reform of the Bush administration is carried forward by Obama and the democratic party. What is dangerously framed out within the neoliberal view is the role of democratic participation in societies ideally committed to democracy and the role of public schools in preparing public democratic citizens with the tools for meaningful and participatory self-governance. By reducing the politics of education to its economic roles, neoliberal educational reform has deeply authoritarian tendencies that are incompatible with democracy. As the only concern becomes one of the efficient enforcement of the “right” knowledge, critical engagement, investigation, and intellectual curiosity not to mention cultural and class difference appear as impediments to learning as teachers are treated as deskilled deliverers of prepackaged curricula prohibiting their potential as critical intellectuals.³

Eli Broad created and runs The Broad Foundation after earning billions in real estate and finance. In retirement he has been working fulltime on urban public school reform. Broad is one of three largest venture philanthropies along with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family foundations. However, of the three Broad has by far done the most to transform the running of public schools by seeking to influence administrator preparation, the meaning and value of teacher and administrator quality, and school boards.

Broad’s educational activities derive from a few key assumptions about improving public schooling including: 1) that the problems facing public schools are administrative problems caused by bad management practices -- especially caused by bad public school managers who lack the leadership skills of the private sector; 2) that public school improvement begins with top-down reform; 3) that educational quality can be understood principally through standardized test-derived achievement scores and that poor and minority students suffer from an “achievement gap” which can be remedied through better educational methods and management. On their own many of these assumptions are widely held rather than specific to Broad. However, taken together these assumptions are closely aligned with the neoliberal educational reform movement as championed by not only the venture philanthropists but also neoliberal think tanks like the Fordham Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, Hoover Institution, and leading right-wing policy wonks associated with them, especially Chester Finn and Frederick Hess among others.

In what follows here I focus on three dimensions of Broad’s educational projects to illustrate how what is represented in academic and public discourse as generosity, care, excellence, and improvement ought rather to be understood as an expression of particular values, visions, and political ideologies in education that are hostile to public forms of schooling, that celebrate and promote a corporate and private rather than public perspective on educational governance, and that have an anti-intellectual and anti-critical, approach to knowledge and curriculum.

The Leadership Agenda

A central priority of the Eli Broad Foundation is to recruit and train superintendents and principals from outside of the ranks of professional teachers and educational administrators and, related to this, to shift administrator preparation away from universities and state certification to the control of outside organizations that embrace corporate and military styles of management and that share the venture philanthropy agenda. These programs include most notably Broad, New Leaders for New Schools, and KIPP's training program. At the core of these initiatives has been the neoliberal celebration of private sector and denigration of all things public. In this view, educational leadership is imagined ideally as corporate management and the legacy of public educational administration is devalued. Policy literature in the area of educational administration refers to what Broad spearheads for leadership as the "deregulation agenda."

Writing that the Broad Foundation is part of this movement to end certification and licensure in universities, Betsy Smith has done one of the most comprehensive examinations of the deregulation agenda and the effort to create outside deregulated educational institutions for leader preparation. Smith argues that not only is there no evidence justifying the deregulation movement that is being pushed by right wing think tanks and corporate foundations, but that the turn to outside leaders relies heavily on what she calls a "compositional argument" – that is, a cultural narrative about the "bullish CEO." To put it differently, the call for turning to leaders from the business sector and the military should be understood not merely as one cultural narrative but as a cultural narrative that is part of a broader ideology of corporate culture within which a series of interlocking business and military metaphors plays a central role in setting the stage for policy.

In the case of the outside leader ideal, the educational administrator as "bullish CEO" merges with the description of educational values through metaphors of efficiency, choice, competition, and accountability. These metaphors rely for their intelligibility on their opposites including ascription of the public bureaucracy and the ensconced public leader as inefficient, monolithic and imposing, monopolistic, and unaccountable. The educational leader as "bullish CEO" hence participates in the much broader tendency found across scholarly and public discourse to imagine the school as a business, the school workers as business people, the student as consumer of private services. Within this view of privatized schooling, the leader should naturally be from the private sector or from the military.

Within this corporatized view of educational leadership found in venture philanthropy, military leadership is celebrated for its alleged link with corporate management – a focus on discipline, order, and enforcement of mandates through a hierarchy at every level of public schooling. The "natural discipline" of the market is discursively linked to the corporeal discipline of the military. The turn to military leaders of public schools began in the late 1990's with Seattle and Washington, D.C. appointing military generals as "C.E.O.'s." This has picked up speed, as seen in the expansion of programs such as

“Troops to Teachers” that puts veterans in the classroom, the expansion of public schools run as military academies (Chicago leads the nation with six schools so far), increases in military recruitment in schools accompanied by slick corporate youth advertising, and the NCLB law that mandated student personal information would automatically be given to military recruiters unless parents intervened. The turn to military leaders particularly for urban poor and predominantly African-American and Latino student bodies belies a profoundly racialized phenomenon within which these students are framed as suffering primarily from a lack of discipline which the military and the corporation can supply.⁴

The discourse of discipline typified by the turn to the military and corporate leader actively denies the social conditions informing the experience of schooling. Instead of acknowledging how social inequalities influence educational access, such discourse reduces the language of educational opportunity to a narrative of individual discipline. Broken schools, absent textbooks, underpaid and overworked teachers, large class sizes, communities beset by unemployment, public disinvestment, dire poverty, skyrocketing homelessness, not to mention unequal distribution of cultural capital, – in short, all of the material and symbolic social conditions inside and outside of schools that render schooling difficult to impossible are made to seem as irrelevant when discipline frames schooling. The celebration of the disciplinarian administrator is deployed in conjunction with multiple other disciplinarian policies such as the implementation of school uniforms, zero tolerance policies for expelling students, vast expansion of surveillance technologies in schools, surprise searches and police school invasions.⁵ The turn to the authoritarian disciplinarian can be found not only in policy but across public discourse in films, television shows, news stories, and advertisements about schooling that participate in what Henry Giroux, Mike Males, Lawrence Grossberg and others have extensively detailed as a discursive and material “war on youth” waged in the U.S. In this “war,” kids are blamed for a myriad of social and economic problems while legal and public protections for kids are scaled back.⁶

Through most of the first decade of the new millennium, an unabated barrage of representations across mass media educated Americans in the virtues of the hard-nosed CEO, from Jack Welch and his goal of regularly firing 10% of the General Electric workforce to discipline the entire company to the return of an omnipresent Donald Trump selling viewers the fantasy of being an apprentice bullish-CEO on Reality TV. In this context the billionaire CEO Eli Broad and his application of business ideals to educational leadership appeared to many people as offering the gift of corporate and military efficiencies and discipline to the beleaguered public schools. But the context for interpretation has recently changed.

As the financial crisis of 2008 hit, it became readily apparent across the political spectrum that the neoliberal idea of markets regulating themselves without state support and intervention is no longer tenable. (In a sense it never was very credible, as the neoliberal program required state support and regulation despite the ideology⁷) As waves of financial corporations collapsed or had to be saved through massive federal intervention, the assumptions behind the market fundamentalism of the last forty years began to be called into question. Neoliberal former head of the U.S. Federal Reserve

bank Alan Greenspan appeared before Congress and admitted that the view of the economy that informed his decision to allow greater and greater deregulation of derivative markets had been wrong. Liberal economist Joseph Stiglitz came to a similar conclusion that the financial crisis could best be understood by grasping that everything came back to deregulation and the faith in markets to regulate themselves. As Henry Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux wisely point out⁸, a consequence of the broader pedagogical effect of neoliberalism on both education and the culture at large has been a difficulty for the public to formulate and name alternative visions to the failed neoliberal ones. This is, as they rightly suggest, a significant problem with a legacy of schooling overtaken by anti-critical approaches such as standardized testing, scripted lessons, commercialism, pay for grades, etc. is that they prohibit the kinds of questioning, critical dialogue, tools of investigation necessary for the fostering of democratic culture that citizens must learn in order to participate in reworking civil society with others.

The Broad Foundation's neoliberal approach to educational reform must be viewed with profound skepticism for two primary reasons. First, it is modeled on the same neoliberal assumptions (privatization and market deregulation) that have been thoroughly discredited as behind the economic crisis. In other words Broad and the other venture philanthropists assume that education is like business and should adopt the same framing language and guiding rationales. As well, neoliberal ideology forms the foundation for expanding the market metaphor to all areas of social life, conflating public and private spheres, and eradicating a sense of the public good in favor of a society composed of nothing but private consumers.

Secondly, in the case of Eli Broad, at issue is not simply that he, like the other venture philanthropists, adopted the language of venture capital and sought to apply it to education. Broad's fortune and hence his ability to steer educational reform, debate, and policy through his foundation all derives from the two primary industries at the center of the financial crisis and subsequent economic meltdown – namely, real estate and finance. What is more, Broad, made a killing in these industries specifically by using them synergistically rather than competitively. So the Broad narrative of financial success, deregulation, and idealization of corporate culture is falling apart not only due to the collapse of the neoliberal ideology that grounds it but also due to the fact Broad's neoliberal educational reform was always premised on assumptions that contradicted the origins of Broad's own wealth – namely, speculative capital in a bubble economy and monopolistic behavior. What the financial crisis reveals about Broad is that what he has sold as a narrative of skill and hard work that every school child should emulate ought to be understood as the result of the clever working of an economic context that was grounded in layers of gambling – an economy that was a house of cards.

The mortgage crisis of 2008 was the result of deregulation of banking compounded by the hawking of mortgage backed securities that when made into securities were sliced and diced to sell what appeared as secure assets but were in fact highly risky and speculative. This in turn was compounded by the linkage to these mortgage backed securities of loan default swaps that were effectively free insurance policies on the mortgage backed securities that multiplied the effect of debt creation when these bad

investments failed. The amount of money in the economy multiplied radically through speculation between 2001 and 2007. At their most basic, Broad's fortune was based in speculative capital made possible by the neoliberal dictate of deregulation. The removal of public controls over private capital set the stage for the amassing of Broad's personal fortune and it participated in the broader radical upward redistribution of wealth and income throughout the last thirty years. It is precisely the ideal of deregulation that Broad extrapolates as a metaphor to apply to public education. If only the public sector can be made to look like and act like the private sector, so goes the metaphor, then the public sector can be improved. And the only way to do that is to shrink public control over public institutions and hand control over to those from the private sector. But the metaphor is misleading. There are great differences between public and private institutions, their missions, and their leadership.

Educational leaders for public schools have distinctly public obligations and responsibilities that differ from the obligations and responsibilities of private sector managers. Private sector managers are responsible foremost for maximizing profit for owners or shareholders. Their decision-making, skills, training, and relations with employees, in short, all that a private sector manager does, foster the financial goal of profit. Educational leaders for public schools are responsible to the public, namely to the community, the parents, students, and teachers who form it. The end of public school administration is not profit maximization but public service. Additionally, the private corporation has a particularly hierarchical organizational structure with the owners and managers at the top with near absolute authority. The public school, being publicly accountable, has a considerably more democratic organizational structure with administrators answerable to multiple constituencies within the community.

In both a practical and political sense, as Bets Ann Smith suggests, the outside private manager will not be attracted to the kinds of programs championed by Broad because though "[a]ttracted to the idea of 'running a school,' many aspirants overlook public schooling's democratic complexities and the degree to which its leadership demands are unrelenting and unrelentingly public."⁹ Smith's study of the case of deregulation in Michigan highlights the differences between large districts that have been subject to anti-democratic mayoral takeovers as opposed to the majority of districts that remain subject to democratic oversight. The mayorally appointed CEOs sit in closed-door meetings where they are generally told that the priorities are test scores and "restoring fiscal order."¹⁰ Such set-ups subvert the messy public struggles for educational and public priorities waged in and through public institutions. Of course, in the context of an era of high stakes standardized testing and the standardization of curricula and other anti-critical approaches to teaching and learning, such narrow imperatives for test scores and cost-cutting promoted in the name of business efficiency above all else become instruments to assure a profoundly anti-intellectual pedagogical approach to schooling dominated by rote learning and memorization, scripted lessons, and decontextualized fact. Not only do these approaches undermine the possibilities of public schools operating as critical intellectual public spheres, but they also have implications for the kinds of social relations, identification, and identities that they produce for the activities people do outside of schools. In other words, democratic culture depends upon the built capacities

for criticism, debate, and deliberation that critically intellectual public schools can develop. The corporate approach to schooling of which the corporate bullish CEO is a part undermines the civic possibilities that public schooling can have for communities by imagining school governance as being imposed from above and outside rather than from within the community while suggesting that knowledge must be imposed and enforced rather than beginning with the experience of those in the community. Some educational policy writers on the political right are quite explicit in championing the corporate-style outside leader.

In the journal *Educational Policy*, Frederick Hess and Andrew Kelly of the neoliberal American Enterprise Institute call for a “radical” restructuring of leader preparation that would involve thoroughly importing business management and principles into the curriculum, redefining the meaning of candidate qualifications to be understood through the outside leader and primarily the business leader, stripping control of universities in leader preparation and licensure and teacher education generally and shifting control to foundations with venture philanthropy ideals such as Broad, New Leaders for New Schools, and KIPP.¹¹ Hess and Kelly see as progress, though insufficiently “radical” progress, such programs as those state-based ones in Ohio and Georgia that are modeled on corporate management academies. The Ohio Principals Leadership Academy was run by a former trainer who developed management academies for companies such as Bath and BodyWorks.¹² But for these authors the problem is that they do not recruit enough middle management directly from business.

This outside leader ideal, as it is championed by Hess and Kelly, Finn, and others of the neoliberal perspective, calls for educational leadership candidates to be educated the way that New Leaders for New Schools does it: having a “proven” track record of leadership experience outside education before even beginning, candidates will then be further educated by business school and education faculty and will learn educational research and “business school literature on organizational change, management, negotiation, and conflict resolution.”¹³ Hess and Kelly also suggest that KIPP’s corporate management training model for leadership preparation is ideal. It is housed in UC Berkeley’s Haas School of Business and funded by the Fisher Foundation which is an aggressively pro-privatization venture philanthropy foundation run by the owners of the Gap, Banana Republic, and Old Navy. Students learn from business professors while “the curriculum fuses the KIPP ethos that results matter with more conventional business practices.”¹⁴ “Through the examination of case studies about successful companies, such as Southwest Airlines and FedEx, students consider what lessons the private sector may hold for K-12 management.”¹⁵

Like the corporate approach of NLNS and KIPP, Broad’s Academy is based in the ideal of making “great leaders.” And great leaders for Broad come largely from business or accept a business view of administration. “Dan Katzir, the Broad Foundation’s managing director and an instructor in the academy, told the fellows that Southwest Airlines and the computer giant Dell Inc. are examples of how new players entered an established market, came up with innovative strategies and achieved success. The message: Urban superintendents can, and should, do the same.”¹⁶ The point not to be missed here is that

“great managers” for Broad follow the management style, precepts, assumptions, and language from the private sector. Part of what is at issue here is the venture philanthropy approach to educational leadership that views public schools as a private market and that views private corporations as the model for public institutions. The confusion between public and private institutions and values has enormous implications for educational governance, material struggles over educational resources, and especially the conceptualization of knowledge in both public schools and in educational leadership programs.

This is not merely a matter of instituting a corporate style of educational leadership. Also, such pedagogy involves teaching future leaders to understand their identities in reference to the private sector rather than to the public sphere and teaching future leaders about the alleged virtues of privatization schemes such as “choice” and charter schools.¹⁷ For example, such projects encourage social relations forged through the hierarchical organizational form of the corporation and the concentrated authority of the corporate leader rather than through the collective, dialogic wielding of power found in more democratic organizational forms.

The Broad Projects Share a View about Knowledge

For Broad, public schools, teacher education programs, and educational leadership programs are all described as businesses. The description hangs on a metaphor of efficient delivery of a standardized product (knowledge) all along the product supply chain: The product is alleged to be high quality, neutral, universally valuable education. The deliverable, Knowledge, is positioned like product. In the case of K12, knowledge, which is presumed to be universal and objective, is to be standardized, measured, and tested. Test scores in this view are the ultimate arbiter of educational quality and, like units of commodity or money, can allow for the quantification of growth and progress. For Broad this is called, “achievement.” Hence, one of Broad’s major initiatives is the “closing of the achievement gap” and the funding of school districts and schools that improve the test scores of non-White students. The presumption is that the unequal distribution of the product, Knowledge, can be remedied through methodological interventions such as the introduction of rigid pedagogical reforms, the introduction of proper business incentives such as teacher bonus pay, or paying students for grades, as well as management reforms such as installing business people to manage schools, and getting unions and school boards out of the way of these business-based “achievement oriented” reform efforts. The moment the goal of education becomes “achievement,” the crucial ongoing conversation about the purposes and values of schooling stops as does the struggle over whose knowledge and values and ways of seeing should be taught and learned.

This perspective about knowledge as measurable, quantifiable, universally valuable and neutral direct Broad’s biggest initiatives: the leadership agenda, the “Broad Prize”, and the database project. The leadership agenda imagines educational leaders as business managers who can increase test based achievement like increasing financial revenue, who can decrease the “achievement gap” like a CEO seeking to close the earnings gap with the business competition.

As Fenwick English argues, the movement in educational leadership to standardize a knowledge base (and then enforce it through ISLLC/ELCC standards applied in NCATE/National Policy Board for Educational Administration) destroys the most valuable dimension of intellectual preparation offered by university leadership programs, effectively lowering standards in educational administration preparation by encouraging the proliferation of weak programs that offer advanced degrees. English contends that Broad typifies the “back door” to “a neoliberal global policy agenda to privatize educational preparation as advanced by right-wing, corporate-backed think tanks and foundations that proffer that free market approaches (i.e. marketization) are a better way to prepare educational leaders.”¹⁸ What makes these programs weak for English is that they are based in standards that form a “knowledge base.” The standards: represent a mistaken view of knowledge as static rather than dynamic. Such standards are anti-democratic, working against historically marginalized groups and securing the authority of those with the most political power; they are grounded in a “knowledge base” that functions primarily to exercise political power; are ahistorical and conceptually incoherent, representing “disembodied skills, concepts, and ideas distanced from the theories that spawned them” that artificially ground existing relations of power; they are antiscientific and anti-intellectual, denying the necessity for research beyond what is encoded in the standards. Together, these problematic underlying assumptions set the stage for a radical venture philanthropy transformation of administrator preparation defined by market competition, with students shopping for the most convenient certification program. Meanwhile vacuous programs lacking in intellectual rigor proliferate. As English argues, the NCATE standards make challenging the assumptions of the field irrelevant or a problem for professors of administration. These standards as currently conceived do not conceptualize the field as dynamic and contested.

The bad assumption of a standardized knowledge base results in the stunted intellectual development of the field of administrator preparation. Consequently, the university’s role in intellectual or critical preparation appears tenuous as off-campus “on-site” preparation programs rapidly expand. The theoretical and intellectual content of administration preparation shifts largely to efficacy-oriented literature from business management, or it is evacuated altogether. As well, this plays into the longstanding confusion in the field of education over the relationship between theory and practice as on-site learning takes precedence and an anti-critical practicalism takes over. Practice is positioned as the real stuff of administrator preparation grounded by the ultimate goal of “changing outcomes” measured by “increasing student achievement” which means raising test scores. Of course, such a conceptualization of educational leadership through the static knowledge base conceals who makes the content of such tests and the symbolic and material interests tied to such claims to truth. The positivism of this approach to knowledge separates facts from the assumptions, values, and ideologies that inform the selection and arrangement of facts.

The Broad approach typifies a much larger movement across the field of education to tie the preparation of teachers and administrators to the test outcomes of candidates’ students. In other words, the value of an education professor or person preparing teachers

can be boiled down to the test scores of the student's student. The Carnegie Corporation has recently championed such thinking and one variation of it goes by the title "value-added" education. The measure of the value of preparation programs is the "value" they have in upping scores. This way of thinking about teacher and administrator preparation exemplifies this resurgent positivism and its anti-intellectual bent. In this view, there can be no place for educational study that does not result in test score improvement two levels down. So educational theory, sociology and philosophy of education, curriculum theorizing, pedagogical theory, those approaches in education that address the underlying assumptions, ethical, historical, and political aspects of what is taught and learned -- none has a place in the "value-added" perspective because all that matters is "delivery" of "content knowledge" through the use of the "best" "instructional methods."¹⁹ As English rightly contends, educational leadership instruction and knowledge ought to be dynamic rather than static and ought to link research into educational problems with research into social problems.

The Scholarship Agenda

Broad created the Broad Prize for Urban Education. The foundation claims that what it has promoted as a "Nobel Prize for education" is intended to support public schooling and increase confidence in public education. The media has picked up the mantle of "Nobel prize for education" from Broad, and this has been endlessly repeated in the popular press. Broad divides a million dollars among five urban school districts that it has deemed as making improvements in "student performance" and "closing the racial achievement gap." One winning district gets \$500,000 and four runners up get \$125,000 to be used for university scholarships for graduating seniors. Broad evaluates urban districts for the prize money by looking at state standardized tests, graduation rates, SAT and ACT scores, among other national tests.

Broad's educational reform agenda applies the same assumptions to rewarding schools and students as it does to training principals and superintendents. While in the case of the administrator there is a "knowledge base" that can collect and apply knowledge regardless of social context, in the case of promoting particular school policy through the prize it rewards standardized and largely decontextualized knowledge that is alleged to be of universal value. In this perspective, those students and schools that do not score highly on the standardized achievement tests can be "incentivized" through the promise of scholarship funds. One of the most obvious basic problems is the fact that the scholarship prize does not address the skyrocketing costs of higher education and that higher education could be publicly funded. The prize assumes that all students somehow will be able to afford to go to university. There are numerous other problems with this line of thinking animating the scholarship.

First, the prize assumes that genuine learning should be measured principally by standardized tests composed of knowledge formulated by specialists. Secondly, this assumes that the tested knowledge is of universal value and expresses no class or cultural values or perspectives and should be of universal interest. When poor and non-White students score poorly on these tests, Broad frames this as a deficit in those poor and non-White students. Such a deficit ought to be remedied by figuring out how to raise test

scores. Broad's perspective runs contrary to more critical approaches to teaching and learning. According to these perspectives, learning ought to begin with what the learner knows, that student experience which is meaningful should then be problematized in relation to broader questions and problems to help students develop a greater understanding of what has produced the student's experience. This means that the student in a more critical approach must learn to approach knowledge not as decontextualized bytes to be unthinkingly consumed and regurgitated but in ways that comprehend that knowledge and versions of truth are struggled over and that different interpretations are informed by material and symbolic power struggles. In this critical perspective, learning as an act of interpretation must be understood as inevitably linked to acts of intervention in the sense that there can be no neutral interpretations and in the sense that how students come to see the world informs how they act on the world. Rather than primarily developing the tools for repeating official knowledge, from a critical perspective students must learn to analyze what they come to know from experience and texts in social, political, ethical, and historical ways. Crucial questions at the center of this critical approach include who is making this knowledge, why do they claim this, how are these claims related to the position of the claimant, what kinds of broader structural forces inform the claim to truth? Broad's rewarding of knowledge that is foremost confirmable through standardized tests denies all of these crucial questions and shuts down the critical approach to knowledge.

Nothing better illustrates the stakes in these different approaches to learning than Broad's own involvement in educational reform following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. When Katrina devastated the city and its schools, longstanding politically-failed privatization plans were put in place (spearheaded by right-wing think tanks like Urban Institute and Heritage), including vouchers and charter schools, the carving up of the school district, the dismantling of the teacher's union, and the refusal to rebuild the public schools as part of the business-led BNOBC plan to keep poor and predominantly African American citizens from returning to their communities, homes, and schools. New Orleans was an experiment in neoliberal urban rebuilding.²⁰ The fate of the schools was struggled over. The history of systematic disinvestment in the New Orleans schools, the history of white flight, the failure of the corporate sector to contribute adequately to the public schools, -- these histories were conveniently erased as the Broad Foundation and the other venture philanthropies including Gates, Fisher, and Walton showed up to offer their generosity. The cash on hand came with strings. Rather than supporting the rebuilding of the public system in a better form, the venture philanthropies targeted their money at the creation of charter schools, alternative administrator preparation of the sort discussed above, and Teach for America program that expands an uncertified, undereducated, and deunionized teacher workforce. Totalling \$17.5 million these initiatives contributed significantly to the carving out of an elite charter network in the city for more privileged residents, solidifying the dispossession of predominantly poor and African American former residents, and the continuing attack on the teachers union.²¹

The kinds of "achievement oriented" standardized schooling such gifts foster will prohibit the kinds of critical teaching and learning that would encourage students to understand how Katrina, the city, and the schools became disputed terrains of class and

racial struggles. Indeed, if public schooling is to offer democratic possibilities, such critical knowledge becomes crucial for students to have the skills to engage as public citizens in the formation of both community and knowledge making about it. Eli Broad's own words help to illuminate this. Speaking of Miami-Dade, Florida Broad said, "Miami-Dade is doing what some say is impossible – improving students' performance, regardless of their race or family income – while at the same time closing persistent achievement gaps."²² Broad frames class position and cultural difference as needing to be erased or seen as impositions to students learning the right knowledge. What this view completely misses is how school rewards the knowledge and cultural capital of students of class and cultural privilege while disaffirming the knowledge of students of oppressed classes and cultural groups.

Thirdly, while Broad claims that the prize increases confidence in public education,²³ it undermines many of the public aspects of public education. One of the ways it does so is by misrepresenting knowledge as discussed above. However, it also "de-publicizes" public schooling by suggesting that the private businessman should have the power to designate and influence the determination of what is valuable knowledge for students to learn. Furthermore, this private businessman uses a series of private for profit companies such as MPR Associates, Inc., to manage the prize selection process and another company Schoolworks, an educational consulting firm, to do site visits and collect information on prize candidates. Rather than the values of a community guiding reform, the values of the billionaire and the private educational consultants do. The very idea that the value and vision of public education should be steered and influenced by one who can fund the "education Nobel prize" aligns the values of learning less with enriching individual lives and collective social purpose defined by the love of learning or the social implications of it than with learning for extrinsic rewards, possessive individualism, and even celebrity adoration. Should the point be missed, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced a \$125,000 Broad award in Bridgeport, Connecticut, "This is like the Oscars for public education,' she beamed." Of course, mass media sells products by offering celebrity identifications and educating viewers to imagine themselves in celebrity relationships. As Zygmunt Bauman discusses, the cultural pedagogies of new media, TV, and film beset us with the problem of subjectivity fetishism – a world of people subjectified as commodities who misunderstand their commoditized selves as authentic and free of the market.²⁴ What public schooling as a public site can offer us in this context is one place where commercialized forms of address and modes of identification can be criticized and where non-commodified versions of selfhood and values can be taught and learned. Not only does the Broad prize contribute to an expansion into public schools of the commercialism found nearly everywhere else in the society but it also promotes the kind of learning in formal schooling that does not foster interpretation and questioning of commercial pedagogies that promote a privatized and individualized society outside of schooling. In other words, forms of schooling that make central social, cultural, political problems in the world ought to be brought into formal schooling while the test oriented pedagogical approaches that Broad supports do just the opposite.

Fourthly, Broad's funding of scholarships for students to go to college obscures some crucial public policy issues regarding public funding for higher education, the skyrocketing costs of tuition, and the increasing corporatization of the university. Rather than advocating for a greater role of the federal government in funding universal higher education, Broad instead promotes an exclusionary and lottery-style system of funding that resembles social Darwinian reality television programs like *Survivor*. While the aim of providing some students with access to college appears to be an admirable one, what needs to be recognized is that the Broad Foundation's actions function to sanction and legitimate a highly exclusionary system of access to higher education. As Stanley Aronowitz wisely writes criticizing one of the "crucial precepts of progressive educational philosophy (specifically Dewey),

under the sign of egalitarianism, the idea [is] that class deficits can be overcome by equalizing access to school opportunities without questioning what those opportunities have to do with genuine education... The structure of schooling already embodies the class system of society, and for this reason the access debate is mired in a web of misplaced concreteness. To gain entrance into schools always entails placement into that system. "Equality of opportunity" for class mobility is the system's tacit recognition that inequality is normative.²⁵

What Aronowitz means by genuine learning is what, drawing on Hannah Arendt, he calls transmitting a "love for the world" and "love for our children." He develops this to mean that radical imagination must stem from radical criticism. Instead, as Aronowitz laments all too commonly, schools teach "conformity to the social, cultural and occupational hierarchy" rather than the democratic values that are often the official but unfulfilled principles guiding schools. Broad's scholarship prize represents the reduction of the possibilities of schooling to work and through universal schooling *access to social mobility*, which, as Aronowitz points out is not egalitarian at all.²⁶

Broad's scholarship prizes promises equality through the potential of individual upward mobility through graduation. By setting such bait, Broad fails to acknowledge the structural economic limits of job markets. The existing economy cannot globally accommodate good employment for a fully educated population. Consequently, the real fulfillment of educational and economic uplift can only come through collective action to change the conditions and standards of work to provide full employment at fair pay, security, etc. Students can be educated for such collective struggle rather than for merely compliance to the current economic arrangement of "casino capitalism."²⁷

The Database Project

Broad supports the School Information Partnership and the more expansive Data Partnership. These are efforts to compile, track, aggregate, and analyze student test scores with the long term goal of influencing school and teacher education policy based in the data. The Education Department provided \$4.7 million and \$50.9 million came from private organizations. Of this, Broad provided half. One explicit goal is to foster the aims of No Child Left Behind to provide schools and parents with score information.

The literature on the database projects suggests that data offers parents and students information for “school choice” – that is, privatization. As with the Broad Prize, the foundation’s justification in supporting this project is to narrow the racial “achievement gap.” This is also a lucrative opportunity for information technology companies including Data Partnership collaborators CELT Corp. which designs information technology systems for schools, the school evaluation division of Standard & Poors, and the influential Achieve Inc., a non-profit organization that was founded by corporations and governors to promote “standards-based” education. In addition to Broad, the Gates Foundation is heavily supporting the Database Partnership.

Mass data collection of student test scores appeals to many who embrace an understanding of learning through numerically quantifiable “standards” imposed from above. Longitudinal tracking of test scores appeals to those who want to boil down successful teaching practice to “efficient delivery” of curriculum. In this perspective, instructional methodologies become the primary concern of teacher practice, and methodologies are disconnected from the matter of what is taught. The experts who know determine what students should learn. The teacher becomes a routinized technician proficiently executing what has been determined to be the most efficient instructional methods to raise test scores. In the tradition of Taylorism’s scientific management, the classroom becomes “teacher proof.”

The database project aims to track and identify which teachers and teacher approaches raise standardized test scores despite racial, ethnic, class, or linguistic differences. Then, once the instructional methods that most raise test scores can be identified, the teacher education approaches that those test-improving-teachers were exposed to can be replicated. The database promises to highlight which schools’ methods are resulting in raised test scores by minorities and hence purports to provide information that will enable administrators to work to “close the achievement gap.” Another promise is that the schools that score the highest on tests will be attractive “choices” for parents. Hence the database project appears to work in conjunction with the way that No Child Left Behind set the stage for transforming public education into a national market by requiring local schools to allow enrollments by anyone who chooses to go to the school.

What is wrong with the database project is that it reduces the value of schooling to standardized test scores while effacing the ways that standardized tests correlate most closely with family income and cultural capital. The emphasis on instructional methodologies paired with the delivery of standardized units of curriculum rewards and promotes approaches to teaching that thoroughly ignore the social contexts within which students learn as well as the identities of the students. As a consequence, such approaches encourage teaching to be viewed not as an intellectual practice nor as critical practice but rather as a technical skill. The overemphasis on testing as the definition of student achievement has practical and social costs. It compromises pedagogical approaches oriented towards creative problem solving while rendering pedagogical content estranged. Critical educators emphasize that learning ideally ought to begin with meaningful knowledge that students have experienced and can be problematized in relation to broader social, political, and cultural contexts and forces to help students comprehend how their experiences, understandings, and assumptions are produced but

also to help students theorize how to confront those forces that produce their experiences. The standards-based approach undermines critical confrontation with both student experience and with the social forces and actors that tell students what is valuable to know.

When it comes to policy, the database project lends itself to a positivist separation of fact from the values and assumptions that organize facts.

Participating states will each receive a customized analysis of data needs and how to close any gaps from the CELT Corp. Over time, the partnership could help states build the architecture for a more robust data system, including detailed implementation plans, joint requests for proposals, procurement, and contractor oversight and management. CELT also plans to identify and share best practices across participating states.²⁸

The point not to be missed here is that policy will be “data driven.” In reality, data cannot “drive” policy. The very expression conceals the motives and politics undergirding human beings’ decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, teacher education, and administration. Implementing practices used in high-scoring schools in low-scoring schools will not only result in misapplications of pedagogical approaches, it naturalizes the unthinking consumption of information as the essence of achievement while imagining teachers as little more than fleshy delivery machines. What does not get interrogated in all this is the process whereby some people with particular values, perspectives, and ideological convictions determine what is important for students to know. Belied is the question of who has the power to distribute and universalize this knowledge, whose material and symbolic interests it represents, who profits from it financially, and what is lost in terms of schooling as dialogic and intellectually dynamic. The database project promises inclusion and access. Yet, it is highly exclusionary by universalizing approaches to learning that refuse to engage with the different contexts that students bring to the learning situation. Context-based pedagogical approaches enable students who are traditionally excluded from the curriculum and who come from historically oppressed groups to problematize claims to truth in relation to their experiences. As in colonialist education policies, the learner must assimilate or perish.²⁹

There is a grand irony in the data partnership. Its web site was developed by the National Center for Educational Accountability and Standard & Poor’s school evaluation services division. Standard & Poor’s along with the other credit rating agencies came under intense criticism in 2007 and 2008 as the collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) markets that S&P had rated highly collapsed. These CDOs are largely understood as triggering the broad-based global financial meltdown following their implication in the radical expansion of a speculative economic bubble.³⁰ As well, Standard & Poor’s continued to rate the government of Iceland highly just up to its financial collapse in 2008. The point not to be missed here is that the database project in education is driven by a number of neoliberal assumptions that ought to be seen as thoroughly discredited. The unquestionable efficiency of business, the model of the numerically quantifiable progress derived in part from industry and the financial sector, the rating of students and teachers

through quasi-credit ratings – all of these are called into question not by the financial crisis but by the failure of the neoliberal dictates that tell people to think of all social goods through the logic of economics. Rather than using dubious credit rating tactics to measure school children, teachers, and knowledge as if they were investments and commodities, human measures of the value of teaching, learning, and knowledge must be expanded. Perhaps as well, to turn it around, financial investments can be rated through their social values and social costs on a human index.

Venture philanthropy initiatives including those of the Broad foundation need to be recognized for their hostility to public and critical forms of schooling as well as their alignment with the broader movement to privatize and dismantle public schooling. It is incumbent upon educators to challenge the promotion of retrograde positivism, the use of private money to steer public educational reform debates, and the corporate hijacking of public institutions especially at a moment when the central tenets of neoliberal ideology are revealed to be utterly untenable. The wealth of the venture philanthropies is only made possible by public subsidy in the form of tax incentives through which the public pays to have public control over public services given over to elite private interests. Private foundation wealth including that of the Broad, Gates, and Walton foundations ought ideally to be nationalized and channeled into public institutions with strong public governance, oversight, and control. Public schools are crucial for making publicly-minded citizens capable of interpreting and acting on matters of public importance. Consequently the preparation of teachers and administrators can not be turned over to elite private interests promoting corporate ideologies but must become increasingly determined in public domains and institutions. The struggle for critical and public democratic forms of administrator preparation must be waged not only discursively but also through accreditation bodies, state boards of education, and state legislatures, as well as in university education program development.

¹ Neoliberalism involves redistributing public goods to private controls while espousing market triumphalism. As David Harvey explains it is a project of class warfare.

² Notable early exceptions to this include Frederick Hess' edited collection *With the Best of Intentions* from a neoliberal perspective and the liberal work of Janelle Scott such as "The Politics of Venture Philanthropy in Charter School Policy and Advocacy" *Educational Policy* V23n1, pp. 106-136 and the work of Rick Cohen of the Center for Responsive Philanthropy. Mike and Susan Klonsky's book *Small Schools* New York: Routledge 2008 and Philip Kovacs's scholarship on Gates stand out as some of the rare critical work on venture philanthropy. See for example, Philip Kovacs and H.K. Christie "The Gates Foundation and the Future of U.S. Public Education: A Call for Scholars to Counter Misinformation Campaigns" *The Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* V6n2 December 2008.

³ For some of the literature criticizing neoliberal education see Henry A. Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism* Boulder: Paradigm Publishers 2004, Michael Apple, *Educating the Right Way* New York: Routledge 2001, Kenneth J. Saltman, *Collateral Damage: Corporatizing Public Schools – a Threat to Democracy* Lanham, MD: Rowman

& Littlefield 2000, and Kenneth J. Saltman *Capitalizing on Disaster: Taking and Breaking Public Schools* Boulder: Paradigm Publishers 2007.

⁴ See the edited collection Kenneth J. Saltman and David Gabbard, *Education as Enforcement: the Militarization and Corporatization of Schools* New York: Routledge 2003.

⁵ Christopher G. Robbins, *Expelling Hope: The Assault on Youth and the Militarization of Schooling* Albany: SUNY Press 2008.

⁶ Henry A. Giroux, *Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond the Culture of Fear* New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2004, Mike Males *Scapegoat Generation: America's War on Adolescents* Monroe: ME: Common Courage Press 1996, Lawrence Grossberg, *Caught in the Crossfire* Boulder: Paradigm Press 2005.

⁷ See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁸ Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux, "Beyond Bailouts: On the Politics of Education After Neoliberalism" *Truthout.org* Wednesday December 31, 2008. Available at <<http://www.truthout.org/123108A>>

⁹ BetsAnn Smith, "Deregulation and the New Leader Agenda: Outcomes and Lessons from Michigan," *Educational Administration Quarterly* V44n1 2008, p. 51.

¹⁰ Smith, 51.

¹¹ Frederick Hess and Andrew Kelly, "An Innovative Look, A Recalcitrant Reality: The Politics of Principle Preparation Reform" *Educational Policy* V19n1, January and March 2005, p. 158.

¹² Hess and Kelly, 158.

¹³ Hess and Kelly, 170.

¹⁴ Hess and Kelly, 171.

¹⁵ Hess and Kelly, 172.

¹⁶ Lesli A. Maxwell, "Challenging the Status Quo" *Education Week* 6/21/2006, V25i41, 36-40.

¹⁷ Maxwell, 36-40.

¹⁸ Fenwick W. English, "The Unintended Consequences of a Standardized Knowledge Base in Advancing Educational Leadership Preparation" *Educational Administration Quarterly* V42n3 August 2006, p. 461.

¹⁹ The attempts at longitudinal tracking of administrator "performance" and teacher "performance" and then isolating individual behaviors or methodological approaches has been funded by the Carnegie Corporation and the U.S. Department of Education under the Bush administration without success. Meanwhile the Broad and Gates foundations are continuing to fund these kinds of positivist projects that share the same assumptions.

²⁰ I detail neoliberal educational rebuilding in New Orleans in *Capitalizing on Disaster: Taking and Breaking Public Schools* Boulder: Paradigm 2007.

²¹ AP, "Louisiana: Grants For Schools" *The New York Times*, December 14, 2007, p.33.

²² Matthew Pinzur, "Dade Selected as One of 5 Most-Improved Urban School Districts" *The Miami Herald*, 04/06/06

²³ Marianne Hurst, “California District Awarded Urban Education Prize” *Education Week* 10/1/2003.

²⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* New York: Polity 2007.

²⁵ Stanley Aronowitz, Stanley Aronowitz, *Against Schooling For An Education That Matters* Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008, p. 18.

²⁶ Aronowitz, 23.

²⁷ Henry Giroux, “Casino Capitalism” Truthout.org, Kenneth Saltman, “Gambling with the Future of Public Education: risk, discipline, and the moralizing of educational politics in corporate media” *Policy Futures in Education* V5n1 2007.

²⁸ Lynn Olson, “State Chiefs, Businesses Forge \$45 Million Data Venture” *Education Week* 7/14/04, V23i42, p. 16.

²⁹ See for example the work of Donaldo Macedo and John Willinsky on this.

³⁰ Richard Tomlinson and David Evans “CDO Boom Masks Subprime Losses, Abetted by S&P, Moody's, Fitch” *Bloomberg.com* available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=ajs7BqG4_X8I>.

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