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Probing Accountability in Educational Leadership: For Whom and for What?

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A Critical Sociocultural View of Accountability

ABSTRACT: This critical sociocultural view of accountability illuminates heretofore hidden, obscured, or neglected aspects of accountability—its meanings, intended and unintended consequences, and the processes by which it was institutionalized. This perspective exhumes the social and cultural processes—power, democracy, policy making, schooling, and language games—implicated in contemporary notions of accountability. Our unique positioning allows us to critically examine the "Texas model" of accountability from the inside, with implications for other regimes of accountability presently in place or being considered elsewhere.

This article undertakes a critical sociocultural examination of accountability in public schools and education in general, particularly as it plays out in the United States. Though such a treatment is, by necessity, eclectic, our discussion of accountability will primarily draw upon analyses of contemporary U.S. culture and be informed by comparative cultural analysis. Our perspective is somewhat different, in that we, the authors, have an insider's view of the so-called educational reforms already instituted in the state of Texas and the so-called Texas model of accountability—a model looked to when other states consider accountability and educational reform.[1] Our analysis is informed by our studies and other acquired

[1]For example, the state legislatures in Georgia and California are considering the "Texas model" as they debate accountability legislation (C. D. Glickman, personal communication, February 15, 2000; G. L. Anderson, personal communication, February 25, 2000, on debates in Georgia and California, respectively). McNeil (2000) uses the political processes affecting education in Texas to underscore her analysis of occurrences nationwide.

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knowledge. We draw especially on our firsthand experiences of working in the Texas public schools and with the school teachers and administrators. Although we will touch upon the high-stakes testing regime in place in Texas, the ultimate focus of our analysis is the broader issue of how accountability plays out in practice.

THE CONTEXT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The term *accountability* has gained cultural currency of late. So deeply has the term infiltrated public dialogue that its meanings, connotations, and ramifications remain largely unquestioned. Accountability stands on the verge of becoming an iconic metaphor, similar to other cultural metaphors such as the American flag, democracy, and motherhood. We feel the need at this critical juncture, before accountability slips irretrievably into the realm of cultural iconic metaphors, to stop and (re)examine what it is. It is our contention that if education is ground zero in the culture wars, then the widespread implementation of accountability systems represents the results of highly successful maneuvering by conservative forces—the last volley in the culture wars.

First, we must remind ourselves and our constituencies that every word is ideological (Volosinov, 1986). Accountability is one such word—highly inflected with(in) an ideological subtext.

There are numerous domains of accountability. For example, there is fiscal accountability. Those who believe in a judgment day believe there will be moral/ethical accountability in the hereafter. When people write or speak of accountability in public education the denotation, the meaning, is often ambiguous. The possible domains of accountability in education are numerous. In addition to the fiscal domain, accountability in education could encompass student learning, teaching (behaviors), student achievement, the education that our students receive, or something else altogether. Whatever it is—be it education with a capital *E* or something else—it is nebulous, ill-defined, and intangible. The complexities of any of these concepts or domains are such that there is no, nor can there be any, consensus regarding all the variables that would/should constitute any of them. Perhaps more important than the lack of consensus about what school accountability means is the fact that no meaningful attempt at achieving such a consensus has been undertaken. Most accountability measures in the United States have been imposed on students, teachers, schools, and school districts and were developed and implemented without their consent or involvement—surely a transgression

of the democratic ideal (i.e., when democracy is loosely defined to include the consent of the governed).

Every application of language involves ideological change (Volosinov, 1986). Because the term *accountability* has entered the public domain, and at an unexamined cultural level, we believe its current preeminence in the U.S. educational dialogue represents an ideological change, and that this change may represent the last volley in the culture wars. Our concern is that ideological conservatives, buttressed by a corporate elite, have succeeded in instilling their values as regards schools and education into the public discourse through manipulation—manipulation of the public's concern with standards and accountability and of policy-making processes.[2]

TESTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

It seems almost impossible to mention accountability without discussing testing. Although some would claim that the terms *accountability* and *testing* should not be used interchangeably, testing, without question, serves as the centerpiece of many, if not most, accountability systems. Currently, without testing, there is no system. Taking this logic full circle then, a "highly successful school" becomes a euphemism for a campus whose students pass the state's accountability system test. For example, a recent *Phi Delta Kappan* article (Scheurich, Skrla, & Johnson, 2000) illustrates this, when, in their search for successful Texas schools, the authors use passing rates and achievement levels on state-generated tests as their primary indicators of success. This obsession with accountability through testing was visibly demonstrated in the nationally televised series of debates during the recent U.S. presidential campaign. In response to a question on dramatically changing public education in the United States, Vice President Gore referred to testing no fewer than five times in his first brief response (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2000). Governor George W. Bush, the eventual winner of the presidential contest, countered with:

> He says he's for voluntary testing. You can't have voluntary testing. You must have mandatory testing. . . . You may claim you've got mandatory testing, but you don't, Mr. Vice President. That's a huge difference. Testing is the cornerstone of reform. You know how I know? Because it's the cornerstone of reform in the state of Texas.

[2]Public Agenda (Johnson & Duffett, 1999) calls attention to the U.S. public's overwhelming support for higher standards and accountability.

Gore then defended himself, saying:

> First of all, I do have mandatory testing. I think the governor may not have heard what I said clearly. The voluntary national testing is in addition to the mandatory testing that we require of states. All schools, all school districts, students themselves, and required teacher testing, which goes a step further than Governor Bush has been willing to go . . .

Bush closed this portion of the debate with:

> All I'm saying is if you spend money, show us results and test every year, which you don't do, Mr. Vice President. You don't test every year. (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2000, p. 17)

We contend that this exchange represents an ideological shift in the public discourse. There is no discussion of the merits of tests and their appropriate applications (American Educational Research Association, 2001). The presidential candidates here were engaged in a verbal dueling match to prove whose initiatives would result in the most testing—the underlying assumptions being that tests and testing to ensure accountability are accepted implicitly and assumed to be good.

THE TEXAS PLAN

In Texas, when addressing the issue of what schools will be held responsible for, a new generation of standards on which accountability rests is termed the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Note that what the state terms *essential* knowledge and skills include only English language arts, reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. "The TEKS in these areas are *required* instruction" (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999, p. 6). TEKS in all other instructional areas are deemed "enrichment." The TEKS carry with them the force of law and the implied threat of severe legal sanctions for disregarding them. In effect, "TEKS are non-negotiable" (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999, p. 8). The statewide achievement test is tightly aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.

When dealing with the question of what accountability means in terms of who is accountable to whom, the Texas accountability system leaves no doubt. It holds teachers, administrators, and schools accountable to the state education bureaucracy (Texas Education Agency, or TEA). The governor is the ultimate authority to whom the schools are accountable, ostensibly. The governor assumes his authority, again ostensibly (for we shall problematize this notion later) from the general (voting) public. Implicit in this system of accountability, with its links of responsibility, is the

threat that so-called low-performing schools can be taken over by the state bureaucracy and completely reconstituted. This, admittedly, is a measure of last resort. As an intermediate measure, the TEA can dispatch a team to the school to advise, give recommendations, and otherwise direct the school and its teachers and administrators in measures that the team of educational bureaucrats believes will result in improvement according to improved test scores on the state standardized test (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test, or TAAS).[3] Schrag (2000) refers to this type of accountability as the "whips and chains" approach.

Accountability has other sanctions attached, some more explicit and intentional than others. For example, students who are enrolled in a school that has been judged to be low-performing for two consecutive years are free to seek enrollment in another school in the same district. If the entire district has been deemed low-performing for two consecutive years, students can transfer to another district. The threat and, on occasion, the actuality of intra- and inter-district transfers of students subject schools to the foibles and forces of market competition. The tumultuous conditions and negative effects of market competition on schools have been experienced in other countries (Dempster, Freakley, & Parry, 2001; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000) and will be explored later in this article.

The manner in which schools' test scores are reported caused our colleague, Pat Holland (personal communication, June 10, 2000) of the University of Houston (Texas), to conclude that the scores have become the new code for race and class in the United States. For example, earlier this past year, the largest newspaper in Houston published a complete separate section containing test scores of local schools, followed by real estate ad-

[3]"The state's accountability system includes a variety of on-site accountability evaluations designed to provide feedback for improvement. The on-site visits are conducted by trained peer review team members who are guided by professional staff from the Texas Education Agency. . . . [and] include the following: accreditation reviews; alternative education campus reviews; bilingual education/English as a second language (BE/ESL) compliance reviews; charter school reviews; combination reviews; corrective action reviews; District Effectiveness and Compliance (DEC) reviews; integrated reviews for accreditation, alternative, DEC, and fiscal management; Texas Youth Commission (TYC) reviews; special investigations for data anomalies; and special investigations for alleged civil rights violations and school governance problems" (Texas Education Agency, 2000, p.1).

As to sanctions, the Texas Education Code, "§39.075 . . . Subchapter G, Accreditation Sanctions, §39.131 provides a series of sanctions, including issuing public notice of deficiency to the board of trustees; ordering a hearing conducted by the board of trustees to notify the public of unacceptable performance, expected improvements, and possible state sanctions; ordering submission of a student achievement improvement plan to the commissioner for approval; ordering a hearing before the commissioner or his designee; conducting an on-site investigation; appointing a special campus intervention team, monitor, master, or management team; annexing a district; or ordering closure of a campus" (Texas Education Agency, 2000, p. 3).

vertising on the last page of the insert. Parents wealthy enough to (re)locate within the attendance zone of a school with high scores (read predominantly white and wealthier) are, thereby, encouraged to do so.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF A DYSFUNCTIONAL SYSTEM

The Texas model of assessment and accountability is beginning to show signs that its successes are not what they have been purported to be (e.g., Scheurich et al., 2000; Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, & Koschoreck, in press). What is worse, the unintended outcomes of this system of accountability are onerous and fall disproportionately upon certain segments of the population, particularly teachers, administrators, and previously marginalized students. A recent study by Haney (2000) has demonstrated the underside of the Texas model. His analysis of 10th-grade exit TAAS data from the Texas Education Agency reveal some disturbing trends, especially for minority students. Haney found, for example, that only 50% of African-American and Hispanic students enrolled in public schools have actually progressed to high school graduation since the implementation of the TAAS testing program. During the 1990s, cumulative 9th-grade retention rates for minority students, who typically had a more difficult time passing the TAAS, were twice as high as those for white students. Since retention in 9th grade is closely associated with dropping out of school, the low rate of minority students making it through high school was predictable.

Other factors have negative impacts on TAAS results. The number of students identified as special education students, and therefore eligible for exemption from taking the TAAS exam, nearly doubled between 1994 and 1998, inflating the positive test results (Haney, 2000). Haney also discovered a large proportion of TAAS-related "missing" children. Counting students who are exempt from the TAAS test, high school students who chose to pursue a general equivalency diploma (GED) rather than suffer the TAAS, and students who simply never completed a high school diploma, only 70% of students in Texas actually graduated from high school in the 1990s—a missing student rate of 30%, or nearly 700,000 children! Some fear it may get worse. Recently, a group of scholars and legislators met in Austin to discuss whether the Texas system is fair to students of color. Panel members expressed specific concerns about a more challenging exam that will serve as a graduation requirement in 2005: "If the present testing [indicators are] correct, we are looking at failure rates of 60 and 70 percent among minority communities, the way we had with the TAAS 10 years ago" (Reston, 2001).

There are other indicators that all is not well with the Texas model. Between 1994 and 1998 there was a 20% increase in the number of tenth graders passing all three parts of the TAAS test (reading, writing, and mathematics) (Haney, 2000). But during the same period, the percentage of Texas students passing the TASP (a college readiness examination taken by all entering freshmen) declined from 65.2% to 43.3%. SAT scores for Texas high school students have not improved since 1990 and Texans' SAT math scores have actually declined relative to students nationally. Aside from test data, there is a growing dissatisfaction with the TAAS among Texas teachers who believe that schools are spending an inordinate amount of time and money preparing students for the TAAS to the exclusion of other curricular content. We know of beginning teachers who have been told by their more senior colleagues, "Don't teach reading; teach the TEKS." Texas teachers also believe that the emphasis on TAAS is hurting learning for all students, but especially those considered at-risk or gifted and talented—the two ends of the socially constructed spectrum of student ability. Finally, many Texas teachers believe that the TAAS contributes to grade retention and magnifies the dropout problem (Haney, 2000).

In a recent survey of a sample of Austin, Texas, parents, nearly half (44%) of the parents polled "felt that the schools placed too much emphasis on preparing students for the state's achievement test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills" (Reston, 2000, p. B3). The sentiments of the Austin school parents parallel recent national data (Rose & Gallup, 2000) and, together, suggest a growing public dissatisfaction with testing as the exclusive measure of student achievement. According to the results of this national poll, there has been a 10% increase since 1997 in the number of people who feel there is too much emphasis on testing in public schools. Public school parents showed an even greater dissatisfaction with testing (an increase of 15% in the same time period, from 19% in 1997 who felt there was too much emphasis on testing, to 34% in 2001). Similarly, only 13% of respondents in the same poll stated they believed a single standardized test was the best way to measure student academic achievement, while 41% felt achievement was best measured through a combination of standardized and teacher-designed tests. An additional 44% of public school parents felt portfolios of students' work and other demonstrations of academic competence were the best way to measure student academic achievement (Rose & Gallup, 2000, p. 54).

As professors of educational leadership and administration, aside from our direct observations of the deleterious effects of the state's obsession with the TAAS and accountability, we have been privy to reports from our

students, all teachers or administrators in the state's schools. We have heard of compulsive, test-driven, drill-and-kill instruction where teachers are ordered to drill the TAAS for 15 to 20 minutes per day per subject area. We have heard of teachers becoming frustrated with the exam and outright refusing to administer it. (In one case, a teacher held her ground, but was forced to resign her position.) We have heard of schools rewarding those who pass the TAAS with such events as a field trip to the state's largest water theme park. We know of one gifted and talented facilitator whose contract promised one release period per day to coordinate the gifted and talented program in her school only to be told, when she reported to work, that instead she was to spend that time tutoring kindergartners in TAAS-related skills. In some middle schools in Texas, students who are deemed at risk of failing the TAAS, rather than being able to choose an elective course as their peers do, are being forced into remedial TAAS courses instead.

Angela Valenzuela (2000), of the University of Texas at Austin, reports:

> The study of science, social studies, art and other subjects . . . are all undermined by the TAAS. For example, many science teachers in schools with poor and minority children are required by their principals to suspend the teaching of science for weeks, and in some cases for months, in order to devote science class time to drill and practice on the math sections of the TAAS. (p. 44)

In an environment where the test data are disaggregated and failing scores received by any one of several student subgroups (white, African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged) can keep a whole school from qualifying for a favorable school rating, race and class can resurface in quasi-racist or quasi-classist dialogue. In a recent master's oral examination, we corrected one of our students who repeatedly said that "the African Americans kept us from getting an acceptable rating." We pointed out that a more accurate phrasing would be that the *test scores* of the African Americans kept the school from achieving such a rating, a big difference in perspective. In Texas, average scores for minority students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are higher than they are nationally. And though there has recently emerged a body of research suggesting that accountability systems can or should be used to leverage social justice or equity (Scheurich et al., 2000; Skrla et al., in press), this interpretation of test results is premature, at best, and factually erroneous at worst (Klein, in press; Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey, & Stecher, 2000). This trend toward higher minority scores predates the implementation of the state's accountability system: "Thus, the NAEP data do not support the argument

that the accountability system in Texas has helped to close the gap in reading and math skills between whites and students of color" (Klein, in press). In fact, there are emerging data that suggest accountability efforts premised on standardized tests contribute to renewed stratification of student populations. Muller and Schiller (2000) report that "state policies that link test performance to consequences for schools are related to greater stratification on the basis of SES [socioeconomic status] for [students' educational attainment]" (p. 210).

Competition among students and schools, as occasioned by the publication of standardized test scores, will always produce winners and losers (Varenne & McDermott, 1999). This is unfortunate for the losers. Varenne and McDermott criticize such testing and ranking because individuals, students, teachers, or schools are stigmatized as a result of cultural processes rather than because of individual effort or lack thereof. Such stigmatization results in the further victimization of the individual or school. Otherwise worthy students and schools are stigmatized by overly simplistic assessments of their strengths and weaknesses. One school in Austin, Texas, for example, otherwise known as an outstanding school with a rich history of excellence, has been deemed low-performing for the third year in a row (Kurtz, 2000). Dropout rates are factored into the state's accountability system, and the dropout rates for the subgroups previously mentioned are part of the formula. This particular school had a dropout rate for Hispanic students of 6.1% last year; the threshold is 6%. At least one educator quoted for the article suggested that the state use more indicators and list every school's performance in several areas: "The problem is using a super broad brush to paint the whole school as a label" (Kurtz, p. A5). This idea has been rejected "for fear that it would confuse the public," someone from the state education agency (TEA) was quoted as saying. Yet this inflexible stance toward using varied means of assessing students' knowledge flies in the face of public opinion poll data (Rose & Gallup, 2000). Rose and Gallup's "The 32nd Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll" reports that, when given the choice between test scores or classroom work and homework as the best way to measure student academic achievement, the overwhelming majority (68%) preferred classroom work and homework. Sixty-five percent felt standardized tests "should be used primarily to determine the kind of instruction needed" (i.e., as diagnostic assessments) (Rose & Gallup, 2000, p. 53).

As previously mentioned, this process of stigmatization and victimization is exacerbated by policies that allow for student transfer from failing schools to other, more "successful" schools. Whether or not these outcomes were intended by those responsible (though not accountable) for

current educational policies, the result leaves schools vulnerable to market forces, a point made by Dempster and colleagues (2001). In order to attract students, schools in these circumstances often resort to crass commercialism, including image (re)making and marketing, two processes that are the polar opposite of the core mission of teachers and schools. What is more, Dempster and colleagues have found that, under "new public management," competition among schools benefits the top-tier schools (both public and private) and penalizes the lower-tier schools. Top-tier schools seldom have to fixate on how their students will do on standardized achievement tests and, therefore, are free to pursue fuller, richer curricula. Competition among schools assures the top-tier schools of a steady supply of students eager to enroll. Such competition benefits private schools, which, by the way, are not required to administer state achievement tests. These schools can, in some cases, selectively admit those who will out-perform students in the lower-tier schools, thereby reinforcing the educational disparities between the top and bottom tiers of schools.[4]

It is possible for historically underresourced schools to suffer even greater loses in funding if they do not exhibit improvement through testing. Valenzuela (2000) has noted that "much of the public rhetoric is that 'low-performing schools' do not deserve additional public investment. It is as if poverty is tied in some puritanical sense to lack of virtue, with low scores as their scarlet letter of guilt" (p. 44). This type of scapegoating and the inflammatory rhetoric it condones feed each other, resulting in such bombastic proclamations as that made recently by Texas State Comptroller Carole Keeton Rylander: "No child should be held hostage in a failing public school. You yank that principal out of there, you yank those teachers out of there, and if they can be salvaged and useful elsewhere, fine. If not, fine" (Harmon, 2000, p. A7).[5]

The excessive attention paid to preparing students for standardized tests steals precious time from other, equally important, curricular areas (Wraga, 1999). When certain subgroups of the general student population are targeted for increased test score attainment, these groups are doubly affected. For example, if the scores of African Americans (or Hispanics, or the economically disadvantaged) are thought to be skewing whole

[4]That private schools benefit from the fallout of accountability regimes in several different ways was evident from a billboard one of the authors observed during a recent trip to Toronto, Ontario, Canada, that read: "What happens when the bully in the school is the government?" The billboard was part of a publicity campaign by a Catholic school organization.

[5]That the state comptroller of Texas presumes to meddle in educational affairs underscores many of the points we make.

school test results, then African Americans might be given even more "instruction" in the "essential areas," thus depriving them of the experience of a fuller, richer, more well-rounded curriculum. These negative effects of standardized achievement testing and accountability are summed up by Valenzuela (2000, p. 31):

> In these schools, the pressure to raise test scores "by any means necessary" has frequently meant that regular education has been supplanted by activities whose sole purpose is to raise test scores on this particular test. . . . In contrast, middle-class children in white, middle-class schools are reading literature, learning a variety of forms of writing, and studying mathematics aimed at problem-solving and conceptual understanding.

The statewide testing system thus widens the already existing discrepancy between the quality of public education provided for poor and minority children and that of children in higher-scoring (that is, wealthier and predominantly white) schools.

In the current educational climate, accentuated by the pressure of standardized tests and accountability, teachers are further stripped of all vestiges of professional autonomy. These pressures can force more teachers to leave the profession, and those teachers who leave are often among the brightest and most creative, exactly those most likely to chafe under the yoke of tighter state control of curriculum and instruction (Kohn, 2000). Principals are affected as well. Steinberg's (2000) article on the scarcity of building principals throughout the nation noted:

> Those [principals] who have departed in recent months . . . often cite the mounting stress of a job that once mostly involved establishing an orderly and nurturing environment for learning, and displaying a firm disciplinary hand. But during the movement to improve schools that has swept through classrooms in the past decade, the principal has become as visibly accountable as a football coach, and must suffer the wrath of parents and state monitors.

Though empirical studies have yet to be done, we suspect that increases in the number of parents choosing to withdraw their children from public schools in favor of private schools or home schooling may result, in part, from the pervading emphasis on test taking to the neglect of a more balanced curriculum. We are of the opinion that the looming teacher shortage, the declining pool of principal and superintendent candidates, and the migration of students to private schools and home schooling should alert policymakers that something is seriously wrong with public education's regimes of accountability. In our more cynical moments we suspect that the conditions leading to the apparent abandonment of public schools

serves the interests of a conservative elite rather than the general welfare of the nation as a whole.

OTHER EFFECTS OF THE TEXAS MODEL

Other blemishes have appeared in the Texas accountability system and even noneducators have begun to see the pitfalls inherent in the state's focus—"like a cross-eyed ferret" (Young, 2000a)—on one test as the prime accountability measure. Young, an opinion page editor for the Waco (Texas) *Tribune-Herald*, comments, "You cannot have a system based on a test of basic skills everyone needs to know and assume that it benefits everyone. Get real." The rising tide of public opinion reflects what academics (professors and teachers) have been saying for some time. For example, Coleman (2000) states that "test scores . . . should be considered in conjunction with other educationally relevant factors . . . when making life-defining decisions affecting students" (p. 45).

Other indicators that high-stakes accountability systems are dysfunctional have begun to appear throughout the nation. In Texas, New York, and elsewhere, teachers, administrators, and districts are facing criminal prosecution for "cooking the books" on test data. The current accountability climate is so highly charged that a group of Houston teachers, concerned about even the appearance of impropriety, asked their principal to hire outside proctors to monitor *them* to ensure that their test administration protocol and professional integrity could not be questioned (*60 Minutes*, September 10, 2000). Rather than isolated occurrences, incidents such as these have come to the attention of leading educational researchers to such an extent that they have coined an expression for the phenomenon: "school scandals waiting to happen" (Ryan, 2000). Rather than adopting a simple-minded, punitive stance toward these teachers, administrators, and districts, we should ask what drives these educators to such extreme acts.

Perhaps more light can be shed on the issues discussed above by drawing an analogy from the medical profession. A recent article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Wynia, Cummins, VanGeest, & Wilson, 2000) notes how a substantial percentage of the physicians studied report "gaming" the current reimbursement system in order to obtain additional benefits for their patients. The study reports three ways physicians worked the system, thus securing more benefits: (1) "exaggerating the severity of the patients' conditions to help them avoid early hospital discharge" (28%); (2) "changing patients' official (billing) diagnoses" (24%);

and (3) "recording signs or symptoms that patients did not actually have to help them secure coverage needed for care" (10%). Thirty-nine percent of those surveyed reported that they sometimes, often, or very often used at least one of the three tactics for manipulating reimbursement rules. These tactics are illegal, often viewed as immoral, and are seen by some as unethical (Bloche, 2000). Still, physicians engaged in such illegal practices.

The average reader might justify their actions with the rationalization that these physicians, members of a respected, high-status profession, are doing what they feel they need to do to benefit their patients, for whom they have a fiduciary responsibility and obligation. Further, it might be suggested that these physicians are professionals acting within an unjust system (that of managed care and HMOs) where, too often, what should be professional decisions are rendered not on the basis of professional judgment but solely on the basis of corporate profit. In light of these considerations, then, we might well justify the physicians' actions.

Is the situation of teachers and administrators that much different than that cited in the medical profession? Are those educators who are "cheating" to help children raise test scores any less altruistic or less deserving of our commendation? The parallels between the case previously discussed and the situation of educators today are rendered even clearer by considering the editorial that accompanied the *Journal of the American Medical Association* article (Bloche, 2000). Bloche suggests that "people who are squeezed between pressures they cannot reconcile sometimes cope with their dilemma through deceit" (p. 5). Though he says these practices are "understandable," he condemns them. He does hazard, using medical terminology, an epidemiological analysis, suggesting serious flaws in the total system.

Such is the case, we suggest, with the system of accountability operant in education today, where markers of the "illness" of the system are rampant. There are those markers we have already identified and still more we have yet to uncover. Bloche (2000) goes on to discuss how it is that "tensions among multiple sources of social control is a fact of professional life in a pluralistic society. But this tension can be reduced to a level that does not undermine professional integrity and public confidence" (p. 5). Though Bloche prescribes for the medical profession, unfortunately for us, this is where the analogy ends and we are left wondering how to find our way out of the ethical dilemma we are in. What are our responsibilities as teachers and administrators? What are our responsibilities to our students in an age of corporate-driven accountability where the dangers that threaten our students and ourselves are immediate and lifelong?

Teachers are left in the curious position of resisting change of this type when they act in the best interests of their students and themselves. Goodson (2001) describes historical cycles of change and notes at least two types of change: internally and externally driven. His analysis of the "chains of change" shows how, in the 1960s and '70s, change efforts sprung primarily from educators' internal motivations, drives, and beliefs. Today, however, most change efforts are externally derived, mandated, and enforced. When individuals or groups of teachers resist such change, often on principled grounds, they are seen as conservative and inflexible. They are perceived as standing in the way of progress. In the eyes of those who hold power, these educators are seen to be part of the problem. When accountability systems are the change or the reform, the two become nearly synonymous. Through a type of language game, those who are opposed to accountability systems are seen as opposed to change. Their motives are suspect, and, in many cases, they are portrayed as those laggards most in need of change (i.e., they are seen as bad teachers in need of the type of fix the accountability system promises).

There is a parallel here with the rationalizations that are advanced for the stripping of civil liberties, such as the guarantees against unreasonable search and seizure or guarantees that protect someone's privacy from wholesale wiretapping. These rationalizations generally proceed like this: Only the guilty have something to hide. The law-abiding have nothing to hide. So, those who are opposed to, for example, expanded police searches must have something to hide; that is, they must be guilty of something. Similarly, those who oppose accountability must be opposed because they have something to hide and are therefore guilty of something. This whole language game, and all that goes with it, is an example of what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (2000) identifies as the "if you don't believe in my God you must believe in my Devil" (p. 50) assumption.

Goodson writes that any change initiative must take into consideration both internal and external factors if the change is to become institutionalized. Unfortunately, shortcuts to institutionalization are, in the short term, quicker, more "efficient." These shortcuts to change usually are achieved through force and coercion. It takes more energy and time to engage in a democratic, dialogical process of negotiation than it does to force compliance. And the quick route to change implementation is that which has been chosen by those who push accountability. However, convincing someone of the desirability of change has at least one advantage that coercion does not: Coercion fosters resistance, internal and/or external resistance, covert resistance, forces that can sabotage a change. Coercion, at best, forces external compliance.

THE BUSINESS OF SCHOOLS OR THE SCHOOLS OF BUSINESS?

The current fetish with accountability stemmed partially from concerns with the United States' ability to compete economically with other countries in a global economy (e.g., National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). It is ironic that the economic recovery experienced in this country of late has occurred prior to the effects of educational reform being realized (McNeil, 2000).

The relationship between the preparation of school children and the U.S. economy is tenuous, at best, and clearly not demonstrable. In the end, worker productivity may have more to do with capital investment in equipment, on-the-job worker skill and knowledge development, managerial skill and worker "ownership" in the production process, and other factors than it has to do with schools. Posing the question a different way: Is this the type of worker the corporate elite wants—a worker who does well on paper and pencil tests over minimal-level material and who is habituated to perform docilely for external rewards and punishments?

General acceptance of the belief that better student preparation (education) would lead to a more productive workforce and/or more robust economy legitimized business leaders' active control of the educational agenda. McNeil (2000) notes how it was the Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot who headed the Select Committee on Public Education in Texas, the panel credited with initiating the current round of education reforms in Texas. Business exerts a disproportional amount of influence on public education in the United States today, just as it has for much of this century (Callahan, 1962). The organizational ideal in the United States has always been that of business and the dominant ideology has been that of the business leader (Callahan, 1962). As McNeil (2000, p. 155) states:

> [The reform policies'] more far-reaching impact has not been the success or failure of any of the specific provisions of the reform but the precedent set for centralized controls based on accountability to a corporate elite, not to a citizen public nor to educators.

While the general public impression is of the state legislature and state government directing public education on behalf of the people (and children) of the state, the reality is entirely different. The state government assumes authority over public education in its role as a representative of the people. But in a democracy, the state's bureaucratic authority is delegitimate to the extent that the government and its bureaucracies are *not* representative of the people and the people's will. In the rhetoric of campaign-finance reform during the recent presidential campaign, democracy in the United States, it was claimed, had been hijacked by money and special

interests.[6] McNeil (2000) has demonstrated how corporate elites have exerted their influence on educational reform in Texas, but the influence of big money is even deeper and more pervasive than she was able to demonstrate.

Take one simple example: the recent Texas state Republican Party convention held in Houston in June 2000. The headline in the Austin *American-Statesman* read "Businesses dole out high dollars for the state's GOP gathering" (Herman, 2000, p. B1). The article noted:

> Big business' heavy influence on the party is evident. . . . State GOP spokesman Robert Black said corporations have paid about two-thirds of the $600,000 cost of the convention. . . . Black said every dollar the corporations gave . . . frees up a dollar for the party to use to support its candidates. . . . The GOP sees nothing wrong with taking donations, $5,000 to $50,000, from companies that face state regulation. "We're not state government. We are a political party," [Black] said. (pp. B1, B5)

Another pertinent example is that of the Texas Business and Education Coalition (TBEC). On its Web site the TBEC organization lauds how "with TBEC support, the Texas legislature created the nation's strongest public school accountability system based on an expanded statewide student assessment program" (Texas Business and Education Coalition, 2000b, p. 2). TBEC, its own Web site proclaims, came together when "many businesses were becoming increasingly concerned by the disparity between their workforce needs and the supply of qualified people graduating from public education in this country" (Texas Business and Education Coalition, 2000a, p. 1). TBEC grew from an initiative begun by several members of the Texas Chamber of Commerce and was eventually joined by such multinational corporations as Exxon, IBM, Southwestern Bell, and Tenneco. TBEC's activities have been concentrated on accountability, standards, curriculum, and program delivery. Many of the same corporations and individuals who founded TBEC also formed Texans for Education, a business lobby group, to promote their education agenda at the state capitol.

TBEC has aggressively influenced the development of the Texas school accountability system and has defended the system against repeated attacks. Coalition members advise the commissioner of education (a gubernatorial appointee) and other officials regarding education policy. The

[6]Democracy, as we're using the term, is more in line with Goodlad's (2000) use and those described by Murphy (2000, p. 78) as democratic localism and direct democracy, whose aims are to begin to right the failings of "the falling fortunes of representative democracy." Democracy for us implies equality, reciprocity, and transparency—attributes we feel are currently lacking in the U.S. educational policy-making process.

Texas Commissioner of Education even sits on the TBEC board of directors. Shadow, quasi-governmental groups are operant at the national level as well: "Because of the success business leaders had in pressuring nearly all states to judge school performance by measuring student achievement on state tests, they are expected to be a major influence on this year's education debates in the states and in Washington" (Mollison, 2001).

This is not democracy as we believe it should be practiced, nor are the influence-peddling tactics of business elites indicative of open democratic processes. Democracy for us involves egalitarianism, reciprocity, and transparency. Transparency in the democratic process refers to decision making that is "above board," or open to public scrutiny. The point is that none of these essential democratic components were present in the decision-making processes that led to the adoption and implementation of the current accountability system in place in Texas.

Transparency in educational policy decision-making processes contributes to accountability of a different sort than that which currently mesmerizes educational policymakers and bureaucrats. Transparency here contributes to responsibility, another form of accountability. Who made these decisions? Who is responsible? We have described how, in Texas, the imposition of educational accountability was spearheaded by corporate elites, with the complicity of the state legislature and state governors of both political parties (McNeil, 2000). The laws and policies supporting the current accountability system are then enforced by the bureaucratic arm of the department of education, the TEA, which is under the direction of the commissioner of education, who, in turn, is appointed by and responsible to the governor of the state. But who among these shadowy entities is responsible for the accountability regime and its effects on teachers and on the education of students? Who is accountable? Without transparency there is no way to know. If this social experiment of public school accountability bankrupts education as we know it and leaves behind nothing but a hollow shell or permanently scars generations of school children, who will take the blame?

Corporations are legal entities designed primarily to shield their members from personal responsibility.[7] When corporations and their members act to influence educational policy, they do so out of the public view and unencumbered by public participation. To whom are these corporate elites responsible other than to their boards? The CEOs' accountability to their boards lies solely within the profit domain. They are not held accountable by

[7]That is, in the United States, at least. The systems of laws in other countries do not absolve the individual leader, the CEO, from responsibility for corporate actions. Under these Napoleonic-type laws, the CEO can be imprisoned, fined, or worse if the corporation is found to be negligent.

the board for any social activism they undertake outside of that domain; yet, they wield considerable influence in domains outside those for which they are accountable, such as in the educational sphere. And they wield their influence not just locally or regionally, but nationally and globally as well. As Cogan, Grossman, and Liu (2000) remind us, "globalization obscures accountability in that it is difficult to trace and specify responsibility" (p. 49).

Some analysts assert that "increased regulation and control by governments over the lives of people" is one of the unprecedented issues facing us today (Cogan et al., 2000, p. 48). Writing of school governance, Murphy (2000) claims that the professional-statist domination of school governance and its reliance on bureaucratic mechanisms of control are two of our most serious contemporary governance problems. Murphy sketches a taxonomy of school governance, consisting of five types: state, citizen, profession, community, and market. In a scathing criticism of current control practices and structures, he demonstrates how states exercise control through their bureaucracies:

> States are attempting to micro-manage schools . . . central office staff are too numerous and too far removed from local schools to understand the needs of teachers, children, and families . . . bureaucracies may be working well for those that run them but . . . are not serving children well. (p. 68)

Murphy fails to account for how it is that, for example, market forces can operate in conjunction with bureaucratic state control to exert even more control over teaching and teachers than either force could exert separately, as we have attempted to show here. In the end, Murphy promotes a type of democratic localism, similar to that which we advocate.

Such a desire for democratic localism seems to be reflected in the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll mentioned earlier. When surveyed, respondents overwhelmingly reported that they felt teachers, parents, and students had too little control over educational decisions (percent of respondents who felt students had too little say, 56%; that parents had too little say, 66%; and that teachers had too little say, 57%). The authors of the report note:

> Clearly, the public would prefer to see more decision-making authority vested in the people who are directly affected by the local schools. This is an important finding in that it appears to run counter to many current school improvement efforts (e.g., accountability), most of which seem to be moving authority to the state level. (Rose & Gallup, 2000, p. 55)[8]

[8]The rhetoric of local control, like that of accountability, deserves more careful scrutiny than we can afford here, especially as it interacts with other rhetoric or discourse to foster conservative control over schools.

It is easy to see that the people of Texas, for example, have less influence on educational policies and agendas than do special interest groups, most notably business. But this should come as no surprise, for, as Lapham (2000, p. 8) notes, "The United States is the only country in the civilized world that grants the commercial interests unfettered access to the minds of its children."[9] What chafes us as educators, even more than the fact that business and business elites seem to "hold the reins" when it comes to making decisions about education, is that they do so presumptuously, assuming that it is their right to do so. And this is certainly no reciprocal relationship—educators are never given the opportunity to influence business(es) the way business influences education. Influence, like accountability, is one way only. Or, as Young (2000b), put it, "The only reason lawmakers might discuss our understaffed public schools might be to further bat around favored nouns like 'standards' and 'accountability,' knowing that in Texas governance, accountability never goes both ways."

CONCLUSION

Though perhaps we have been overly pessimistic, a small ray of hope in the current educational climate can be had from a long-term perspective. It is this: There are indications that there is a change coming. The data from at least one national opinion poll portend as much (Rose & Gallup, 2000). Around the globe, governments (including state governments) are struggling with a legitimacy crisis. In the United States, at least one survey finds that the public wants more educational control vested in students, teachers, and parents, not in state governments and their bureaucracies (Rose & Gallup, 2000). Another indication that a change is in the works comes from data collected and analyzed for the World Values Surveys (Inglehart, 2000). These data were collected in 1981, 1990, 1995, and 1999–2000, and demonstrate a trend in developed countries away from what Inglehart terms materialist values to those he identifies as postmodern values, where "the needs for belonging, self-expression, and a participant role in society become prominent" (p. 221). Inglehart hypothesizes a substantial lag time between the sociopolitical (especially economic) conditions favoring such cultural value changes and the realization of them as widespread throughout a population. In fact, the recent U.S. presidential campaign evidenced such a shift: "'It used to be the haves versus the have-

[9]Also see McWilliam (2000) on the corporatization of public education, especially teachers' professional development.

nots'. . . . No more. Now, Inglehart finds a cultural shift between 'the cultural conservatives and the cultural innovators'" (Bishop, 2000, p. A10). "The traditional values—the American flag, motherhood and apple pie—used to be consensual and self-evident things. They aren't anymore," Inglehart is quoted as saying (Bishop, p. A10).

Perhaps accountability is one of these traditional, conservative values destined to change. Perhaps the imposition of state-controlled accountability systems is indicative of a paroxysm, the death throes of a heavy-handed bureaucracy, or, as we have framed it, the last volley in the culture wars. It is too soon to tell. But a swelling up of public discontent with the current accountability system, with its state-imposed sanctions and labels that run counter to educators' and the public's beliefs about a worthwhile education, might just turn the tide. We shall see. What neither we nor anyone else can predict are the long-term consequences of these accountability systems on generations of students, their teachers, and education as a whole. Let us hope that they do not become simply collateral damage.

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