

The Middle Class Fights Back

*How Progressive Movements
Can Restore Democracy in
America*

BRIAN D'AGOSTINO

New Trends and Ideas in American Politics

Raymond A. Smith and Jon Rynn, Series Editors

 **PRAEGER** (2012)

AN IMPRINT OF ABC-CLIO, LLC

Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado • Oxford, England

PRAISE FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS FIGHTS BACK

This powerful book is a crucial voice in the historic fightback movement against injustice in America. Don't miss it. –Cornel West, Professor, Union Theological Seminary

* * * * *

It is conventional wisdom that downsizing most of America's military capabilities would destabilize international security and a democratic world order. D'Agostino's methodical analysis shatters that picture, exposing how it upholds the power of state and corporate elites at the expense of the populace, at home and abroad. He shows how demilitarization can be achieved without jeopardizing real security, freeing up resources needed for a green New Deal that can provide productive livelihoods for ordinary people and a viable ecology for future generations. This is what is meant by 'human security,' which D'Agostino argues is the proper aim of government. His book is a tour de force! –Saul H. Mendlovitz, Dag Hammarskjöld Professor, Rutgers Law School-Newark

* * * * *

D'Agostino exposes the truth behind the corporate-driven education reform movement and offers the kind of research- and experience-based conversation about real reforms that would truly improve our public education system and that our policy-makers should be having. He reminds us that, rather than rely on these elites, parents, young people and educators must fight to transform our public education system and, more broadly, for the fiscal priorities our country needs and our children deserve. –Julie Cavanagh, The Grassroots Education Movement, Producer of The Inconvenient Truth Behind Waiting for Superman

* * * * *

The Middle Class Fights Back cogently argues that it was unions and government that created the middle class as we once knew it, and that the shrinking of unions, beginning in the 1970s, has had a devastating effect on the prosperity of ordinary people. Arguing that militarism and capital flight are undermining the country's capacity to produce wealth, D'Agostino's provocative book makes the case for massive public investment in green technology and for the creation of a new economy of worker-owned and -controlled enterprises. –Moshe Adler, Author of Economics for the Rest of Us: Debunking the Science that Makes Life Dismal (The New Press, 2010)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian D'Agostino, PhD, teaches political economy and history at the Harry Van Arsdale, Jr. Center for Labor Studies, Empire State College, State University of New York. He previously taught political science at Adelphi University and City University of New York, and worked 11 years as a New York City public school teacher. D'Agostino holds a doctorate from Columbia University and is the author of numerous publications on public affairs and political psychology, including the peer-reviewed article "Self-Images of Hawks and Doves."

Contents

Series Foreword	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	xiii
PART I: ~ HOW THE RICH RULE	1
1 ~ The National Security Scam	3
2 ~ The Attack on Wages and Benefits	29
3 ~ School Reform and Other Diversions	55
4 ~ The Attack on Government	83
PART II: ~ THE NEW PROGRESSIVE AGENDA	95
5 ~ Government for the People	97
6 ~ Markets without Capitalism	129
7 ~ Unleashing Minds and Brains	143
8 ~ Renewing Democracy	159
Appendix: Psychology of the Radical Right	169
Bibliography	177
Index	00

CHAPTER 7

Unleashing Minds and Brains

INTRODUCTION

In its Jeffersonian origins, the primary goal of public education in the United States was to equip citizens to participate in democratic governance. As voting rights were extended to poor whites, African Americans, and women, education played a central role in their empowerment. While continuing to pay lip service to this civic function of education, most Americans today view school primarily as the source of skills and credentials needed for individual, private success (Turner 2011). This development reflects the eclipse of democracy itself in the age of global capitalism.

In this mercenary and competitive environment, which America's ruling elites have played no small part in creating, standardized tests of individual performance on verbal and mathematical skills have become the dominant measures of educational success. School districts are increasingly firing teachers and awarding merit pay on the basis of such test scores, notwithstanding that some of the most capable and dedicated personnel in public education work in inner-city schools where low test scores reflect a surrounding culture of poverty.¹ Meanwhile, with education becoming a competition among individuals for test scores, schools

1. In New York City, where I live, the Department of Education in theory takes account of the socio-economic status and prior academic skill level of students in its evaluation of teachers. In practice, the schools it is closing because of low test scores—in most cases over the objections of the schools' stakeholders—are disproportionately located in poor, minority communities (Cramer 2011; Grassroots Education Movement 2011).

are increasingly unable to satisfy basic human needs for community and meaning, an indispensable requirement for overcoming gangs, drugs, and violence.

While the goals of education have narrowed in the age of global capitalism, the demands placed on teachers and schools have paradoxically never been more far reaching. Educators are required to deliver higher test scores while *simultaneously* picking up the pieces of a competitive social system that erodes family and local community. Such contradictory expectations, combined with insufficient resources, build failure into public education, creating a culture of blaming that prevents politicians, administrators, teachers, parents, and students from working productively and cooperatively to solve real problems (Comer et al. 1999; James et al. 2010).

As will be discussed in this chapter, the use of test scores to reward and punish educators, far from promoting the academic excellence school reformers claim to want, has very deleterious effects on instruction. Further, and most ironically, it corrupts the very data the reformers imagine to be so reliable. When teacher job loss and merit pay are determined by measurable academic outcomes, an epidemic of teaching to the test instead of the learning needs of children is inevitable. Test scores then go up, but that only means students are getting more testlike instruction, not that they are actually learning more (Koretz 2008; Ravitch 2011). When the federal government stigmatizes and punishes schools or states that do not produce better and better data, state education departments across the country dumb down tests in order to raise their scores, further corrupting the data (Koss 2009; Ravitch 2011).

Indeed, the entire school reform and “accountability” movement is pervaded by the simplistic and misguided notion that academic performance can be improved by collecting “hard data” on student outcomes and then using it to get rid of “bad teachers” and “failing schools” and to award merit pay and grants for “excellence.” In reality, the neoliberal reformers who demand high-stakes data are imposing on public schools a corporate culture that has already failed miserably in the private sector (Compton and Weiner 2008; D’Agostino 2012c). That failure runs much deeper than the accounting scandals that brought down companies like Enron and World-Com. More fundamentally, it reflects capitalism’s preoccupation with maximizing short-term profit, measured in the hard data of monetary units. Profits go up, but the data may have little to do with the production of wealth, reflecting instead a pervasive externalizing of costs

and neglect of long-term investment (Melman 1983; D'Agostino 2012c).² Similarly, the gross domestic product goes up even while the quality of life goes down (Cobb, Halstead, and Rowe 1995).³

Nor can the inherent limitations of incentive schemes be rectified by creating better incentive schemes, a logical truth systematically ignored by school reformers. One notable example of this fallacy in action is value-added assessment, a method of statistical modeling that aims to disentangle the effects of class size, prior student performance, teacher effectiveness, and other variables on student test scores (D'Agostino 2012c).⁴ Such systems—which have recently been adopted by Chicago, New York City, and Louisiana (Dillon 2010)—are intended to isolate and measure teacher effectiveness for purposes of rewarding and punishing teachers (Hanushek and Hoxby 2005b). But if incentives to teach to the test were corrupting education when teacher effectiveness was being poorly measured, improving the measurement will only corrupt it more. I am reminded of Inspector Clouseau's line in the *Pink Panther*, "It is because of my methods that I have so often failed where others have succeeded."

A similar school reform fiasco was devised by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, a professional basketball player who "reformed" the Chicago school system before bringing his methods to Washington. Duncan's replacement for No Child Left Behind, a now discredited and defunct bipartisan school reform scheme based on state test scores, was a new system of rewards and punishments to be based on better

2. "Externalizing" means imposition of costs on parties other than the buyers and sellers of a product, such as workers injured in an unsafe workplace or future generations saddled with the ecological consequences of profitable but unsustainable technologies. The adverse consequences of preoccupation with corporate bottom lines and student test scores is explained by Campbell's Law, which holds that the use of quantitative indicators for high-stakes decision making corrupts both the data and the social process that the indicators are meant to monitor (Campbell 1976, cited in Koss 2009). Another example is the failure of the New York City Police Department to police itself, which occurs because the office in charge of investigating misconduct is under pressure to ignore it in order to produce good data for Mayor Bloomberg (Rashbaum, Goldstein, and Baker 2011). This flows inexorably from the management-by-numbers paradigm that Bloomberg brought to city hall from his successful career providing data to Wall Street traders (Purnick 2009).

3. Indeed, the country's supposedly good economic performance under Ronald Reagan reflected just such data inflation, driven by deregulation that permitted corporations to externalize more of their costs, increased military spending that produced no real wealth, and a stimulus from unsustainable tax cuts and budget deficits that would have to be paid for by future tax increases.

4. Proponents of value-added models include Eric Hanushek (Hanushek and Hoxby 2005a), an economist who also advocates the rewarding and punishing of teachers (Hanushek and Hoxby 2005b) and questions the importance of class size in student learning (Rothstein and Mishel 2002). The latter issue is discussed later in this chapter.

assessments (Dillon 2011). To be sure, America needs better assessments, such as greater use of essay questions and reduced reliance on multiple-choice tests. But if states are required to show improvements on new and better high-stakes assessments in order to win federal grant money or waivers from impossible federal mandates, which is precisely Duncan's policy, they will certainly dumb down their new assessment rubrics, just as they previously dumbed down their multiple-choice tests. And if they are forced to adopt rigorous rubrics, those who evaluate student work will be pressured to apply the rubrics in a less-than-rigorous manner.

Similarly, if student scores on essays are going to have high-stakes consequences for schools and teachers, the latter will have incentives to teach to the rubric. Indeed, high school teachers in New York City have reported to me that their principals are pushing them to do just that for the English Language Arts Regents Exam, a state test. As a result, students are being trained to mine a work of literature for suitable material to be used on this test. In these schools, literature reading and essay writing are being taught as purely mechanical skills, even to the extent of making students memorize algorithms that are useful in satisfying various essay scoring criteria.

This has little in common with genuine education, which typically requires reflecting on a literary work on the author's terms and writing essays that express the student's own thoughts, activities that may or may not produce high scores on someone else's rubric. The latter may be even less relevant in the case of a highly creative and original essay.⁵ Far from promoting such "out-of-the-box" thinking, high-stakes tests teach students to think *in* the box of the test maker's scoring criteria. By inculcating this pernicious habit of mind, high-stakes tests are creating a nation of "in-the-box" people who are incapable of independent and creative thought and thus are interchangeable with machines (Sacks 2001). Good teachers know all this. But Arne Duncan, Michael Bloomberg, and other neoliberal reformers—whatever their intentions—are driving such teachers out of the profession and tying the hands of those who remain (Ravitch 2010).

5. Indeed, it is the rubric that must be measured against such work, not the work against the rubric. This kind of critical perspective on rubrics does in fact prevail in schools and countries that use student assessment solely as a source of information for educators. In such settings, the discrepancy between an outstanding student essay and the mediocre evaluation it receives on a rubric opens an important conversation among teachers about what, exactly, they are trying to accomplish in the classroom. This leads to improvements in both the rubric and classroom instruction, just the opposite of the corruption of both measurement and instruction that occurs when rubrics are used as part of an incentive scheme.

Better assessments are necessary but not sufficient for unleashing the minds of America's youth. A fundamentally new paradigm is needed, one that does not empower businessmen, lawyers, politicians, and basketball players to determine what teachers do in classrooms, which is exactly what management-by-numbers systems do (see page 70, footnote 13). Genuine educational renewal demands that every teacher be treated as a professional whose sole job is to educate the student in front of her based on her best judgment about the student's learning needs, not to produce data to please power holders.

The only accountability that should matter is the kind that arises among stakeholders. For example, schools in which teachers observe one another's lessons in an entirely constructive spirit create a culture in which every teacher takes pride in their work—no teacher wants to be judged ineffective by colleagues—while putting the focus on improving instruction, not blaming anyone. Similarly, schools that elicit students' feedback on their educational experiences and in which parents are actively involved bring out the best in every teacher. Such stakeholder-driven accountability is part of a new school governance paradigm, which, along with adequate funding, is an essential requirement for unleashing the minds and brains of all stakeholders in America's schools.

COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL GOVERNANCE: PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH

All parents know that the deepest and most enduring lessons children learn stem not from what they are told but from what they observe. A parent who smokes cigarettes and then lectures a son or daughter about the evils of smoking will send two messages. The first—about the parent's own lack of integrity—will be more powerful than the intended message, about the evils of smoking. Children are just as observant of adults in schools as they are at home.

If a school wants its students to be excited about learning, it must create an environment in which its teachers can be excited about learning, regarding both their subject matter and their pedagogy. Most of those who go into the teaching profession do so because they were excited about learning when *they* were in school and want to re-create that experience for the next generation. Instead of encountering a work environment where supervisors value and cultivate such unalienated learning, however, teachers are increasingly micromanaged or manipulated with rewards and punishments like laboratory rats, all in the name of "school reform" and "accountability." Far from promoting excitement, that kind of

environment actively kills it. Schools of the future must discard this failed paradigm and commit to giving teachers considerable latitude as to what they teach, how they teach it, and how they assess student learning.

If we want students to learn to think for themselves, schools must be environments in which teachers who think for themselves are valued, not punished. In America today, however, schools are expected to whip children into shape to compete in a capitalist society, with success in this preparation measured by standardized test scores. As long as such notions of education prevail, schools will be little dictatorships that punish independent thought, creativity, and indeed intelligence itself.

In any dictatorship, even a benevolent one, directives flow down from the top, and the information flowing up is filtered by the leader's agenda, precluding genuine dialogue and collaboration. Rather than tapping the creativity and intelligence of the entire staff and student body, a school organized in this way is limited by an information and decision bottleneck in the principal's office. Under a malevolent dictator—a "principal from hell"—it is only a matter of time before the school fails. Such a principal may be removed before running "his" school completely into the ground but only after great damage is done to the lives of students and teachers, damage for which restitution is never offered (except in court settlements).

When an entire school system is taken over by a dictator, as New York City schools were in 2002, the potential for damage is incomparably greater. Mayor Michael Bloomberg hired corporate management guru and former General Electric CEO Jack Welch to train principals for his brave new world of school reform (Casey 2006; Hoffman 2005). Welch knew absolutely nothing about teaching or managing schools; his main occupational skill was making money for himself and his shareholders. Placing such a person in charge of training principals was in itself an extraordinary display of contempt for principals, teachers, and the work that goes on in schools.

The mayor and his corporate consultant viewed the source of the school system's problems to be the teachers' union and the "bad teachers" it protected. Thus, school reform in their minds consisted primarily of training principals to break the union and remove "low performers." A commitment to recognizing, valuing, and cultivating the creativity and intelligence of every staff member—the essence of being a collaborative principal—was now equated with being "soft" on "incompetence." Not content with the existing supply of principals from hell, Welch created a "Leadership Academy" to mass produce them. That is not what Bloomberg and Welch imagined they were doing, of course, but the road to hell is indeed paved with good intentions.

Welch indoctrinated prospective New York City principals with the management paradigm he had honed at GE—identify your highest and lowest performers, reward the former, and fire the latter (Casey 2006; Hoffman 2005). Even if this had worked in industry—which is not the case⁶—there was no reason to believe that it would be a good way to manage teachers, and it was indeed a disaster. I have written in more detail about Mayor Bloomberg's failed experiment to improve New York City public schools (D'Agostino 2009b). Suffice it to say here that this fiasco is a model of how *not* to create quality schools. If America wants every *student* to feel that they can succeed, it needs schools in which every *teacher* can succeed. This is not to say that schools—or any other organizations—should turn a blind eye to incompetence. The point is rather that cultivating fear of failure is a counterproductive way to motivate competence. Experiments by B. F. Skinner (1965) showed this to be so even in the case of laboratory rats, whose learning is impaired by stress when their mistakes are punished.

So what is a better alternative? There is no more powerful way of building competence in a teacher than having them coteach with a master teacher so that apprentice and master can observe one another's performance and the latter can model exemplary practices. Interacting with a more competent colleague whose role is entirely constructive provides exactly the right combination of challenge and support to promote optimal staff development. If a school or school district is serious about improving teacher quality, that is the way to do it. It is more expensive than other approaches, but this kind of mentoring is the most reliable path to excellence in the long run. It is hard to imagine how anyone who meets existing requirements for becoming a teacher and is motivated to enter the profession in the first place, when provided with this kind of quality training, could fail to become a satisfactory teacher.

The upshot of this analysis is that public schools should be controlled collaboratively by their stakeholders—principals, teachers, parents, and students—not power holders in city halls, state education departments, and the federal Department of Education. The proper role of politicians and school district officials is not to monitor test scores and dispense consequences from Mount Olympus but to provide the resources teachers

6. There is little evidence these methods worked at G.E., where Welch increased profits through predatory financial strategies that had nothing to do with producing wealth or the skillful management of people. These strategies included dodging environmental regulations, overbilling the Department of Defense, abandoning U.S. based manufacturing in favor of cheaper labor abroad, and abandoning manufacturing altogether in favor of acquiring lucrative financial service companies (O'Boyle 1998). It is a scathing commentary on American state capitalism that a person with such a resume was even considered, much less hired, to train school principals.

need to do their jobs. How well they do their jobs—the so-called accountability problem—is a matter best left to the stakeholders, including teachers themselves.

There is nothing outlandish about stakeholder-driven accountability, except to neoliberal elites who imagine that they are uniquely qualified to rule the world. In fact, universities have for centuries monitored and maintained the quality of their own work through a process of peer review, and the result has been an outpouring of knowledge in science and the humanities that has immeasurably enhanced human existence.⁷ The apprenticeship system of labor unions, rooted in the medieval guilds, has a similarly long history of successful quality control by peers.

The kind of stakeholder governance I am advocating is already practiced in many public schools, both in the United States and abroad. The Coalition of Essential Schools (2011), with members throughout the United States, is a noteworthy example. Before the Bloomberg era, New York City hosted an entire district of small, collaboratively governed, “alternative” high schools that were highly successful at reducing dropout rates and preparing inner-city youth for college (Meier 2009; Hantzopoulos and Tyner-Mullings 2012).⁸ I taught at one of these schools, whose success was celebrated in the film *Homeless to Harvard* (Levin 2003), and know their strengths and weaknesses from personal experience. Putting that experience to work, I helped design a small, innovative public school and drafted the planning documents (D’Agostino 2009a).

The school design I helped create featured a collaborative governance structure, including a strong union chapter, student council, parent association, and community partner.⁹ With all these stakeholders feeling a sense of shared ownership of the school, the principal’s role is that of

7. The only contribution of government and corporate elites, apart from the constructive one of providing resources, has been to corrupt knowledge by enlisting academics to legitimize the elites’ own power. Noam Chomsky’s voluminous political writings (Ward 2011), for example, expose the role of American political scientists in legitimizing state capitalism. Richard Lewontin (1991) made a similar critique of sociobiologists, and Constance L. Benson (1999) showed how seminal thinkers in modern Christian ethics legitimized the power structure of imperial Germany.

8. Some of these schools still exist but became an endangered species under Bloomberg’s top-down management regime. Less bureaucratic and more responsive to the needs of individual students than their traditional counterparts, the alternative high schools have many of the qualities parents seek in charter schools. Unlike the latter, however, they operate under the same union contract and serve special needs students to at least the same extent (Meier 2009).

9. In New York City and elsewhere, small collaborative public schools frequently form partnerships with local institutions—such as universities, businesses, or community organizations—that support the work of the school in some way, such as providing tutoring or internships. This kind of partnering is one way that the Mondragon-type cooperatives discussed in the previous chapter can form mutually beneficial relationships with schools.

coordinator, not boss. Such a governing structure simultaneously makes the principal's job easier and empowers all the other stakeholders. Problems continually arise, of course, but the norm is to acknowledge them honestly and work collaboratively for creative solutions, not to single out individuals for blame and punishment. Those who are serious about improving public education should begin by studying innovative schools of this sort, which have a long record of success (Hantzopoulos and Tyner-Mullings 2012), not untested management-by-numbers schemes devised by businessmen and economists.

FISCAL EQUITY FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Providing a quality education for every child in America will require an end to the shameful system of educational apartheid that adequately funds public schools in affluent suburbs while underfunding schools for the poor and lower middle class (Kozol 1991, 2005; Mayer 2011). To achieve educational parity, disadvantaged children need more resources, not fewer, than their more affluent peers (Adler 2010).¹⁰ These funds should be spent in four areas: (1) building and maintenance of adequate facilities, (2) smaller class sizes, (3) improved teacher training, and (4) programs that are essential to optimal brain performance. To help ensure that public resources are actually used in these ways, all public schools, districts, and boards of education should be independently audited at regular intervals with a clear and understandable report made public after each audit.

A comparison of the facilities of America's affluent and poor school districts reveals a highly visible aspect of fiscal injustice. In Illinois, a three-to-one discrepancy in spending per student is reflected in the quality and level of maintenance of facilities (Black 2011). Many schools serving the poor lack adequate libraries, science laboratories, and/or facilities for athletics and the arts. Half of public school principals surveyed in New York City in 2008 reported overcrowding issues (Horowitz 2009), a statistic that is unthinkable in affluent suburban districts. Jonathan Kozol (2005) found similar neglect in dozens of schools

10. Eric Hanushek and other school reformers who say that resources do not matter will not have an iota of credibility until they advocate slashing the budgets of *their* children's schools and using that money to equalize spending for the children of the poor. After all, if resources do not matter, such equalization would not hurt anyone. It would be a cost-free way of generating sorely needed goodwill among the poor, who believe—however foolishly, as the reformers would have it—that large discrepancies in public school funding are an ugly and intolerable injustice.

he visited in various parts of the country. In the digital age, large discrepancies in the quality and availability of computing facilities, software, interactive whiteboards, and other instructional technologies are another troubling example of inequitable access to facilities. Correcting these injustices will require a massive investment in underfunded schools.

Numerous peer-reviewed articles, government reports, and other studies have established the importance of small class sizes for a quality education (*Class Size Matters* 2011). One of the leading dissenters from this literature is neoliberal economist Eric Hanushek, who is employed by the Hoover Institution, a right-wing think tank bankrolled by big corporations. Hanushek has testified repeatedly as an expert witness against school districts and other plaintiffs seeking to rectify inequitable public school funding through the courts (Adler 2010). He has produced a number of clever arguments why class size does not matter that have been discredited by experts (Krueger and Whitmore 2001; Mishel and Rothstein 2002). As every stakeholder in education knows, dismissing class size as unimportant is simply absurd (see Chapter 3, footnote 10). Ruling against one of Hanushek's clients, a judge opined, "Only a fool would find that money does not matter in education" (Adler 2010). And yet a man with a PhD in economics cannot be such a fool. Rather, Hanushek's pseudo-scientific theories are a thinly veiled legitimization of inequality and a vicious attack on the poor.¹¹

In a recent survey of elementary school teachers, only 25 percent of those who serve the poor had class sizes of eighteen or fewer, compared with 62 percent of those who serve middle-class or affluent students (Adler 2010). As noted in Chapter 3, poor students are academically disadvantaged in a number of ways and are therefore in greater need of individual attention than affluent students. To rectify this discrepancy, all general education elementary school class sizes in poor districts should be eighteen or fewer, which will require an increase in funding to pay for expanded teaching staffs. In order to attract qualified teachers to work in poor neighborhoods with academically needy children, especially in shortage areas such as mathematics, science, and English as a second language, equitable compensation for all teachers is essential. This will require additional funding to bring the salaries of teachers in many poor districts up to the level of those in affluent districts.

11. Indeed, this is just another legitimization of wealth and power of the sort exposed by Chomsky, Lewontin, and Benson mentioned previously (footnote 7).

In addition to facilities and class sizes, the third area requiring increased funding is teacher training. It is common in the United States for new teachers to be given undesirable and difficult teaching assignments that would tax even experienced teachers while being required to devote extra time to staff development programs that often do not address the kind of problems they encounter in the classroom. The inevitable result is a high rate of burnout and dropout from the profession among new teachers. The kind of mentoring system discussed in the previous section can help solve these problems and is effective where it is already practiced. It should be the norm in school systems throughout the country. The additional cost of paying mentors is a necessary investment in upgrading the effectiveness of teachers. This is especially important in schools that serve the poor, which face special challenges.

The fourth area requiring increased funding encompasses programs necessary for optimal brain functioning, which are typically neglected in schools that serve the poor. While improvements in school governance, facilities, class size, and teacher training shape the macrocosm in which learning occurs, it is also necessary to attend to the microcosm—the human brain—which is the basis of all learning. The three most important factors at this level are physical activity, nutrition, and rest.¹²

Athletic activity develops brain fitness and mind-body integration, while the visual and performing arts develop right-brain and sensorimotor skills as well as creativity and aesthetic appreciation. These disciplines should be valued at least as highly as mathematics, language arts, and other traditional left-brain subjects. It is the common experience of schools with strong programs in athletics and the arts that many students who struggle with the academic curricula excel in these bodily-kinesthetic curricula and vice versa. Every school should be committed to educating the whole person, which means providing every student ample opportunities to excel at what they do best while challenging and supporting them to develop aptitudes that do not come easily to them. The rich and upper middle class send their children to well-funded private and suburban public schools that generally provide such an education. It is the birthright of every child regardless of class.

The second factor on which brain performance depends is nutrition. Reflecting an increased awareness of its importance, many schools are

12. This assumes that fresh air, clean water, and an environment free of toxins and other health hazards exists in every school, which is unfortunately not the case in many poor districts (Kozol 1991, 2005). Such conditions are an intolerable scandal in a country as rich as the United States, and rectifying them is an urgent moral imperative.

revolutionizing the offerings of their vending machines and cafeteria menus (New York Coalition for Healthy School Food 2011). Highly processed foods that are low in nutrients and fiber while containing refined carbohydrates, trans fats, and chemical additives are a menace not only to health in general but to the brain in particular. Also important but less widely known, the typical modern diet—based largely on grains and the meat and dairy products of grain-fed animals—contains an excessive amount of omega-6 fatty acids relative to omega-3 fatty acids (Simopoulos and Robinson 1999). The latter are derived primarily from green plants, the meat and dairy products of pasture-fed animals, and fish.¹³ There is a large body of peer-reviewed research on the importance of omega-3 fatty acids for optimal brain function and the consequences of omega-3 deficiencies including depression, attention deficit disorders, and hyperactivity (Simopoulos and Robinson 1999).

Ensuring that every citizen has access to a quality diet informed by nutritional science should be one of the highest priorities of every government. That will require the kind of transformation of America's agricultural and food system discussed in Chapter 5 (Appendix 5.1). Short of this, every effort must be made to provide healthy food for the nation's schoolchildren. Here again, money is a decisive factor; affluent children have access to healthy food to a much greater extent than poor children, one of the many shameful facts associated with child poverty in America. The diet provided in vending machines and cafeterias can help rectify this imbalance, and adequate funding to that end must be made available in urban school systems.

Finally, proper rest is an essential prerequisite of optimal brain function and thus of teacher and student performance. Sleep disorders are common in the United States and deprive many students of the energy and alertness needed to perform well in school. To be sure, the amount of sleep students get at night is beyond the control of educators. Some innovative schools, however, have set aside time in their schedules for the group practice of meditation, which provides deeper rest than sleep, combined with a higher level of alertness than occurs during normal

13. Humans are well adapted to a high omega-3 diet because we evolved over a period of several million years eating primarily the meat of animals that lived on green plants (or algae) while shifting to an omega-6 diet based on agriculture only very recently. A fatty acid-balanced vegetarian diet would contain walnuts, flaxseed oil, and canola oil—concentrated sources of omega-3—as well as non-omega-6 carbohydrates such as potatoes and yams, thus reducing reliance on grains. Artemis Simopolous, author of numerous peer-reviewed articles on the health effects of omega-3 fatty acids, traces a range of health disorders to the grain-based diet (Simopoulos and Robinson 1999).

waking activity (David Lynch Foundation 2011). The success of these programs is consistent with peer-reviewed research showing that meditation reduces insomnia and the effects of stress while improving academic performance and general well-being.¹⁴

PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THE MIDDLE CLASS REVOLUTION

This chapter has outlined what it will take to fully unleash the minds and brains of America's youth and other school stakeholders. It will mean replacing standardized-test-based incentive schemes with school-based accountability and instituting collaborative school governance that involves all stakeholders. In addition, it will mean providing for every child the kind of education that is currently offered only in well-funded private and public schools. Such an education requires properly maintained facilities, including well-equipped classrooms, libraries, laboratories, art rooms, and athletic facilities. It requires small class sizes, time and resources for collaborative teacher training and professional development, and equitable pay for teachers. Finally, a quality education includes first-rate programs in physical education and the arts, healthy food, and innovative health and wellness programs of proven effectiveness.

Jonathan Kozol (1991, 2005) poses the question: What kind of society tolerates such a scandalous discrepancy in school funding that children of the rich and upper middle class receive all or many of these things while children of the poor receive few if any? And why is this question itself not on the country's political agenda? On the rare occasions that rich and powerful people are confronted with such questions, they typically respond that it will do no good to "throw money" at the problems of America's public schools (Adler 2010). But these same elites would not even *consider* sending their own children to schools as badly funded as those that serve the poor. The progressive movement should relentlessly expose the cynicism and hypocrisy of this position, which pervades the neoliberal school reform movement.

14. The most extensive body of peer-reviewed research on this subject has been conducted on the Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique taught by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The deep rest and heightened alertness experienced during TM has been measured in terms of oxygen consumption—an index of metabolic activity—and EEG (brain wave) patterns. Statistical studies have been conducted comparing practitioners of TM with non-TM control groups on a wide range of health and wellness indicators. A bibliography of peer-reviewed research appears on the TM Web site (Maharishi Foundation USA 2011).

But there is more at issue here than cynicism and hypocrisy; the rich and powerful also have objective economic reasons for not wanting to talk about money in connection with public education. Providing a first-rate education to every child in America would require a revolution in the country's fiscal priorities, which currently serve the purposes of these same elites. It would mean diverting hundreds of billions of dollars every year from military programs, prisons, and tax breaks for corporations and the rich into all the unmet needs described in this chapter, which are the needs of the poor and lower middle class. Rather than acquiesce in such a revolution, the rich and powerful use test scores as a stick to beat inner-city teachers, making scapegoats of the middle-class workers who struggle day after day to salvage human lives from the wreckage of American state capitalism.

The upshot of this analysis is that the middle class itself must lead the revolution against plutocracy and state capitalism, joined by the minority of the rich and majority of the poor who will support such far-reaching change. There are a number of synergistic political strategies through which the progressive movement can accomplish this, and I discuss these in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that the schools themselves are part of the solution whenever they become places where political transformation occurs (Anyon 2005; Teachers Unite 2011). This has nothing to do with "politicizing" schools in the sense of indoctrinating children with right- or left-wing ideology. Rather, it means reinventing the original Jeffersonian concept of school as preparation for citizenship in a democracy. That involves talking about how power is organized in America and how it should be organized. Liberal and conservative teachers will give opposing answers to such questions. Students need to hear both sides of this debate, form their own opinions, and learn to present their ideas—backed by evidence—orally and in writing.

Nor can such lessons be confined to the classroom. It is not enough to study the Constitution and read in textbooks how American democracy supposedly works. Schools need to become places where students *experience* democracy. That means asking why their school does not have solar panels on the roof and agitating to get them installed. It means social studies classes in which students go out into the community and investigate injustices they find there. It means science classes in which students take water samples from the local river or aquifer and measure pollution levels. It means English classes in which students write informed letters to politicians and businessmen about climate change, poverty, and water pollution; propose policy solutions; and ask the power holders what they are going to do to on behalf of justice and saving the planet. It means

reading their replies and being able to evaluate them. This is what democracy looks like.

None of this will be on the standardized tests, and teachers who are forced to maximize test scores will have little time for any of it. Liberating schools from the tyranny of test preparation is part of what is needed to liberate America from state capitalism. To be sure, students also need to know about the French Revolution, what goes on in cells, and how to solve equations. What else they need to know is currently under discussion by state education departments in the United States that are collaborating on the development of common core curriculum and learning standards (Hansel and Durban 2010). This is a positive development for a number of reasons and will bring the United States up to speed with advanced industrial democracies in the rest of the world (Darling-Hammond 2010).¹⁵ But assessments of student learning in relation to such standards should be for the use of educators in improving instruction, not for the use of power holders in rewarding and punishing educators.

The status quo in American public education reflects the power relationships and fiscal priorities of state capitalism. Authentic educational renewal will therefore require a transformation of that system. Students, teachers, and schools can and should be protagonists in that transformation (Anyon 2005; Teachers Unite 2011) but are currently impeded by the tyranny of test preparation and authoritarian school governance. The progressive movement can strike a blow against that tyranny by supporting teachers in their struggle for professional autonomy against the school reform juggernaut. In so doing, it will unleash the people who can unleash the minds and brains of America's youth. What else can the progressive movement do to achieve the policy and institutional reforms outlined in this book? To that crucially important question I now turn.

15. The standards being developed are specific enough to guide the creation of textbooks and enable schools of education to provide teachers with knowledge they can actually use in their classrooms. On the other hand, they are general enough to give teachers latitude about what and how they teach. There is some debate about how much instructional time should be devoted to the core curriculum, with estimates ranging from two-thirds to 85 percent. I favor two-thirds, which allows ample time for student-chosen electives and the kind of real-world projects and inquiries discussed previously.

References

- Adler, Moshe. 2010. *Economics for the Rest of Us: Debunking the Science That Makes Life Dismal*. New York: New Press. <http://monetary.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/32-page-brochure.pdf>
- Anyon, Jean. 2005. *Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education, and a New Social Movement*. New York: Routledge.
- Benson, Constance L. 1999. *God and Caesar: Troeltsch's Social Teaching as Legitimation*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Black, Lisa. 2011. "Spending Gap between State's Rich, Poor Schools Is Vast." *Chicago Tribune*, November 7.
- Campbell, Donald T. 1976. "Assessing the Impact of Planned Social Change." Public Affairs Center, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH. <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED303512.pdf>
- Casey, Leo. 2006. "Leading the Race to the Bottom. Tweed's Leadership Academy and Jack Welch." EdWize, January 6. <http://www.edwize.org/leading-the-race-to-the-bottom-tweeds-leadership-academy-and-jack-welch>
- Class Size Matters. 2011. "Research Studies Showing the Benefits of Class Size Reduction." <http://www.classsizematters.org/research-and-links-2>
- Coalition of Essential Schools. 2011. "About CES." <http://www.essentialschools.org>
- Cobb, Clifford, Ted Halstead, and Jonathan Rowe. 1995. "If the GDP Is Up, Why Is America Down?" *Atlantic Monthly*, October. <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/politics/ecbig/gdp.htm>
- Comer, James P., et al., eds. 1999. *Child by Child: the Comer Process for Change in Education*. New York: Teachers College Press
- Compton, Mary, and Lois Weiner. 2008. *The Global Assault on Teaching, Teachers, and Their Unions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cramer, Philissa. 2011. "Judge Rejects UFT-NAACP Claims, Allows Co-Locations, Closures." Gotham Schools, July 21. <http://gothamschools.org/2011/07/21/judge-rejects-uft-naacp-claims-allows-co-locations-closures>
- D'Agostino, Brian. 2009a. "Design for an Innovative Public School." <http://brian.bendag.com/education.php>

- D'Agostino, Brian. 2009b. "Holding Mayor Bloomberg Accountable." NYC Rubber Room Reporter, October 28. <http://nycrubberroomreporter.blogspot.com/2009/10/holding-mayor-bloomberg-accountable-by.html>
- D'Agostino, Brian. 2012c. "Beyond the Welch Paradigm: Why Value Added Assessment is not a Path to Educational Quality." Unpublished paper. Dame, Frederick William. 2001. *History of Switzerland*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Darling-Hammond, Linda. 2010. "Soaring Systems: High Flyers All Have Equitable Funding, Shared Curriculum, and Quality Teaching." *American Educator* 34, no. 4.
- David Lynch Foundation. 2011. "Our Work: Schools." <http://www.davidlynchfoundation.org/schools.html>
- Dillon, Sam. 2010. "Method to Grade Teachers Provokes Battles." *New York Times*, August 31. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/01/education/01teacher.html>
- Dillon, Sam. 2011. "Obama to Waive Parts of No Child Left Behind." *New York Times*, September 22. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/23/education/23educ.html>
- Grassroots Education Movement. 2011. *The Inconvenient Truth behind Waiting for Superman* (DVD). New York: Grassroots Education Movement and Real Reform Studios Production. <http://www.waitingforsupermantruth.org/>
- Hanushek, Eric A., and Caroline B. Hoxby. 2005a. "Developing Value Added Measure for Teachers and Schools." In *Reforming Education in Arkansas*, by Koret Task Force. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.
- Hanushek, Eric A., and Caroline M. Hoxby. 2005b. "Rewarding Teachers." In *Reforming Education in Arkansas*, by Koret Task Force. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.
- Hantzopoulos, Maria and Alia R. Tyner-Mullings. 2012. *Critical Small Schools: Beyond Privatization in New York City Urban Educational Reform*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Hansel, Lisa, and Jennifer Durban. 2010. "Common Core Curriculum: An Idea Whose Time Has Come." *American Educator* 34, no. 4.
- Hoffman, Mary. 2005. "Jack Welch Is My Daddy." Independent Community of Educators, March 8. <http://ice-uft.org/daddy.htm>
- Horowitz, Emily. 2009. "School Overcrowding: What Principals Say." In *NYC Schools under Bloomberg and Klein: What Parents, Teachers, and Policymakers Need to Know*, ed. Ravitch et al. New York: Lulu. <http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/nyc-schools-under-bloomberglein-what-parents-teachers-and-policymakers-need-to-know/4970767>

- James, Michael, et al. 2010. *Education's Highest Aim*. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press.
- Koretz, Daniel. 2008. *Measuring Up: What Educational Testing Really Tells Us*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Koss, Steve. 2009. "Test Score Inflation: Campbell's Law at Work." In *NYC Schools Under Bloomberg and Klein: What Parents, Teachers, and Policymakers Need to Know*, ed. Ravitch et al. New York: Lulu. <http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/nyc-schools-under-bloomberglein-what-parents-teachers-and-policymakers-need-to-know/4970767>
- Kozol, Jonathan. 1991. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Kozol, Jonathan. 2005. *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*. New York: Crown Publishing Group.
- Krueger, Alan, and Diane Whitmore. 2001. "Would Smaller Class Sizes Help Close the Black-White Achievement Gap?" Princeton University working paper 451.
- Lewontin, R. C. 1991. *Biology as Ideology: The Doctrine of DNA*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Maharishi Foundation USA. 2011. "Top Hundred Published Studies.:" <http://www.tm.org/research-on-meditation>
- Mayer, Janet Grossbach. 2011. *As Bad as They Say? Three Decades of Teaching in the Bronx*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Meier, Deborah. 2009. "New York City Schools: Then and Now." In *NYC Schools Under Bloomberg and Klein: What Parents, Teachers, and Policymakers Need to Know*, ed. Ravitch et al. New York: Lulu. <http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/nyc-schools-under-bloomberglein-what-parents-teachers-and-policymakers-need-to-know/4970767>
- Melman, Seymour. 1983. *Profits without Production*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Mishel, Lawrence, and Richard Rothstein, eds. 2002. *The Class Size Debate*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
- New York Coalition for Healthy School Food. 2011. "Create Change." <http://www.healthylunches.org/createchange.htm>
- O'Boyle, Thomas. 1998. *At Any Cost: Jack Welch, General Electric, and the Pursuit of Profit*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Purnick, Joyce. 2009. *Mike Bloomberg: Money, Power, Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

- Rashbaum, William K., Joseph Goldstein, and Al Baker. 2011. "Experts Say N.Y. Police Dept. Isn't Policing Itself." *New York Times*, November 2.
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/03/nyregion/experts-say-ny-police-dept-isnt-policing-itself.html?_r=1&hp
- Ravitch, Diane. 2010. *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ravitch, Diane. 2011. "School 'Reform': A Failing Grade." *New York Review of Books*, September 29. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/sep/29/school-reform-failing-grade>
- Rothstein, Richard, and Lawrence Mishel, eds. 2002. *The Class Size Debate*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.
- Rothstein, Jesse. 2010. "Teacher Quality in Educational Production: Tracking, Decay, and Student Achievement." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 125, no. 1: 175–214.
<http://www.nber.org/papers/w14442>
- Sacks, Peter. 2001. *Standardized Minds: The High Price of America's Testing Culture and What We Can Do to Change It*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Simopoulos, Artemis P., and Jo Robinson. 1999. *The Omega Diet: The Lifesaving Nutritional Program Based on the Diet of the Island of Crete*. New York: Harper Paperbacks.
- Skinner, B. F. 1965. *Science and Human Behavior*. New York: Free Press.
- Teachers Unite. 2011. "Mission Statement." <http://teachersunite.net/node/335>
- Turner, Ralph. 2011. "Sponsored and Contest Mobility and the School System," in Richard Arum et al ed., *The Structure of Schooling: Readings in the Sociology of Education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers.
- Ward, Dana. 2011. "Chomsky Bibliography." Anarchy Archives.
http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/chomsky/chomskybiblio.html

About the Author

BRIAN D'AGOSTINO teaches political economy and history at the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies, Empire State College. He previously taught political science at Adelphi University and City University of New York, and worked for eleven years as a New York City public school teacher. He holds a PhD from Columbia University and is the author of numerous publications on public affairs and political psychology including the peer-reviewed article "Self-Images of Hawks and Doves."
