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# “You’re Not Going to Continue to Set My Kids Up”: Gendering Neoliberal Education Reform and Teacher Activism

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**“You’re Not Going to Continue to Set My Kids Up”:  
Gendering Neoliberal Education Reform and  
Teacher Activism**

Erin C. Hagen

Submitted in partial completion of the Master of Arts Degree at Sarah

Lawrence College

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### **Abstract**

“You’re Not Going to Continue to Set My Kids Up”: Gendering Neoliberal Education Reform and Teacher Activism explores why teachers have been excluded from creating education policy in the United States, and how this relates to the proliferation of for-profit education companies benefiting from neoliberal education reforms. In addition, this thesis examines why the American Federation of Teachers has not been effective in preventing reforms teachers believe are harmful to themselves and their students, while also providing successful examples of teacher activism that addresses neoliberal education reforms.

### **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother who has been a public school teacher for twenty-seven years.

## Acronyms

AFL-CIO	The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
AIFLD	American Institute for Free Labor Development
AFT	American Federation of Teachers
BATs	Badass Teachers
CCSS	Common Core State Standards
CORE	Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators
CPC	Chilean Teachers' Professional Association (Colegio de Profesores de Chile)
CTU	Chicago Teachers' Union
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
IFFT	International Federation of Free Teachers Unions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MORE	Movement of Rank-and-File Educators
MTEA	Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NEA	National Education Association
NGA	National Governors Association
NYCORE	New York Collective of Radical Educators
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RTT	Race to the Top
SIMCE	System for Measuring the Quality of Education (La Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación)

TFA	Teach for America
UFT	United Federation of Teachers
VAM	Value-Added Modeling
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization

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## Introduction

I think everything being tied in together with the Common Core, where the Common Core came from, the fact that teachers were not a part of it, the high-stakes testing being tied to it, the new teacher evaluations. I think that everything happening at the same time is what led to this explosion.<sup>1</sup>

-Melissa Tomlinson on teacher activism

This thesis attempts to answer a number of questions about the newest education reform initiative in the United States, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The central questions addressed are: What are the reasons that U.S. educators were not involved in the creation of CCSS? And what types of activism do educators and teachers' unions engage in to address education reforms they believe are harmful to students and teachers?

CCSS are part of the Standards and Accountability Movement, which began in the 1990s, and was prompted by the government report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983). This infamous report produced an education crisis, positing a close correlation between global economic success and education, as well as a dichotomy between excellence and equity.<sup>2</sup>

An important piece of legislation in the Standards and Accountability Movement is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2001, and still in effect today.<sup>3</sup> From its inception, NCLB mandated high-stakes testing, which meant that the standardized tests students were required to take each year

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<sup>1</sup> Melissa Tomlinson, telephone interview by author, April 2, 2015. Melissa Tomlinson is a special education middle-school math teacher in New Jersey.

<sup>2</sup> James W. Guthrie and Matthew G. Springer, "A Nation at Risk Revisited: Did 'Wrong' Reasoning Result in 'Right' Results?" *Peabody Journal of Education* 79 no. 1 (2004): 8.

<sup>3</sup> NCLB is the current incarnation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act signed into law in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson. U.S. Department of Education, "Elementary and Secondary Education Act," accessed March 2015, <http://www.ed.gov/esea>.

would be used as measurements to determine if schools were “failing,” and if teachers were competent.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, NCLB set a goal for one hundred percent proficiency by 2014.<sup>5</sup> Although in its unveiling NCLB was hailed as legislation that would remedy disparities in education quality that had still not been addressed decades after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, it lost support when schools began experiencing punitive funding provisions of the Act. Educators continue to express frustration that NCLB mandates schools to wipe out inequalities without addressing the factors that produced them, and labels schools as failures without giving them the resources to improve.<sup>6</sup>

Another notable piece of legislation spawned by the Standards and Accountability Movement is the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which includes a federal grant called Race to the Top (RTT) to spur competition among states to adopt particular education reforms.<sup>7</sup> The same year that RTT was enacted, the National Governors Association (NGA) convened a group of individuals (none of whom were current teachers) to create CCSS. The initial CCSS government hearings were tinged

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<sup>4</sup> Many educators were immediately skeptical of this for two reasons: first that proficiency, a category used in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), was often confused with ability to perform at grade-level, and second, that under NCLB, proficiency was measured by norm-referenced tests. Deborah Meier and George H. Wood, *Many Children Left Behind: How the No Child Left Behind Act Is Damaging Our Children and Our Schools* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>5</sup> NCLB expired in 2007, but Congress was not able to come to an agreement on how to best revise the Act. Hearings for the revision of NCLB finally occurred on April 14, 2015. Eric Westervelt, “Senators Try To Revise No Child Left Behind-A Few Years Behind,” National Public Radio, April 13, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/ed/2015/04/13/398804901/senators-try-to-revise-no-child-left-behind-a-few-years-behind>.

<sup>6</sup> Meier and Wood, *Many Children Left Behind*, 54.

<sup>7</sup> Signed into law by President Barak Obama, RTT rewards states for addressing many of the same issues as NCLB such as using Value-Added Modeling (a method that attempts to isolate the contribution that each teacher provides for a given year of students). Dana Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2014), 174.

with much of the same paranoia as the *Nation at Risk* report, witnesses fretting over the loss of U.S. dominance in the global economy.<sup>8</sup> CCSS were released in June of 2010, and within months, forty-four states had adopted the standards.

In spite of complaints of educators, the reasons teachers have not been involved in the creation of CCSS are more complex than corporate enterprise buying its way into government reform. The exclusion of educators is stark considering that teachers arguably have the most expertise in creating a developmentally-appropriate curriculum.<sup>9</sup> However, as this thesis demonstrates, CCSS is part and parcel of previous neoliberal education reforms that privilege for-profit companies invested in “market choice” (competition between private and public entities). The Corporate State in public schools is obvious in the profits that come from textbooks, pre-packaged curriculum, school lunch programs, standardized tests, prep courses, and for-profit charter schools. CCSS, however, is a vehicle through which for-profit education companies can both involve themselves in the development of standards used by public schools, and have access to federal funding to create the curriculum and standardized tests that accompany the standards.

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<sup>8</sup> The central question posed in the hearings addressed how the United States could “improve [its] global competitiveness.” *Hearing Before the Committee on Education and Labor, Improving Our Competitiveness Common Core Education Standards*, 111<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., December 8, 2009, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Notable educators, such as Jose Vilson, who have spoken out against CCSS have three major critiques. The first is that the exclusion of educators assumes their expertise is not as valuable as those who “study” education from the outside. The second is that CCSS does not recognize students as variables, which inevitably affect what and how quickly content can be covered in a classroom. The third is that the international comparison rhetoric, which prompted the creation of CCSS, does not take into account that teaching conditions in other countries are not equivalent to those in the United States. Jose Luis Vilson, *This Is Not a Test: A New Narrative on Race, Class, and Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 189-191.

CCSS is also part of a larger pattern of neoliberal education reforms. Whereas private companies have been involved in education in the United States for more than a century, free-trade agreements have enabled them to access international markets at an expedited and unlimited rate. It is important to note that alongside the increase in neoliberal practices employed by transnational corporations, there has also been an increase in the influence of economic institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (WB), which have pressured many governments to sign free-trade agreements. The combination of these two power structures led to today's neoliberal ideology or "class strategy" that stresses individualism, competition, and free-market reforms that privilege the Corporate State.<sup>10</sup>

To understand why educators were not involved in the creation of CCSS this thesis asks questions about how the devaluation of teaching and animosity towards teachers' unions is related to teachers' exclusion from education policy. Because the majority of teachers in the United States are women, yet men predominate in positions of authority within school districts, teachers' unions, and education reform, this thesis pays attention to the ways in which expectations and perceptions of the teaching profession are gendered.

The first chapter of this thesis highlights the significance of teaching as a feminized profession, considering the consequences that the devaluation of feminized skill sets, the gendering of wages, and occupational segregation have had with regard to teachers' participation in education reform. Additionally, this chapter looks at the gendered dynamics of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to consider the ways

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<sup>10</sup> Peter J. Rachleff, "Neoliberalism: Context for a New Workers' Struggle." *Working USA* 9, no. 4 (December 2006): 463, accessed October 8, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/236435663?accountid=13701>.

in which teachers' unions have supported the status quo alongside the education reformers they critique.

The second chapter examines neoliberal education reform in a global context, paying attention to how education policies like those recently implemented in the United States have already exacerbated socio-economic stratification in other countries. This chapter also argues that, had teachers' unions in the United States been critical of neoliberal education reform in other countries, they would have been able to foresee the consequences of domestic education reform, such as CCSS. Using the AFT's relationship with the Chilean teachers' union as a case study, this chapter demonstrates the value of taking seriously parallels between the Chilean and U.S. education system, and, more importantly, the activism of Chilean educators.

The third chapter explores successful examples of resistance to neoliberal education policies as models for future education activism. It features a number of campaigns and publications that respond directly to negative public perception of educators, and increased corporate involvement in the public education system. Finally, this chapter contrasts examples of issue-based activism that primarily addresses CCSS and high-stakes testing with coalition activism in which teachers, students, and community members work together to address multiple inequalities that are compounded by neoliberal policies.

My work enters into conversation with scholarship that addresses the effects of recent neoliberal policies on the U.S. education system. Additionally, this thesis speaks to works concerned with the actions by and public perceptions of teachers and teachers' unions since the implementation of neoliberal education reforms.

Prominent education historian Diane Ravitch's book, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools* (2013), addresses the mythologies utilized by reformers who advocate for the privatization of education in the United States. Ravitch has two main arguments: first, that the recent crisis in public education has been fabricated to serve corporate interests and, second, that we should instead direct our energy towards redressing extreme economic and social stratification, which deeply affects students' quality of education. She traces the unprecedented involvement of and spending by the private sector in public education (interventions that have bipartisan support), and concludes that the true threat to the U.S. education system is unregulated corporate influence.<sup>11</sup>

Dana Goldstein's *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession* (2014) explores the question of how teachers have come to be both resented and admired.<sup>12</sup> Goldstein's impetus for writing this book was her observation that public school teaching had become one of the most controversial professions in the United States. The "teacher wars" she refers to reflect the discursive battles among politicians, philanthropists, corporate leaders, social scientists, activists, and parents (and teachers) about who should be teachers, how they should teach, and what they should teach.<sup>13</sup>

Lois Weiner's essay "Teacher Unionism Reborn" (2012) argues that teachers' unions are in danger because they threaten neoliberal education reformers seeking to

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<sup>11</sup> Diane Ravitch. *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools* (New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 43.

<sup>12</sup> Dana Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession* (New York: Doubleday, 2014), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars*, 5.

implement their policies without opposition or regulation.<sup>14</sup> She also argues that rank-and-file teachers need to “occupy their unions” to demand more radical leadership, as well as that unions’ failure to confront their history of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment has contributed to their being cast in the media as more interested in maintaining the status quo than in helping students. Additionally, Weiner criticizes education reformers who claim to oppose corporate involvement in public education while defending capitalism.<sup>15</sup> She argues that they perpetuate a romanticized history, obscuring parts of our education system and economic system that have always reproduced social inequality.

Another article written by Lois Weiner that fits into this conversation is “Social Justice Teacher Activism and Social Movement Unionism: Tensions, Synergies and Space” (2013) in which she features Teachers Unite, a New York City-based teacher organization, and explores how it has worked to build coalitions of students, parents, teachers, and teachers unions. Weiner highlights a coalescence of community and teachers unions’ concerns on educational issues, and divides them into four categories: social movement concerns; community issues such as school closings; contract negotiations; and bigger questions of political control such as histories of racial and economic injustice. Through analyzing these categories, her argument is that through coalition work, teachers, who are often economically privileged in comparison to the

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<sup>14</sup> Lois Weiner, “Teacher Unionism Reborn” in *The Future of Our Schools: Teachers Unions and Social Justice* ed. Lois Weiner (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 195.

<sup>15</sup> Weiner, “Teacher Unionism Reborn,” 194.

communities they serve and yet disempowered as professionals, can locate opportunities to work alongside local activists to address structural inequalities.<sup>16</sup>

Kristen Buras's book, *Charter Schools, Race, and Urban Space: Where the Market Meets Grassroots Resistance* (2014), is a critical analysis of the privatization of the New Orleans education system after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Buras writes in response to the New Orleans private charter movement being presented as an example of education reform that should be emulated in other urban districts. Her main argument is that elite, white interests have controlled the resources of predominantly black public schools since they first came into existence, and that the current privatization of schools is thus part of a larger history of economic racism.<sup>17</sup> Buras also explores the ways in which teachers' unions and students fought for local control of their schools in the case of King Elementary and Frederick Douglass High School in New Orleans. Those protesting for-profit charter schools were able to re-frame the debate by documenting the for-profits' lack of commitment to equity and the preservation of local culture in schools, which, in turn, exposed the erroneous claims of reformers touting "market choice" as a civil rights project.<sup>18</sup>

Tom Alter's essay, "It Felt Like Community" (2013), looks at the 2012 strike by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) as an example of social-movement unionism. Alter's thesis is that the CTU succeeded in defending public education against neoliberal policies

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<sup>16</sup> Lois Weiner, "Social Justice Teacher Activism and Social Movement Unionism: Tensions, Synergies and Space," *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research* 3, no. 3 (October 2013): 289, accessed September 10, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.447/remie.2013.016>.

<sup>17</sup> Kristen Buras, *Charter Schools, Race, and Urban Space: Where the Market Meets Grassroots Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2014), 23.

<sup>18</sup> Buras, *Charter Schools, Race, and Urban Space*, 89.



because it was led by the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), a radical group of educators that places teachers' concerns in a broader framework of the local community's struggle against injustices.<sup>19</sup> Alter points to the high percentage of community members who supported the CTU strike by pulling their children out of school and marching with the striking teachers as evidence that social-movement unionism mobilizes the community more effectively than other forms of unionism.<sup>20</sup>

While Ravitch's and Goldstein's books are detailed accounts of the current state of education in the United States, they lack a critique of the larger power structures that enable corporate enterprises to have such a disproportionate influence on education policies in comparison with educators. This thesis expands on questions posed by Ravitch and Goldstein by locating the root causes of teacher exclusion and disempowerment. Weiner's, Buras's, and Alter's works are case studies that feature instances of teacher unions' working alongside community members to confront neoliberal policies affecting their localities in a myriad of ways. While each author has important things to say about teachers' successful involvement in education reform, this thesis examines teacher resistance through a wider lens in order to locate patterns that can be used to inform and empower education activism in the future.

Finally, Weiner's essay, "Teacher Unionism Reborn," critiques teachers unions for their unwillingness to acknowledge their history of racism and their support of foreign policies that negatively affect teachers in other countries, and encourages the rank-and-file members to confront conservative positions adopted by their unions. This thesis

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<sup>19</sup> Tom Alter, "'It Felt Like Community': Social Movement Unionism and the Chicago Teachers Union Strike of 2012," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* 10, no. 3 (2013): 11.

<sup>20</sup> Alter, "It Felt Like Community," 13.

builds on Weiner's argument by locating instances in which U.S. teachers unions might have built coalitions with their counterparts in countries like Chile, that was among the first to experience neoliberal education policies, and by asking whether such coalitions can be built if teachers' unions do not recognize neoliberalism as a political-economic system that also exacerbates inequality outside of the realm of education.

The primary sources I use to answer the questions posed in this thesis include education policies since the release of *A Nation at Risk* such as CCSS hearings before the House Committee on Education and Labor, the RTT executive summary, press releases from the NGA about CCSS, and educational reports from international bodies such as IMF and WB. By reading against the grain of these documents, this thesis reveals the ways in which public officials and international organizations think about education reform (as inexorably connected with global economic positioning), and how heavily this way of thinking is influenced by corporate interests.

This thesis also draws on primary sources that address education reform from the perspective of teachers and teachers' unions such as transcripts from the AFT convention proceedings and AFT resolutions that illustrate how teachers' unions see their place in education reform discussions. Other primary sources include material produced by Teachers of Conscience, The Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), and sources from the national teachers' union in Chile, Colegio de Profesores de Chile. Another type of primary source used is interviews with classroom teachers, which go beyond what was done in the creation of CCSS.<sup>21</sup> Although it is impossible to represent the diversity of

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<sup>21</sup> I have not been able to capture all teacher voices- they are too many and too diverse. This thesis features some of the many educators who believe that teachers have a responsibility to organize against reforms they believe are harmful to teachers, students, and community members.

teachers' voices in this thesis, I have chosen to include many voices of educators that are interested in being included in education reform.

As I discuss in the following chapters, contrasting teachers' voices with those that support neoliberal reforms illustrates how for-profit education organizations have limited the narrative of education reform to suit their interests. Additionally, comparing teachers' voices with each other reveals not only the complacency of some educators about the status quo, but also possibilities for coalitions between educators and communities seeking to challenge neoliberal education reforms.

## Chapter 1

### **Who Reforms and Who Teaches: Gendering Neoliberal Education Policy**

In January of 2015, two educators were invited to give testimony before the U.S. Senate on the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Jia Lee, an elementary school special education teacher from New York who had recently refused to administer CCSS-aligned tests to her students, spoke about the contradictions of creating education policy without teachers' involvement and the gender implications of their exclusion:

Until we have teachers and policymakers sitting alongside, and getting to know our students and our classrooms in deep and meaningful ways, we cannot fully understand the state of public education. And I sit here as a sole female, and this is a field dominated by women.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter explores how public perceptions of educators have limited their participation in education reform, positing that the reasons teachers are perceived as unqualified to create curriculum have to do with gendered divisions that exist in education, government, and corporate sectors. Examining teaching as a historically feminine profession elucidates how the “war on teachers” is a gendered phenomenon, as well as how the devaluation of feminized skill sets and occupational segregation have limited educators' participation in education reform. This chapter also explores how U.S. teachers' unions perpetuate sexism within their structure. This limits their participation in education reform, partially because it alienates the majority of teachers (who are women) and

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<sup>1</sup> nLightn Media, “Jia Lee-Senate Hearings Reauthorization of NCLB Jan 2015,” (Senate testimony), posted February 2015, accessed March 2015, <https://vimeo.com/117989096>.

partially because it affects their credibility in the eyes of other activists who could be allies.<sup>2</sup>

### **A Brief History of the Feminization of Teaching**

The feminization of teaching in the United States took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when large numbers of women entered the occupation. This shift was justified for both economic and social reasons: one, young women could be paid less than their male counterparts, and, two, the responsibilities of teachers harmonized with common-sense notions of femininity.<sup>3</sup> It was typical for teaching contracts to forbid women from getting married, wearing makeup, and drinking alcohol during their employment.<sup>4</sup> Because women were forced to choose between getting married and teaching, schools were guaranteed a constant cycle of young, inexperienced women who could be minimally paid.<sup>5</sup> The feminization of teaching in the late nineteenth century was justified by an essentialist view of maternalism: the notion that educating and caring for children was a skill set that extended from women's "natural abilities."<sup>6</sup>

The perception that women taught for "pin" money while waiting to find a husband to support them financially legitimized the low wages of teachers, and is a

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<sup>2</sup> Lois Weiner, "Teacher Unionism Reborn" in *The Future of Our Schools: Teachers Unions and Social Justice*, ed. by Lois Weiner (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012): 193.

<sup>3</sup> An argument made by Catherine Beecher in her campaign to find employment for women that supported separate gender spheres. Madiha Didi Khayatt, *Lesbian Teachers: An Invisible Presence* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 35.

<sup>4</sup> Khayatt, *An Invisible Presence*, 40.

<sup>5</sup> Khayatt, *An Invisible Presence*, 45.

<sup>6</sup> It is imperative to keep in mind that unlike socialist or feminist, the label of maternal is one that researchers inscribe upon their subjects' actions Marian van der Klein, Rebecca Plant, Nichole Sanders, and Lori Weintrob, *Maternalism Reconsidered: Motherhood, Welfare and Social Policy in the Twentieth Century* (New York City: Berghahn Books, 2012), 10.

perception that exists even today. Additionally, women's crowding in the teaching profession combined with the fact that many female teachers lived with their families, contributed to them being paid less than a living wage.<sup>7</sup>

Teaching is still a predominantly female profession. Statistics from 2012 indicate that there is still an extreme occupational segregation in the education field with over seventy-three percent identifying as women.<sup>8</sup> The gender ratio is significantly more skewed among pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers, ninety-eight percent of whom are women, and among elementary and middle-school teachers, eighty-one percent of whom are women.<sup>9</sup> A possible explanation for the occupational segregation within the education field is the perpetuation of the belief that there are essential feminine skills needed to teach elementary school; they just need to be "good with kids." Examining wage-setting as a social practice makes it possible to see how wages both shape and reflect ideas about gender-in particular how the feminization of teaching has affected teachers' compensation and social prestige.<sup>10</sup> Data on public school teachers' salaries demonstrate their pay has lagged slightly behind inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Khayatt, *An Invisible Presence*, 52.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook*, May 2014, [http://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/cps/womenlaborforce\\_2013.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/cps/womenlaborforce_2013.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Women in the Labor Force*.

<sup>10</sup> Deborah M. Figart, Ellen Mutari, and Marilyn Power, *Living Wages, Equal Wages: Gender and Labor Market Policies in the United States* (London: Routledge, 2002), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Constant dollars are based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and adjusted to a school-year basis. The CPI does not account for differences in inflation rates from state to state. National Center for Education Statistics, "Estimated average annual salary of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by state: Selected years,

It is important to note that, although the division of domestic labor has become much more equitable in heterosexual couples, women are typically still burdened with more responsibilities at home, and have less flexibility to work overtime, something (unofficially) expected of school administrators. In 2013, there were approximately 804,000 U.S. education administrators in all levels of public and private schools.<sup>12</sup> In elementary schools, sixty-four percent of principals were women, while forty-two percent of middle-school principals were women, and only thirty percent of those in high schools. This breakdown elucidates how the occupation segregation within the field of education has resulted in a significant pay gap: the median weekly earnings for women in education administration are twenty-seven percent lower than those for men.<sup>13</sup>

Carol Caref, a former high school mathematics teacher and Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) research consultant, argues that the process of implementing CCSS has placed additional stress on the relationship between educators and administrators, already distanced from each other by gender disparities and compensation. She states of CCSS:

Because these standards were introduced from above, and were presented as something that had to be developed all at once in every grade level, right now, this has created tremendous stress for teachers. The tests are ready before the materials are ready to teach from the standards. So teachers are having to develop their own materials. They're having to go to various professional developments and trainings to learn about the standards as opposed to spending that time collaborating with other teachers on how to do a better job reaching students who are difficult to teach, which is much more important than changing the standards. On top of all the new learning that comes with having to implement Common Core standards, this came at the same time (at least in our district, and I think this

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1969-70 through 2012-13," *Digest of Education Statistics*, accessed January 2015, [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13\\_211.60.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_211.60.asp).

<sup>12</sup> AFL-CIO, "School Administrators: An Occupational Overview: Fact Sheet 2014," The Department for Professional Employees, accessed October 2014, [http://dpeaflcio.org/programs-publications/issue-fact-sheets/school-administrators-an-occupational-overview/#\\_edn1](http://dpeaflcio.org/programs-publications/issue-fact-sheets/school-administrators-an-occupational-overview/#_edn1).

<sup>13</sup> AFL-CIO, "School Administrators: An Occupational Overview: Fact Sheet 2014."

is probably true across the country as well), the same time as new teacher evaluation instruments were being employed... The other thing is the principals don't really know what they're doing around Common Core. And you know how it is when someone's in power, and they don't actually have a command of what it is they're supposed to be implementing. Then they are not able to give good direction, and instead they give mandates. And say things like, "In this lesson I want to make sure that I see this particular technique." Close reading, whatever; just as a mandate.<sup>14</sup>

Although these tensions do not lend themselves to cultivating a good learning environment, one might argue that distance between teachers and administrators abets the implementation of reforms that are not designed nor led by teachers.

Educators' exclusion from the development of a national curriculum is extreme on a spectrum that is often referred to by teachers as deskilling. Deskilling takes away teachers' autonomy to choose and/or create curriculum, classroom management procedures, and pedagogy. This can also be understood as the manifestation of Taylorism in education, a concept that helps elucidate how occupational segregation has affected teachers' inclusion in education reform.<sup>15</sup>

Taylorism legitimizes the idea that teachers who are not highly ranked are not the "right" teachers, and Value-Added Modeling (VAM) provides a tool for reformers to claim just this. VAM calculates teachers' performance in a given year by comparing the current test scores of their students to the scores of those same students in previous

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<sup>14</sup> Carol Caref, telephone interview by author, March 17, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Taylorism, also known as Scientific Management, was developed by Frederick Taylor in the late 1800s. It is based on the principle of maximum division of labor, consisting of a complex organization containing many simple jobs that was first implemented in factories. Yvonne Benschop and Hans Doorewaard, "Six of One and Half a Dozen of the Other: The Gender Subtext of Taylorism and Team-based Work," *Gender, Work and Organization* 5, no. 1 (January 1998): 7.



school years (as well as to the scores of other students in the same grade). On the subject of locating “bad teachers” through VAM, Carol Caref notes,

What’s currently happening doesn’t really have anything to do with people that shouldn’t be teaching. Chicago just instituted this very extensive, very time consuming, very expensive teacher evaluation system.... If your main objective in creating a teacher evaluation system is to rid the system of really bad teachers, you don’t need this whole extensive expensive system. The principals know who the struggling teachers are, or the students do, or other teachers certainly do.... I think the real purpose of the evaluation system is not to get rid of bad teachers. Well, it has several purposes. One is it divides teachers up, and it attempts to pit teachers against each other. It was also brought in as a way of bringing in merit pay, which we were successful in fighting back against in our last contract. Merit pay is really just another way to lower teachers’ pay because a few teachers will get more and everybody else will get less.... They also use it to divide teachers to not encourage the kind of collaboration, which is useful for students as well as teachers.<sup>16</sup>

If teachers are being divided up, as Caref argues, perhaps it is because their ability to organize is threatening to neoliberal education reformers who see teachers as an obstacle to expediently implementing new technology, curriculum, and tests.

The increasing amounts of digital campuses like Rocketship Education, which is based in Silicon Valley, but contracts with schools in Milwaukee, Memphis, Nashville, and Washington, DC, are an example of a radical solution to dealing with “bad” teachers by drastically reducing the number of teachers.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Rocketship students spend about one-fourth of their classroom time in computer labs (without teachers), using videogames to learn math and reading.<sup>18</sup> Teacher turnover is higher than in most schools,

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<sup>16</sup> Carol Caref, telephone interview by author, March 17, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon Lafer, “What Happens When Your Teacher Is a Video Game?” *The Nation*, October 13, 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/181751/what-happens-when-your-teacher-robot?page=full#>.

<sup>18</sup> In digital campuses functioning under the assumption that students can learn without the expertise of teachers, the Internet can also be considered a major tool of deskilling.

but Teach for America (TFA) is tapped to provide a source of young, inexperienced teachers.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, the portrayal of teachers in popular culture re-enforces the Tayloristic notion that teachers who receive poor ratings (or teach in schools that are “failing”) lack the right management. In the popular documentary film *Waiting for Superman* (2011), teachers are portrayed as defenders of the status quo and generally incompetent, while figures like Michele Rhee, and the “innovators” from Silicon Valley are painted as heroic in their use of business practices to “save” education.<sup>20</sup>

Under Taylorism, the hierarchical division of labor (or occupational segregation) makes it possible to separate jobs for men and women on the grounds that some job responsibilities are a better “fit” for men or women. For example, in the Broad Academy superintendent training school, funded by philanthropist billionaire Eli Broad, only one third of the Broad Academy graduates listed online are women.<sup>21</sup> The concentration of men or women in a particular job further reproduces this gendered distinction leading to a

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<sup>19</sup> Teach for America recruits graduating college students of any degree to spend two to three years teaching in public schools in low-income communities with only a few weeks of training. Teach for America, “Our Mission,” accessed April 2015, <https://www.teachforamerica.org/about-us/our-mission>.

<sup>20</sup> Michele Rhee was the Chancellor of Washington D.C. public schools from 2007 to 2010. She is also a founder of Students First, a lobbying organization, which opposes teacher tenure and supports increasing the number schools to give parents more choice. *Waiting for Superman*,” directed by Davis Guggenheim (Hollywood: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2011), DVD.

<sup>21</sup> Eli Broad sold his retirement savings business, SunAmerica, to AIG for eighteen billion dollars in 1999, and created the Eli and Edyth Broad Foundation soon after. The Broad Academy is an 18-month training program with five one-week sessions. This brief training prepares persons with little classroom experience to lead an entire district of educators. Over half of the listed graduates are no longer working as superintendents. The Broad Center, “Broad Academy Network,” accessed February 2015, <http://www.broadcenter.org/academy/network/profiles/category/alumni>.

gendered hierarchy of skills based on assumptions about what work is typically male (and paid more).<sup>22</sup> In the realm of teaching, this idea is played out in the assumption that you are either suited to do the work of a teacher or are suited to do the work of an administrator. Melissa Tomlinson, a middle-school special education math teacher in a rural New Jersey district, states,

Personally, myself, I got into a big argument with my supervisor. I kept telling her that the curriculum needed to be rewritten before we could purchase new materials. And she said, “Oh no the curriculum doesn’t need to be rewritten, doesn’t need to be rewritten.” Well we purchased these new materials, and all of a sudden the curriculum needed to be rewritten.... I have my Master’s degree in special education. I know. I went to school to learn what is right for students.<sup>23</sup>

Tomlinson’s story illustrates the conflict that arises between teachers and administrators, particularly when teachers are confident they are experts and expect to be treated as such.

### **Gender Disparity in Neoliberal Education Reforms**

Keeping in mind the significant gender division in the teaching profession, it is possible to recognize the ways in which neoliberal education reforms privilege the input of male-dominated professions in government and business, particularly in the creation of CCSS.<sup>24</sup> A gendered analysis of CCSS hearings in Congress reveals how men’s and

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<sup>22</sup> Benschop and Doorewaard, “The Gender Subtext of Taylorism and Team-based Work,” 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> Melissa Tomlinson, telephone interview by author, April 2, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> A number of assumptions were present in the CCSS hearings that are beneficial to for-profit education companies, and support the deskilling of teachers, including: school choice should function like the free market in order for the U.S. to be globally competitive, subjects such as math and science should be privileged over social sciences to improve global economic competitiveness (particularly in the realm of technology), and standardized tests scores can accurately measure what students have learned. *Hearing Before the Committee on Education and Labor, Strengthening America’s Competitiveness Through Common Academic Standards*, 111<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., April 29, 2009, 25.

women's separate roles in education are reinforced by who gets to make decisions about education reform. Indeed, there was only one woman who spoke in each CCSS hearing, and the women testifying were more closely connected to education than the majority of the men, who were either politicians or chairpersons of companies and organizations that profit from education.<sup>25</sup>

Many of the testimonies focus on economic competitiveness both globally and within the United States. Arkansas's Commissioner of Education Dr. Ken James stated, for example:

Let me end by paraphrasing something I heard Intel's chairman, Craig Barrett, say on numerous occasions: "Business knows no borders; business and industry will go to a state--to where the talent pool is located." Our governor, as well, Governor Hunt, talks about economic development and education being inextricably linked.<sup>26</sup>

It is important to note that many of those tapped to create CCSS were members of for-profit education corporations. The CCSS development work groups consisted of: five employees of ACT, two employees of America's Choice, six employees of Achieve Inc.,

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<sup>25</sup> Strengthening America's Competitiveness Common Core Education Standards, *Hearing*, ii. Howard P. McKeon- Senior Republican Member, Committee on Education and Labor, George Miller- Committee on Education and Labor, Dr. Jerry Weast- Superintendent of Schools, Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools, James B. Hunt Jr.- Chairman of James B. Hunt Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy Foundation Board, and former Governor of North Carolina, Dr. Ken James- Arkansas Department of Education Commissioner of Education, Greg Jones- retired president and CEO of State Farm General Insurance, chairman of California Business for Education Excellence, and chairman of California Business Roundtable, David Levin- founder of KIPP Schools, Randi Weingarten- president of AFT

Improving Our Competitiveness Common Core Education Standards, *Hearing*, ii. John Kline- senior Republican Member, Committee on Education and Labor, George Miller- chairman, Committee on Education and Labor, Glenn Thompson- Representative in Congress from the State of Pennsylvania, Cathy Allen- St. Mary's County, MD Board of Education Vice Chair, Douglas Kubach- Pearson Assessment and Information, Bill Ritter Jr.- State of Colorado Governor, Gene Wilhoit- Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) executive director.

<sup>26</sup> Strengthening America's Competitiveness Through Common Academic Standards, *Hearing*, 15.

seven employees from the College Board, the co-founders of Student Achievement Partners.<sup>27</sup> No one on the CCSS development work group was a classroom teacher, and the majority were employees from for-profit education companies. I argue that this is evidence of significant corporate interest and involvement in education, as well as the devaluation of teachers as creators of standards and curriculum.

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten also testified in support of CCSS. At one point in her testimony she asserted, “what ends up happening is that, all too often, teachers end up making it up every day, as they go along, because of the absence of common standards, the absence of curriculum...”<sup>28</sup> Weingarten’s background and location are important to consider here. She has never been a classroom teacher, and, as AFT president, she is frequently required to form alliances with politicians such as those present at the CCSS hearings.

One of the most important takeaways of the CCSS hearings was that the creation of these standards was a bipartisan effort. That is evident in the roster of people who testified at the hearings and in the CCSS development groups founded by the National Governors Association. Corporations have found space to push their interests in the climate of bipartisan support: promising tangible results in the form of test scores at a time when teachers are growing increasingly resistant to high-stakes testing.

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<sup>27</sup> National Governors Association, “Common Core State Standards Development Work Group and Feedback Group Announced,” accessed September 2014, [http://www.nga.org/cms/home/news-room/news-releases/page\\_2009/col2-content/main-content-list/title\\_common-core-state-standards-development-work-group-and-feedback-group-announced.html](http://www.nga.org/cms/home/news-room/news-releases/page_2009/col2-content/main-content-list/title_common-core-state-standards-development-work-group-and-feedback-group-announced.html).

<sup>28</sup> Strengthening America’s Competitiveness Through Common Academic Standards, *Hearing*, 34.

It is imperative to keep in mind that there is a great deal of money to be made in public education. The United States has more than 14,000 public school districts and spends more than \$500 billion on public elementary and secondary education each year.<sup>29</sup> It is no wonder that corporations and investors have been increasingly interested in this market.<sup>30</sup> The Thomas B. Fordham Institute announced in 2012 that CCSS implementation could cost schools between \$3 billion and \$12.1 billion nationally (representing a budget increase of between one and three percent).<sup>31</sup> Seventy-two percent of school districts planned to buy CCSS curriculum materials in 2014 and 2015.<sup>32</sup>

There are a number of corporations involved making money from selling their products to public education, but Pearson is by far the most powerful. Pearson made at least 3.79 billion dollars more from education revenue than any other company in the world as of 2012, and its reported annual sales in 2012 were 9.26 billion dollars with 4.1 billion coming from North America. Although the company is involved in many ventures, including its Penguin publishing branch, over fifty percent of Pearson's profits

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<sup>29</sup> This figure represents the combined spending of federal, state, and local governments. U.S. Census Bureau, "School Districts," last modified June 15, 2012, accessed February 2015, <https://www.census.gov/did/www/schooldistricts/>.

<sup>30</sup> There are many ways that for-profit companies can get access to federal and state education money. For example, in the state of Ohio non-profit charter schools are allowed to contract out their management and services to for-profit operators such as White Hat Management even though for-profit charter schools are not permitted. Diane Ravitch, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools* (New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 168.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Murphy, Elliot Regenstein, and Keith McNamara, "Putting a Price Tag on the Common Core: How much Will Smart Implementation Cost?" Thomas B. Fordham Institute, May 2012, accessed March 2015, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED532509.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Lawrence Delevingne, "Companies cash in on Common Core despite controversy," CNBC, March 11, 2015, <http://www.cnbc.com/id/102496406>.

come from education materials (including their subsidiary America's Choice, which was a part of the CCSS development group).<sup>33</sup>

Pearson was founded in 1844 as a building firm in England. It was not until 1998 that it acquired Simon & Schuster's education branch and formed Pearson Education.<sup>34</sup>

Pearson moved from construction, a growing market in the twentieth century, to education, a market it had not previously tapped. Its mission statement is ironically simple for an education corporation. Pearson Education aims,

to help people make more of their lives through learning. We are the world's leading learning company, with 40,000 employees in more than 80 countries helping people of all ages to make measurable progress in their lives. We provide a range of education products and services to institutions, governments and direct to individual learners, that help people everywhere aim higher and fulfill their true potential.<sup>35</sup>

The concept of making measurable progress ignores the important distinction of who gets to define progress in education. As it currently operates, Pearson has contempt for classroom teachers' expertise because they are not consulted in the creation or implementation of their products.

In many ways, education is a stable investment. There will always be an influx of students who need facilities, maintenance, food, and technology.<sup>36</sup> Private investors see

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<sup>33</sup> Pearson, "Annual Reports and Accounts 2012," accessed January 2015, [https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/corporate/global/pearson-dot-com/files/cosec/2013/15939\\_PearsonAR12.pdf](https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/corporate/global/pearson-dot-com/files/cosec/2013/15939_PearsonAR12.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Pearson, "The Pearson Timeline," accessed April 2015, <http://timeline.pearson.com>.

<sup>35</sup> Pearson, "About Us," accessed April 2015, <https://www.pearson.com/about-us.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Some food/facility corporations that are contracted in the public schools that contract with prisons, factories, and sports complexes, including: Aramark, Compass Group, and Sodexo. This brings up the question of why companies like these, which have had access to government subsidies since the 1946 National School Lunch Act, have not been receiving the same criticisms as testing companies like Pearson. Robyn Ziperstein, "School Food, Inc.: The Contracting of America's National School Lunch Program and its Nutritional Consequences," *The Cornell*

students as a captive audience for publishing and textbook companies, but schools constitute a reliable mass market only when curriculum is mandated and uniform (and not dependent on teachers).<sup>37</sup> In a 2011 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, Australian-American business magnate Rupert Murdoch wrote,

Everything we need to do is possible now. But the investments the private sector needs to make will not happen until we have a clear answer to a basic question: What is the core body of knowledge our children need to know? I don't pretend to be an expert on academic standards. But as a business leader, I do know something about how common standards unlock investment and unleash innovation. For example, once we established standards for MP3 and Wi-Fi, innovators had every incentive to invest their brains and capital in building the very best products compatible with those standards.<sup>38</sup>

The innovators that Murdoch has in mind are not teachers. Indeed, the way he refers to common education standards suggests that they are a way for companies to bypass teachers in their venture into the education sector.

### **Why the American Federation of Teachers Supports Common Core**

There are two major teachers unions in the United States, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA). Historically, each of the two has believed its own structure (the NEA as a professional union, and the AFT as a labor union, focused on collective bargaining rights) would bring

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*Policy Review* 2, no.1 (Fall 2011), accessed January 2015, <http://www.cornellpolicyreview.com/school-food-inc-the-contracting-of-americas-national-school-lunch-program-and-its-nutritional-consequences/>.

<sup>37</sup> Students have been seen as a captive audience to other groups throughout history such as Catholic Indian mission schools.

<sup>38</sup> Rupert Murdoch, "The Steve Jobs Model for Education Reform," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 15, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970203914304576631100415237430>.



it the most respect from the communities its members served.<sup>39</sup> I am more interested in the AFT because it has a history of privileging masculinity in its leadership, and because it passed a resolution in support of CCSS.

The AFT president that most embodied the masculine style of leadership was Al Shanker. Formerly president of the New York United Federation of Teachers (UFT), Shanker led the AFT from 1974 to 1997. At an AFT convention during his presidency, a group of women demanded an equal opportunity clause in collective bargaining contracts, maternity leave, daycare, and the AFT's support for the Equal Rights Amendment, and were literally laughed at by men who felt that the women's demands were "frivolous."<sup>40</sup> Although Shanker helped bring about collective bargaining, he also instituted structural changes that undemocratically privileged the conservative leaning UFT over all other locals.<sup>41</sup> CTU member Carol Caref believes that AFT is still limited by the legacy of his leadership:

I think the AFT needs to play a very active role in [organizing against education policies they believe are harmful to teachers, students, and communities]. In the last fifty years, I guess, I would say in general they have not played that role. They've much more wanted to try to take care of things behind the scenes, which ends up not really taking care of things, and it also disempowers the members of the union so they're not learning how to fight. In many cases the AFT has advocated things that many teachers feel they should not be advocating; that are harmful for us.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> In one of the most in depth studies of the history of U.S. teachers unions, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980*, Marjorie Murphy makes the argument teachers' unions' narrow focus on collective bargaining stems from the limited space in which they can function in a conservative society. Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 210.

<sup>40</sup> Men were also outraged when women tried to discuss birth control and abortion counseling. Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 259.

<sup>41</sup> Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 246.

<sup>42</sup> Carol Caref, telephone interview by author, March 17, 2015.

Caref refers to the Shanker style of leadership, which upheld the status quo by refusing to address injustices both within the AFT and in the larger society, and continues to distance teachers from the communities in which they work.<sup>43</sup>

The discussion of teachers' union history in the United States is relevant to the discussion of the CCSS, particularly as the AFT passed a resolution in support of CCSS during its 2014 convention, where an intense debate ensued. Videos of the debate, posted online by the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE), revealed rivalry between the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU), which opposed the standards, and the UFT, which supported them.<sup>44</sup>

UFT President Mike Mulgrew's speech was divisive and hyper-masculine, an emulation of Shanker's style. It received much attention on social media after the convention, partly because it was filled with violent language, and partly because he invoked an argument that seemed to blame teachers for backing down from a "fight" to claim CCSS as a teacher tool. He stated,

I understand my brothers' and sisters' frustration and anger about the Common Core. And I have heard the stories about how Eli Broad, Bill Gates, Joel Klein, and a flying saucer full of Martians designed these things to brainwash us all. But I want to bring this back to the classroom and to the teacher. There has never been a set of standards designed that took into account the diversity of all of the

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<sup>43</sup> For example, in the 1977 case of *Bakke v. Regents of the University of California* in which a white student sued for discrimination after being denied admission to University of California Davis Medical School, Al Shanker and the AFT filed amicus curiae in support of Bakke unbeknownst to the rank-and-file members. Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 264.

<sup>44</sup> The motion being debated (Resolution Two) was put forth by the UFT, and called for AFT's continued support of the CCSS. It also called for teachers to be more involved in the CCSS implementation process, and an end to high-stakes testing linked to CCSS. Another CCSS resolution was proposed by CTU, which called for the AFT to take a hard position in opposition to CCSS. The AFT Educational Committee, which reviews all proposed resolutions, chose the UFT resolution to be debated on the floor, and rejected the CTU resolution. Many speculated that this is because of UFT's inordinate influence on AFT resolutions. It is important to note that until WWII, CTU had the seat of the national AFT union. Since then, UFT has controlled the national seat. Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 4.

students that we teach. That is up to us to fix that. And I can tell you now in New York City since we have got rid of Pearson and we have now have teachers unpacking the Common Core, we are seeing its promise.

But the point, and what bothers me more than anything, is the idea that the American Federation of Teachers would back down from a fight. The standards are ours. Tests are ours. We are fighting now because they took tests away, to bring them back to us. You don't back down from a fight. They took our standards away from us, we're going to take them back from them because that is our tool; we are the teachers. They are not the teachers. It is our profession. So I stand here in support for this for one simple reason: if someone takes something from me, I'm going to grab it right back out of their cold, twisted, sick hand, and say, "It is mine. You do not take what is mine." And I'm going to punch you in the face, and push you in the dirt because this is the teachers', these are our tools, and you sick people need to be away from us and the children that we teach.<sup>45</sup>

The violence in Mulgrew's speech is startling; not only the image of his punching someone in the face and pushing them into the dirt, but also his barb about Martians, aimed at teachers who have been wary of corporate influence in the creation of CCSS. His rage is directed towards the other delegates, calling on them to toughen up for a fight (against whom, it is not clear), and chastising them for forgetting that teaching is "our profession."

Pia Payne-Shannon, a member of Minneapolis Federation of Teachers Local 59 spoke out against CCSS later in the debate.<sup>46</sup> She stated,

I am standing here in opposition of the Common Core. I am opposed to the Common Core because as a teacher in a low-income neighborhood where my kids are coming into the classroom two, three, four years behind, as a teacher in a classroom who's not trained in special education services, and I cannot have... and the kids are not getting the services that they need, in order to support me in this classroom to teach them grade-level content. I'm opposed to these standards. Who

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<sup>45</sup> MORE Caucus, "#AFT14 Video - Sarah Chambers and The Speech that Triggered Mulgrew 'Punch in Face' Comments," (AFT convention testimonies), posted August 15, 2014, accessed October 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSv34FPBIB8>.

<sup>46</sup> Although Payne-Shannon was not a part of the CTU and UFT rivalry, her testimony echoed the concerns of other CTU rank-and file members.

said, “That as professionals?” I thought we were all teachers. I thought we were all teachers. No one has come up to this mike and said that they were opposed to standards. No one has said that. That is putting words in people’s mouths. What we are saying we’re opposed to is corporate-backed standards where we were not invited to the table. That’s what we’re opposed to. You bring me to the table, you bring my professional voice to the table, and you allow me to put in my expertise into what you’re bringing in front of my kids then, yeah, I will take those standards.

And, yes, I want my kids to get out of the ghetto. I want them to get out of the [undecipherable] urban communities. I want them to rise up and do better and be better. That’s what I teach everyday. But you’re not going to continue to set my kids up because that’s exactly what’s going on. We’re setting our kids up that are coming into our classrooms disadvantaged, and every year the bar goes higher, and they haven’t even met the initial bar. I have a problem with that. I have a serious problem with that, and if you all don’t see the problem, then shame on you, shame on you. You want to talk about throwing the baby out with the bathwater? At least the baby was in the water. We didn’t even get in there. You want to talk about if I move away from Minnesota and my son has his education in New York, it’s a fallacy for me to believe that what was being taught in his second-grade classroom in Minnesota is going to be taught in his classroom in New York? Come on y’all, let’s get real. Let’s get real up in here. And you cannot rewrite something that has already been copyrighted. You can’t do it. It’s owned.<sup>47</sup>

It is interesting to note that Payne-Shannon called out speakers like Mulgrew who styled themselves “professionals,” and hinted that educators who opposed CCSS also opposed high standards. She reframed the argument with her comments, “I thought we were all teachers,” addressing Mulgrew’s dichotomous use of the term “professional” and “teacher.” Payne-Shannon argued instead that professionalism involves teachers’ being brought to “the table” to make major decisions about their profession. Additionally, Payne-Shannon drew authority from her close relationship to her students when she stated, “I want *my* kids to get out of the ghetto [emphasis added].”

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<sup>47</sup> MORE Caucus, “AFT14 Convention - Common Core Debate - UFT Leaders Vs. Classroom Teachers,” (AFT convention testimonies), posted August 7, 2014, accessed October 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToNEs-C9HCU>.

Sarah Chambers, a special education teacher and member of the CTU, also argued against CCSS using maternalist language, evoking images of children suffering:

In Chicago we have lived under the Common Core Standards for a few years now, and these standards are crippling. They're crippling our students' education and their joy of learning. As a special education teacher, I've seen my students transform from smiling children excited about learning to now students whose faces cringe when they are made to read passages that are multiple levels above their grade level because with Common Core Standards they must constantly struggle and struggle to push themselves to levels that are not developmentally appropriate, and I haven't even spoken about testing so it gets worse.... I have watched my babies cry, pull out their eyelashes one by one in these tests; say, "Pero maestra no habla Inglés. Why am I taking this test, I do not speak English?" during these exams. This is not progressing my babies and moving them towards success.<sup>48</sup>

The tone of Chambers's speech was extremely different from that of Mulgrew's. She used images of her "babies" pulling out their eyelashes in response to the stress of CCSS tests, and called on teachers to have more confidence in their expertise. Similar to Payne-Shannon, who talked about her frustration that CCSS (coupled with poor public school funding) had caused her students to fall even further behind, Chambers argued that she would not support standards until her expertise was valued. Both women positioned themselves as authorities as teachers with maternal relationships to their students, and interpreters of standards. This allowed them to address CCSS as part and parcel of the devaluation of both students and of teachers (whom they presented as allied in their frustration with the standards).

It is significant that the women speaking from the CTU and the Minneapolis Teachers' Union spoke as current classroom teachers, while Mike Mulgrew spoke as UFT president. The positioning of the delegates as teachers or administrators clearly

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<sup>48</sup> MORE Caucus, "#AFT14 Video - Sarah Chambers and The Speech that Triggered Mulgrew 'Punch in Face' Comments," (AFT convention testimonies), posted August 15, 2014, accessed October 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSv34FPBIB8>.

affected how they presented their authority on the issue of CCSS. The two classroom teachers utilized firsthand experiences in their arguments about the challenges that CCSS presents to special education students, and students in low-income districts where many are already years behind grade-level measurements. The UFT speakers tended to be in administrative positions, but they also tended to be men.

In *Feminizing the Unions: Challenging the Culture of Masculinity*, Sheila Cunnison and Jane Stageman note that expressions of masculinity within unions often include anti-femininity and a refutation of appeals to emotion.<sup>49</sup> For all the “tough guy,” militant language Mulgrew uses, his support of CCSS makes him far less militant than Chambers and Payne-Shannon who are allied with teachers, students, and parents that are resisting neoliberal education reforms. This is not the first time AFT leadership has confused militant language with militant action as will be seen in their relationship with Chilean teachers in chapter two.

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<sup>49</sup> Sheila Cunnison and Jane Stageman, *Feminizing the Unions: Challenging the Culture of Masculinity* (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1993), 14.

## Chapter 2

### **El Colegio de Profesores de Chile and The American Federation of Teachers: A Transnational Investigation**

In the summer of 2014, the Chilean Teachers' Professional Association, Colegio de Profesores de Chile (CPC), made a series of videos featuring retired educators. The videos aimed to bring awareness to a campaign called Deuda Histórica, or Historical Debt, which refers to the economic dues Chilean educators are still demanding from their government after the removal of Augusto Pinochet and return to democracy.<sup>1</sup> In addition to circulating the videos, the CPC's Historical Debt Commission organizes weekly protests in Santiago's Constitutional Plaza and in other public squares throughout the country.

One Deuda Histórica video features Patricia Garzo, a teacher who worked in the Chilean public school system for forty years. The film begins in her house as she sits looking over old photographs of her students spread out on her coffee table. She says, "Yo les conozco mas que mis propios hijos," or "I know them more than my own children."<sup>2</sup> Garzo explains she has been gathering with other Chilean teachers at Constitutional Plaza every Thursday for the last six years. The video then pans across a group of about fifty women and a handful of men solemnly holding signs. One reads, "Mi

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<sup>1</sup> Although the wages for teachers in Chile have risen since the return to democracy in 1990, the Deuda Historica campaign calls on the government to pay teachers the living wages they were denied during Pinochet's rule. Docen TV, "Testimonio Deuda Histórica," (union campaign video), posted July 23, 2014, accessed November 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IqgdZHndT0>.

<sup>2</sup> Docen TV, "Testimonio Deuda Histórica," (union campaign video), posted July 23, 2014, accessed November 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IqgdZHndT0>.

abuela dice: ¡Páguenme la Deuda Histórica!” or “My grandmother says: Pay me my Historical Debt!” Echoing testimony at the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) convention in which a U.S. teacher referred to her students as “babies,” Chilean teachers use their authority as mothers and grandmothers to address national discussions about education policy.<sup>3</sup> Under the junta, Chilean teachers issued maternalist appeals for students’ protection, and that legacy now puts women teachers in the forefront of the Deuda Histórica campaign.

Although it is happening thousands of miles away under different circumstances, the Deuda Histórica campaign is relevant to debates about education in the United States. It is a reminder that national conversations about education reform tend to be insular, ignoring the fact that other nations are having similar debates. Complicating popular arguments that there has been a corporate “takeover” of public education, a global perspective calls on us to examine other actors’ roles in education reform, and to recognize neoliberalism’s international reach as a power structure that redistributes resources upward while paying lip service to equity and choice. With such issues in mind, this chapter explores the AFT’s relationship with the CPC and asks why the AFT has not been more attentive to parallels between the two countries’ educational systems, and the activism of Chilean teachers.

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<sup>3</sup> The maternalist appeals used in the Deuda Histórica campaign have the potential to strengthen educators’ positioning, particularly because the majority of teachers in the United States and Chile are women, but also has the potential to exclude them from policy conversation as motherhood is seen as outside the realm of politics. Docen TV, “Testimonio Deuda Histórica,” (union campaign video), posted July 23, 2014, accessed November 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IqgdZHndT0>.



### Chile's Neoliberal Education System

In 1970, Salvador Allende became the first Marxist-Socialist to be democratically elected in the Western Hemisphere. He was deposed in 1973 by a military coup aided by the United States, and Augusto Pinochet came to power. Pinochet's dictatorship lasted for seventeen years, during which he restructured Chile's constitution to institute free-market economics and privatized its education system. Chilean teachers were denied wages and those who spoke out against the junta or taught censored subjects were detained, exiled, or tortured.<sup>4</sup>

Chile's education system has many points of convergence with the education system in the United States. During Pinochet's dictatorship, a group of Chilean economists, known as the Chicago boys, studied with free-market economist Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago, and designed a wave of neoliberal reforms enacted in the 1980s, including allowing private schools to compete directly with public schools and implementing a voucher system.<sup>5</sup> Decades after Chile returned to a democracy in 1990, it still has one of the most privatized and stratified school systems in the world, and has received much attention as an experiment in market-choice education.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jill Pinkney Pastrana, "Terminating the Teaching Profession: Neoliberal Reform, Resistance, and Assault on Teachers in Chile," *Workplace* 17 (2010): 17.

<sup>5</sup> Robert W. McMeeking, "Chile: Vouchers and Beyond," in *Balancing Change and Tradition in Global Education Reform* ed. by Iris C Rotberg (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education, 2004), 84.

<sup>6</sup> Cristian Cabalin, "Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise," *Policy Futures in Education* 10, no. 2 (2012): 219.

After the removal of Pinochet in 1990, Chile began a wave of education reform that included the implementation of a six-hour school day, construction of additional schools to accommodate more students, and curricular reform including a standardized test system called System for Measuring the Quality of Education or Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación (SIMCE), as well as measures that increased teacher pay.<sup>7</sup> While these reforms brought about significant changes, the decentralization of school budgets and privatization measures enacted under Pinochet remained in effect.<sup>8</sup> One reason Pinochet's education reforms have not been dismantled is that Chile's binominal electoral system makes it difficult for independent candidates to win one of the two seats in each district. As in the United States, the two major parties, The New Majority and The Alliance, have a stronghold on the government.<sup>9</sup>

In May of 2013, AFT President Randi Weingarten traveled to Chile to meet with the CPC, and create a mini-documentary, "How Free-Market Education in Chile Fails the Neediest." The goal of the video, filmed and produced by AFT, was to call on the Chilean government to make universal education a right, and, as Weingarten states, to ensure that "we [U.S. educators] know what's going on in the rest of the world."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Significantly, SIMCE is not used as a high-stakes test like standardized tests in the United States, and, thus, does not face the same amount of criticism from teachers. McMeeking, "Chile: Vouchers and Beyond," 85.

<sup>8</sup> The General Education Law enacted in 2009 by Michelle Bachelet was designed to replace The Organic Constitutional Law on Education enacted in 1990 under Pinochet, but did not alter the voucher system nor provide funding to improve the public schools. Cristian Cabalin, "Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile: Inequalities and Malaise," *Policy Futures in Education* 10, no. 2 (2012): 220.

<sup>9</sup> G.L., "Chile's Electoral System: Ending the Permanent Draw," *The Economist*, April 25, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/americasview/2014/04/chiles-electoral-system>.

<sup>10</sup> The video was directed and produced by Brett Sherman, and distributed by the American Federation of Teachers, but both the intended audience and video's source of funding

Weingarten interviewed parents, teachers, and CPC leaders to illustrate the consequences of Chile's privatized education system.

The video demonstrates that the AFT wishes to build transnational alliances to address neoliberal education policies. Weingarten states, "We have to work together to build up education across the world, public education across the world." But the video overlooks the many ways in which similarities between the Chilean and U.S. education systems highlight the global scale of neoliberal policies. The way Chilean teachers talk about the lack of respect for their profession, for instance, mirrors comments made by many U.S. educators about the devaluation of teachers. One Chilean teacher, Francisca Fuentes, says, "Although this is a wonderful profession, with the heartwarming affirmation that you get when you see the children have learned something, we all have our families and bills and expenses we have to pay for."<sup>11</sup>

It is not until the end of the film that Weingarten draws a connection between the two situations. As she participates in a demonstration with the CPC, calling for the restoration of public education as a right, she states, "We have some of the same battles. The Chilean school system is based on the direction that many of the so-called market reformers want to go in, in the United States, and it's not a pretty picture."<sup>12</sup>

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are unclear. Indeed, proponents of neoliberal education policies could easily use this video to attribute Chile's problems to its poor implementation of neoliberal reforms. American Federation of Teachers Head Quarters, "How Free-Market Education in Chile Fails the Neediest," (mini-documentary), posted June 9, 2013, accessed October 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZclDX-VAUak>.

<sup>11</sup> American Federation of Teachers Head Quarters, "How Free-Market Education in Chile Fails the Neediest," (mini-documentary), posted June 9, 2013, accessed October 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZclDX-VAUak>.

<sup>12</sup> Although they were unacknowledged in the film, I noted some other obvious parallels, such as the consequences of NCLB absence policies and those in Chile. CPC President, Jaime

### **A Forgotten History: The American Federation of Teachers in Chile**

One barrier to closer cooperation between the CPC and the AFT is the AFT's amnesia about its implication in developments that made Chile a model of neoliberalism. In 1962 the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) was founded by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), of which the AFT is a member. The brainchild of Irving Brown, who worked for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), AIFLD was a union-corporate-government alliance that conducted trainings and educational seminars with labor unions in many Latin American countries (as well as in parts of Asia and Africa), and AFT's support of AIFLD was part of its participation in the international battle against Communism. Both the CIA and U.S. transnational corporations benefited directly from these trainings by obtaining knowledge of the political leanings and ideologies of unions and union members, information later used in the massive workers' strike that disrupted Chile's economy, and set the stage for Allende's deposition and assassination at the hands of Chile's military.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to being linked to the coup through AIFLD, AFT had a direct involvement that can be traced through the International Federation of Free Teachers Unions (IFFTU), one of the international organizations that received funding from the

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Gajardo, states that if students miss classes in Chile, the schools lose funding, and it is mostly the impoverished neighborhoods in which students miss a lot of school. This is similar to the measure in NCLB that penalizes schools for student performance regardless of when students show up to school or transfer from another district in the middle of the year. American Federation of Teachers Head Quarters, "How Free-Market Education in Chile Fails the Neediest," (mini-documentary), posted June 9, 2013, accessed October 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZclDX-VAUak>.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Scipes, "It's Time to Come Clean: Open the AFL-CIO Archives on International Labor Operations," *Labor Studies Journal* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 18.

CIA in the 1960s.<sup>14</sup> U.S. union leaders, including many within the AFT, supported the anti-communist trade unionism promoted by IFFTU.<sup>15</sup> However, at this time in the United States, AFT president David Selden had publicly criticized AFL-CIO foreign policy practices. The AFL-CIO leadership turned to UFT president Al Shanker, who had demonstrated his support of anti-communist unionism through his friendship with Irving Brown, to represent the AFT abroad.<sup>16</sup> Shanker supported the work of Denise Thiry (a wealthy Belgian immigrant who had lived in Chile) when she was hired to represent the AFT in the IFFTU, even though she had never been a member of an AFT local or a teacher.<sup>17</sup> Under Thiry's watch, the Chilean teachers' union was turned into a "professional association," and IFFTU sent this message to AIFLD:

The democratic leaders are busy making the necessary contacts to re-organize the teachers under an organization reflecting the traditions of democracy in Chile. During her visit in November, 1973, Ms. Denise Thiry had the opportunity to discuss future programmes now that conditions have changed in that country. An intensive educational programme has been requested, in order to ensure a *democratic* base for the new teachers' organizations [emphasis added].<sup>18</sup>

In the process of supporting "free" trade unionism, the AFT facilitated the suppression of radical unionists in Chile. Additionally, its complacency with the agenda of U.S.

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<sup>14</sup> George Schmidt, *The American Federation of Teachers and the CIA* (Chicago: Substitutes United for Better Schools, 1990), 19.

<sup>15</sup> Schmidt, *The American Federation of Teachers and the CIA*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Irving Brown was an American trade unionist that worked to disassemble Communist unions in Europe and Africa during the Cold War. Eric Chenoweth, *Democracy's Champion: Albert Shanker and the International Impact of the American Federation of Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: The Albert Shanker Institute, 2013), 21, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Schmidt, *The American Federation of Teachers and the CIA*, 38.

<sup>18</sup> Schmidt, *The American Federation of Teachers and the CIA*, 38-39.

transnational corporations and U.S. foreign policy isolated it from progressive unions in other countries.<sup>19</sup>

In 1974, the AFT passed a resolution on “Repression in Chile,” condemning the junta.<sup>20</sup>

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers continue its call for the restoration of the civil and democratic rights of trade unions, political parties, and individuals; and RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers reiterates its call for the President and the Congress to cease rendering all aid and financial assistance to the Chilean military government until democracy is restored in Chile.<sup>21</sup>

After the resolution was passed, there was a motion put forth demanding the union investigate AIFLD’s involvement in the murder of Allende. Sandra Feldman, a delegate from the UFT and the-soon-to be vice president of the AFT, spoke in opposition to the proposed motion:

Now, there are those of us who know something about the AFL-CIO’s role in international affairs, and we know that we feel that the work that the AFL-CIO does through AIFLD is work which benefits workers in Latin America, which teaches the organizing skills including skills in developing their own trade skills and helps them organize free trade unions. Now, the last thing that the AFL-CIO would be interested in doing is to put down the militancy of trade unions in the underdeveloped countries. It is in the interest of the AFL-CIO for militant free trade unions to develop in the rest of the world, certainly in Latin America, so that the workers in those countries cannot be used as slave labor, at low wages, undermining the wages of workers in the United States. It is in the interests of workers in the AFL-CIO and in the United States and in the interests of workers in other countries for them to be able to build strong, militant, free trade unions, and that is the kind of work that the AFL-CIO is engaged in in Latin America and

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<sup>19</sup> Beth Sims, *Workers of the World Undermined: American Labor’s Role in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 18.

<sup>20</sup> Schmidt, *The American Federation of Teachers and the CIA*, 38.

<sup>21</sup> This resolution was revisited two years later, in 1976, to reestablish the AFT’s support of restoration of democracy in Chile. American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, “AFT Resolution: Repression in Chile,” accessed November 2014, <http://www.aft.org/resolution/repression-chile>.

other places around the world where they are trying to aid fellow trade unionists. I think that all this is trying to do is take a slap at the AFL-CIO, and I urge us to defeat it.<sup>22</sup>

The motion failed, and the role of the AFT in bringing Pinochet to power, unknown by rank-and-file members at the time, remained hidden until Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) member George Schmidt wrote about it in his pamphlet, *The American Federation of Teachers and the CIA*. Neither the AFT nor the AFL-CIO has formally apologized.

Before the AFT can begin to build coalition with teachers' unions in Chile and elsewhere, it must first come to terms with its past role in dismantling unions to promote free trade. Although the mini-documentary made by the AFT demonstrates that it is willing to meet with other teachers' unions, the video also shows that the AFT does not truly listen to them. I argue that it is the AFT's preoccupation with the state of U.S. education that has led it to disregard teachers' welfare and educational policy in other countries.

### **The Need for Transnational Coalition-Building**

The AFT spoke out against neoliberal policies in Chile; however, there is still much it can learn by looking beyond U.S. borders. For example, each year the World Bank publishes a study about development economics, *The World Development Report*. In 2004, the theme of the study, *Making Services Work for Poor People*, named illness and illiteracy as the two major barriers to escaping poverty. Lois Weiner, who has written prolifically on neoliberalism and education, critiques how educators are represented in the first draft of the *World Development Report 2004* in her essay, "Neoliberalism,

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<sup>22</sup> Schmidt, *The American Federation of Teachers and the CIA*, 39.

Teacher Unionism, and the Future of Public Education.” Noting that the draft she references has since been amended, Weiner claims it originally labeled teachers’ unions as “one of the greatest threats to global prosperity.”<sup>23</sup> Later editions were not so explicit, but did portray Latin American teachers’ unions as barriers to education reform.

Reforms to promote greater parental involvement, more school autonomy, more emphasis on results, and changes in the training, selection, assignment, and compensation of teachers are politically explosive--particularly with teachers’ unions. A study of five attempts at education reforms that included many of these elements in Latin America in the 1990s found that teachers’ unions opposed nearly all of them--emphatically and stridently. “Teacher’s unions in Mexico, Minas Gerais, Brazil, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador followed similar strategies in opposing education reform. All used strikes to assert their power...against unwanted changes. The power to disrupt public life, to close down schools and ministries, to stop traffic in capital cities, to appeal to public opinion--were familiar actions to them.”<sup>24</sup>

Teachers’ unions in the United States have been described similarly. For example, in 2004, Education Secretary Rod Paige compared the National Education Association to a “terrorist organization” because it was resisting the implementation of No Child Left Behind.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, at the 2015 Conservative Political Action Conference, Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin, when asked how he would address the Islamic State in Iraq

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<sup>23</sup> Lois Weiner, “Neoliberalism, Teacher Unionism, and the Future of Public Education,” *New Politics* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2005), accessed October 2014, <http://newpol.org/content/neoliberalism-teacher-unionism-and-future-public-education>.

<sup>24</sup> The section of this passage in quotes appears that way in the report, but the source is not fully cited. At the end of the passage it states: “Source: Grindle (forthcoming).” The World Bank, *World Development Report: Making Services Work for Poor People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 129.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Pear, “Education Chief Calls Union 'Terrorist,' Then Recants,” *New York Times*, February 24, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/24/us/education-chief-calls-union-terrorist-then-recants.html>.



and Syria (ISIS), responded, "If I can take on 100,000 protesters, I can do the same across the world."<sup>26</sup> He referred to protests by striking public workers, largely teachers.

One reason that the AFT has yet to form a partnership with the CPC is because its analytic framework does not elucidate how complacency with unjust foreign policies suppresses teachers' unions elsewhere. Indeed, resolutions at AFT conventions tend to address singular human rights abuses, but ignore their historical contexts and, thus, do not critique power structures that perpetuate them. Never was this more evident than in the AFT's 1988 resolution to support the CPC in its participation in the plebiscite campaign to end the rule of Pinochet:

RESOLVED, that the AFT send delegations to Chile both during and after the plebiscite campaign to monitor elections; and RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers renew its commitment to support the Colegio de Profesores in its efforts to establish an independent teacher organization in Chile with rights to collective bargaining and to strike and to support the Comando de Profesores por el No and its participation in the national Campaign for the No Vote in the plebiscite of General Augusto Pinochet. The AFT, convened in its biennial convention, sends its greetings and solidarity to the Colegio de Profesores and its courageous leader, Osvaldo Verdugo. And the AFT calls on its local affiliates to send financial, political, and moral support to the Colegio de Profesores and the Comando de Profesores por el No.<sup>27</sup>

This resolution neglects the historical background that implicates the AFT in the reason the plebiscite campaign was needed. Additionally, the resolution deploys militant language of support, but because the AFT did not build coalition with the CPC on the

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<sup>26</sup> Erik Lorenzsonn and Shawn Johnson, "Walker: 'If I Can Take On 100K Protesters, I Can Do The Same' With Islamic Terrorists," Wisconsin Public Radio, February 26, 2015, <http://www.wpr.org/walker-if-i-can-take-100k-protesters-i-can-do-same-islamic-terrorists>.

<sup>27</sup> The goal of the plebiscite campaign was motivate Chileans to participate in the plebiscite (or the direct vote of all the members of an electorate), which asked whether or not Pinochet should hold free elections. American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, "AFT Resolution: Chile," accessed November 2014, <http://www.aft.org/resolution/chile>.

ground, it missed an opportunity to learn from the Chileans in their fight against neoliberal education policies.

In Chile, there have been two major demonstrations against these policies. The first, known as The Penguin Revolution (2006), was a student-led occupation of schools, which pressured President Michelle Bachelet to address lingering inequalities from policies implemented under Pinochet.<sup>28</sup> While the uprising prompted the Chilean government to increase education spending, there were no significant structural changes. In their article, “The Public Pedagogy of Student Activists in Chile,” Michael O’Malley and Sarah Nelson argue that one of the most notable achievements of the demonstration was students’ coalition building with teachers, parents, and community members.<sup>29</sup>

Another major protest, known as The Chilean Winter Strike (2011), occurred during the presidency of Sebastian Piñera.<sup>30</sup> Many of the same students who had been involved in The Penguin Revolution launched this nationwide strike in solidarity with the Arab Spring.<sup>31</sup> Moved to action by high tuition costs that drove students and their

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<sup>28</sup> Michelle Bachelet served as president of Chile from 2006–2010 and was re-elected in 2014. She is the first female president of Chile. In 1973 Bachelet’s father was arrested for opposing the military coup and died in prison. While in medical school, she and her mother were also arrested and tortured. After Chile’s return to a socialism in 1990, she began pursuing a political career. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Michelle Bachelet,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed March 3, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1009973/Michelle-Bachelet>.

<sup>29</sup> Michael O’Malley and Sarah Nelson, “The Public Pedagogy of Student Activists in Chile: What Have We Learned from the Penguins’ Revolution?” *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing (Online)* 29, no. 2 (2013): 43, accessed on September 10, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.remote.slc.edu/docview/1501430075?accountid=13701>.

<sup>30</sup> Sebastian Piñera is a billionaire businessman and politician who served as president of Chile from 2010–2014. The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Sebastian Piñera,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed March 3, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1250481/Sebastian-Pinera>.

<sup>31</sup> Cabalin, “Neoliberal Education and Student Movements in Chile,” 224.

families into debt, the demonstrators named free university tuition as one of their major goals. The protestors' tactics were creative, and included a kiss-in and giant flash mob dancing to Michael Jackson's "Thriller." In 2013, Bachelet became President of Chile for a second time with a platform of reforming the tax system to generate more revenue for public education.

Then, in January of 2015, the Chilean Congress approved a bill that eliminated profits from state-subsidized schools and selective entrance policies. President Bachelet announced afterward that she would pursue legislation to improve teacher pay and conditions, centralize the budget for public schools, and make university education free by 2016.<sup>32</sup> The fact that Chile is now doing away with the education policies implemented under Pinochet can be attributed to the persistence of teacher-student activism in Chile.

Perhaps Weingarten was right; the direction U.S. neoliberal reformers want to go in is not a "pretty picture." Chileans have beat back neoliberalism in education to a degree beyond the AFT's most optimistic ambitions. Rather than approach the CPC as a struggling union that needs advice and assistance, the AFT will accomplish more by studying the CPC's ways of fighting neoliberalism and adapting them for a winning strategy to de-privatize education in the United States. The AFT can also look to similar models of coalition activism happening in the United States, which will be discussed in chapter three.

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<sup>32</sup> Anthony Esposito, "Chile's Bachelet prepares next phase of education reform," Reuters, January 27, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/27/us-chile-education-reform-idUSKBN0L01W620150127>.

### Chapter 3

#### **Justice, Not Just Tests: Teacher Resistance to Neoliberalism<sup>1</sup>**

In 1967, more than a decade after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, New York City's Mayor John Lindsay placed under community control the low-performing Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district in Brooklyn.<sup>2</sup> For parents and students, this meant a chance to improve the quality of education, while for some teachers this meant fear for their job security. With funding from the Ford Foundation, Ocean Hill-Brownsville elected a community board, which hired Rhody McCoy (a principal who believed that Black students could best be taught and empowered by Black teachers) to lead the district. It seemed that Ocean Hill-Brownsville was an ideal location to implement community control as ninety-five percent of its public school students were Black or Latino, while two-thirds of its educators were white.<sup>3</sup>

About a year later, 350 teachers went on strike after McCoy began firing teachers. UFT president Al Shanker worried that it would devalue the profession and eliminate job security if people with no education experience could fire teachers. Shanker called on all New York City teachers to support the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike, declaring, "This is a strike that will protect Black teachers against white racists and white teachers against Black racists."<sup>4</sup> News photographs of those on strike revealed middle-aged white men and

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<sup>1</sup> "Justice, Not Just Tests" was the name of the 2015 New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE) Conference.

<sup>2</sup> Dana Goldstein, "The Tough Lessons of the 1968 Teacher Strikes," *The Nation*, September 24, 2013, <http://www.thenation.com/article/181757/tough-lessons-1968-teacher-strikes?page=0,0>.

<sup>3</sup> Goldstein, "The Tough Lessons of the 1968 Teacher Strikes."

<sup>4</sup> Goldstein, "The Tough Lessons of the 1968 Teacher Strikes."

women with signs produced by the UFT that read “Civil Rights for Teachers. Contracts Must Be Honored. Stop Teaching Race Hatred.”<sup>5</sup> One of the reasons this strike is so memorable is because of the racial tensions that emerged between white, predominantly Jewish educators, and Black community members.

During the strike, more than half the students from Ocean Hill-Brownsville continued to attend classes, and the district brought in teachers from groups that opposed Shanker’s leadership, including the African-American Teachers Association, white supporters of community control, and New Left activist teachers who were against the Vietnam War. After the strike ended, the district was placed back under state control.<sup>6</sup>

This history is important to the conversation of resistance to neoliberal education policy. In Jonathan Kozol’s *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, he argues that supposedly general school reform policies and practices are actually targeted at poor children of color, and it is widely understood among educators that school reforms are foremost responses to the persistence of segregated schools with unequal resources.<sup>7</sup> Ocean Hill-Brownsville is an example of why it is important for teachers to recognize the ways in which Kozol’s idea plays out in their daily interaction with students, as well as how catastrophic it is for teachers’ unions to set themselves in opposition to the communities their members serve. The events of Ocean Hill-

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and the other major community control conflict with teachers’ unions in Newark, see: Steve Golin, *The Newark Teacher Strikes: Hopes on the Line* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), and Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Goldstein, “The Tough Lessons of the 1968 Teacher Strikes.”

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (New York City: Crown Publishers, 2005), 64.

Brownsville not only created a rift between educators and community members, but also affected students' quality of education.

This chapter explores contemporary U.S. examples of resistance to neoliberal education policies. It features educators' responses to increased corporate involvement in the public education system through CCSS and standardized testing. Additionally, it argues that the best models for resistance can be found in the coalition activism and social-movement unionism emerging from radical factions in teachers' unions that align with students and community members to combat neoliberal policies.

### **When Teachers Organize Around an Issue**

Just as neoliberal education policies have enjoyed bipartisan support in the United States, the opposition to CCSS comes from both sides of the aisle. This is important to consider when exploring means of resistance to neoliberal education reforms. It raises the question of whether educators should seek partnerships that cross party lines in support of a particular issue (such as repealing CCSS) or grassroots coalitions that address multiple issues and place CCSS in a broader framework of neoliberalism.

Public debates about neoliberal education policy have begun to see an influx of educators. In 2014 a number of classroom teachers, angry at the bumpy implementation of CCSS beginning in 2010, published books that specifically address the new standards.<sup>8</sup> Public controversy about CCSS meanwhile piqued publishers' interest in the subject. The

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<sup>8</sup> Books published by educators in the year 2014 include: Jose Luis Vilson, *This Is Not a Test: A New Narrative on Race, Class, and Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014); Anthony Cody, *The Educator and the Oligarch: A Teacher Challenges the Gates Foundation* (New York City: Garn Press, 2014); Jesse Hagopian, *More Than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014); and Mercedes K. Schneider, *A Chronicle of Echoes: Who's Who in the Implosion of American Public Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2014).

number of classroom teacher books may also signal that U.S. educators are coming to understand how deeply neoliberal policies will affect their profession.

Another author who has written critically about CCSS is notable education historian and Assistant Secretary of Education under Presidents George H. Bush and Bill Clinton, Diane Ravitch. Once a supporter of NCLB, Ravitch discusses the significant shift in her politics in one of her most recent books, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* (2010). She argues that educators should be the ones making decisions about schools, and that putting charter schools in competition with public schools will not improve the state of education.<sup>9</sup> She also comments on the increasing amount of neoliberal education reforms,

American education has a long history of infatuation with fads and ill-considered ideas. The current obsession with making our schools work like a business may be the worst of them, for it threatens to destroy public education.<sup>10</sup>

It is significant that Ravitch uses an argument about making education function “like a business” from her positioning as someone who used to be in support of the “ill-considered” NCLB. Her critique of neoliberal-reform supporters’ claims is more powerful because she was formerly in their camp, and found their arguments about how to improve education unconvincing. Ravitch’s prominence has helped make CCSS a high-profile issue, and she has become a cheerleader for all teacher groups opposing CCSS no matter their mission or tactics. I argue, however, that some teacher activists are more likely than others to combat neoliberal education policies, and are more worth supporting than others.

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<sup>9</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* (New York City: Basic Books, 2010), 231, 235.

<sup>10</sup> Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, 222.

Teachers' relationship to education reforms has varied throughout history. What is important to consider is how teachers know they are supporting reforms that help their students and opposing reforms that do not. For example, although many educators critique standardized testing as a tool of social stratification, some do not recognize its multifaceted history. Standardized testing was once used to support the study of eugenic theories of racial superiority and inferiority, but after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, many saw it as a way to ensure all students were receiving the same quality of education as schools desegregated. Many still see standardized testing this way.<sup>11</sup> Although there is vehement opposition to standardized testing as employed by NCLB, it is important to remember that the stated goal of the legislation was to address the disparities in education quality that further disadvantaged students living in poverty, and Black and Latino students, and that Black educators initially supported NCLB because of this.<sup>12</sup>

There are also educators who recognize the contentious history between teachers, teachers' unions, and the communities they serve as well as the perspective of parents who support standardized testing. Brian Jones, a teacher and contributor to Jesse

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<sup>11</sup> In January of 2015, more than twenty Civil Rights organizations penned a press release that supported the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), citing standardized testing as one of the shared Civil Rights principles: "Each state adopts college and career-ready state standards and provides [...] Annual, statewide assessments for all students (in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school) that are aligned with, and measure each student's progress toward meeting, the state's college and career-ready standards." The Education Trust, "Shared Civil Rights Principles for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act," January 11, 2015, accessed on January 12, 2015, <http://www.edtrust.org/dc/press-room/news/more-than-20-civil-rights-groups-and-educationadvocates-release-principles-for-e>.

<sup>12</sup> It is also interesting to consider that Act's title, No Child Left Behind, would not have been so compelling during its creation if there were not already a concern that many children were being left behind.



Hagopian's *More Than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing* (2014), writes:

The idea that standardized tests can be a leveler of advancement for people of color has some powerful roots. There was a time when black people and other US “minority” groups were excluded from public sector employment, for example. Working for the government in transportation, social services, or education, you pretty much had to know someone to get a foot in the door. When civil service exams were introduced, many (but not all) people who had been previously excluded were now at least potentially included. To this day, bus drivers, firefighters, and many other public sector employees get their positions by taking a test. In most people's minds, a test is an opportunity and believing in our children and encouraging our children means teaching them they can pass anyone's test. For people who have experienced racism in the schools, standardized tests can seem like part of the solution.<sup>13</sup>

The Opt-Out Movement, the mass refusal of educators, students, and parents to participate in high-stakes testing, appears to take into account this more nuanced view of standardized testing.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Opt-Out requires communication between teachers, students, and parents when students officially refuse the test. United Opt-Out, a national organization, has also made demands for reducing student-teacher ratios, for wrap-around services to support students outside of the school day, and for superintendent qualifications that include classroom teaching experience.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, a growing opt-out organization in New York City called Change the Stakes initiates dialogues with

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<sup>13</sup> Brian Jones, “Standardized Testing and Students of Color” in *More Than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing* ed. by Jesse Hagopian (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 72.

<sup>14</sup> United Opt Out, “One Page Talking Points Flyer,” accessed January 2015, <http://unitedoptout.com/resources-what-does-it-mean-to-opt-out/one-page-talking-points-flyer/>.

<sup>15</sup> United Opt Out, “Our Demands for Public Education,” accessed January 2015, <http://unitedoptout.com/resources-what-does-it-mean-to-opt-out/our-demands-for-public-education/>.

parents to help them refuse high-stakes tests.<sup>16</sup> However, Carol Careef, a supporter of the Opt-Out Movement, claims a “movement” has yet to emerge:

In general we haven’t seen a massive refusal to give the tests, which I think is what it would take, and we’re just not there yet. It’s a lot for teachers to do that. One thing is they’re not giving the tests in a group situation. It’s just me and my students and the principal standing at my door saying, “You better give this test.” It’s not like organizing everybody to come downtown. It’s harder, but I think that’s what it would take.<sup>17</sup>

The AFT does not help teachers keep track of frequently changing education reforms, so teachers lack knowledge of how to opt out or resist in other ways. It is left up to teacher-led organizations outside of the AFT and radical factions within the AFT to do the work of sifting through policies and proposing ways to address them.

One of the most visible organizations addressing CCSS (and the high-stakes testing that accompanies it) is the Badass Teachers (BATs). BATs describes itself at the top of its blog as an activist organization created for “every teacher who refuses to be blamed for the failure of our society to erase poverty and inequality, and refuses to accept assessments, tests and evaluations imposed by those who have contempt for real teaching and learning.”<sup>18</sup> The majority of its activity is online in twitter campaigns and press releases such as the following that addressed the AFT’s declaration of support for CCSS at its 2014 Convention:

The Badass Teachers Association, an organization that is nearing 50,000 members, is releasing this statement to express our outrage over Resolution #2 (AFT Common Core) that passed on the floor of the AFT Convention this past Sunday. The decision to support the Common Core will further erode the confidence of parents, students, and teachers who have watched the chaos that has

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<sup>16</sup> Change the Stakes, “8 Reasons to Opt Out,” January 2015, accessed on March 21, 2015, <https://changethestakes.wordpress.com/testing-info/what-parents-need-to-know/>.

<sup>17</sup> Carol Careef, telephone interview by author, March 17, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> *Badass Teachers Association Blog*, <http://badassteachers.blogspot.com/>.

unfolded in our schools as a result of standards that were never researched, tested, or piloted.... BATs look forward to continuing our work with parents, students, and education policy makers to take back public education and end the FEDERALLY MANDATED Common Core State Standards!<sup>19</sup>

BATs emerged in 2013, the summer that thousands of parents chose to opt their kids out of Common Core testing in New York. Working alongside a group of parents, Mark Naison, a professor of history at Fordham University in the Bronx, helped them to form The Badass Parents Association. That same year, BAT co-founder Priscilla Sanstead, an education activist in Tulsa, Oklahoma, suggested the formation of a partner group to “recruit teachers to support parents and students protesting high stakes testing.”<sup>20</sup> Melissa Tomlinson, a New Jersey teacher who is also in a leadership position in BATs, described the group as having two main purposes:

The first is to give a voice to teachers. Teachers have not really had an outlet for their voice.... We amplify their voices on (you could almost call it a machine) what we’ve created on social media.... The second part of what we do is, given the size that we are, we make statements.<sup>21</sup>

The statements Tomlinson refers to are the social media campaigns that address issues such as school closings, local elections, and the call for Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s resignation. BATs’ unique structure can best be described as a living petition with over fifty thousand signatures, but its digital members are united only by issues outlined in their statement of mission, which begins:

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<sup>19</sup> “Press Release,” *Badass Teachers Association Blog*, July 14, 2014, accessed September 2014, <http://badassteachers.blogspot.com/2014/07/press-release-for-immediate-release.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Naison, “The Rise of the Badass Teachers Association- A Brief History,” *With a Brooklyn Accent Blog*, October 20, 2013, <http://withabrooklynaccent.blogspot.com/2013/10/the-rise-of-badass-teachers-association.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Melissa Tomlinson, telephone interview by author, April 2, 2015.

We want to make it clear that we ARE NOT A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION. WE DO NOT SUPPORT OR ENDORSE ANY POLITICAL PARTY. The only thing that we endorse is to return public education back to the public and teacher voice to the education conversations being had at both the federal and state level. Here is what we are clearly fighting against:

1. Badass Teachers will fight against Common Core National Standards-- this stance is rooted in an extensive review of research literature, policy documents, and advice of educational historians/experts (Ravitch and Krashen). This stance is in NO WAY ROOTED TO SUPPORT ANY POLITICAL PARTY. BATs WILL NOT ALLY THEMSELVES WITH ANY POLITICAL PARTY FIGHTING AGAINST CCSS. WE BELIEVE THIS IS AN "EDUCATORS" FIGHT AND WE WILL FIGHT IT BASED ON ITS PROPENSITY TO HARM PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AMERICA.<sup>22</sup>

At the end of its mission statement, the BATs Leadership Team note: "An army of 54,000 Badass Teachers will not agree on all these elements but we do agree on most."<sup>23</sup>

The scope of BATs' activism is limited by the fact that its members do not share a pedagogical method, a teaching philosophy, or ideas on how to partner with parents and students concerned about education reforms.

The argument invoked by BATs that teachers should not be blamed for problems caused by poverty does not help alter the perception that teachers are more concerned about their own welfare than that of their students. It is also a relatively safe argument to make. Those engaging with neoliberal education policies through direct action, however, come out against corporations (in a way that could cost them profits). Thus, their

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<sup>22</sup> Badass Teachers Association, "Badass Teachers Association Statement of Our Mission," July 17, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Badass Teachers Association, "Badass Teachers Association Statement of Our Mission." July 17, 2013.

decisions to strike (or refuse to comply with education reforms they disagree with) bring them face-to-face with the potential loss of their jobs.<sup>24</sup>

In January of 2013, a group of teachers from Garfield High School in Seattle refused to administer the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test, which is a computerized standardized test given multiple times per school year. The teachers' announcement of their boycott cited many serious objections to the MAP test, including:

1. The test is not valid at the high school level because the margin of error is higher than the expected gains.<sup>25</sup>
2. The test is not aligned to our curriculum.
3. The former superintendent, the late Maria Goodloe-Johnson, brought the MAP to Seattle at a cost of some \$4 million while she was serving on the board of the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), the company that sells it. She did not disclose this connection until after the district approved the contract.
4. The MAP test especially hurts students receiving extra academic support-- English language learners and those enrolled in special education. These are the children who lose the most each time they waste five hours on the test.
5. Our computer labs are commandeered for weeks when the MAP test is administered, so students working on research projects can't get near them. The students without home computers--predominantly low-income and students of color--are hurt the most.<sup>26</sup>

Before the boycott, Seattle Superintendent José Banda decreed that principals should oversee MAP tests if teachers refused administer them. This tactic pitted administrators

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<sup>24</sup> For instance, a group of Newark Principals were fired for standing up to TFA graduate and Newark Superintendent Cami Anderson. Anderson was hired as Superintendent to restructure the Newark school system in 2011, which was a year after a Mark Zuckerberg donated one hundred million dollars. One principal was fired after she showed parents how to strategically boycott Anderson's lottery initiative (which randomly assigned students to a school) by only listing their current school on the school-choice form. Fredda Barrow, "Ras Baraka Holds Community Forum to Stop NPS School Closings," (community forum), posted January 16, 2014, accessed January 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10203160699287599>.

<sup>25</sup> Kit McCormick, a Language Arts teacher at Garfield High School made an argument at the time of the boycott that the MAP tests were not aligned to grade level standards, which explained why scores were so low. Jesse Hagopian, "Seattle Test Boycott: Our Destination Is Not on the MAP," in *More Than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing* ed. by Jesse Hagopian (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 35.

<sup>26</sup> Hagopian, "Seattle Test Boycott," 36-37.

against teachers regardless of whether or not administrators supported the test.<sup>27</sup> Jesse Hagopian, a high school history teacher and union representative at Garfield High School, argued that the boycott's success was measured both by the test not being used and no teachers losing their jobs. He also noted that a major reason for its success was that on the day of the test, many students and parents chose to opt out or found ways to make the test scores invalid.<sup>28</sup>

The Seattle boycott inspired many others, and in February of 2013 the CTU (in coalition with other organizations and in solidarity with the Seattle MAP protest) petitioned the Chicago Board of Education and Chicago Public Schools leadership to:

1. Eliminate standardized testing for children from preschool to 2nd grade and greatly reduce it for 3rd grade and above.
2. End the use of standardized testing data to evaluate students and educators and to close schools.
3. Fully disclose the cost, schedule, nature, and purpose of all standardized tests.<sup>29</sup>

Then, in the spring of 2014, three teachers from the Earth School in New York City refused to proctor state standardized tests. As they explained:

From their inception, Common Core Learning Standards have been heralded as an opportunity for privatization and the standardization of educational products.... We are acting on our conscience, built on years of experience teaching young people. In reaction to this position paper it is likely that some will characterize our choices as a betrayal of high standards, an endorsement of “watered-down” curricula, or cynically as an attempt to escape teacher evaluations and “accountability.” In a different national climate, the character and credibility of individuals who leveled those charges would be questioned. Regrettably, the denigration of teachers has become commonplace among proponents of market-based reforms, with little forethought as to the regrettable consequences that come

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<sup>27</sup> Hagopian, “Seattle Test Boycott,” 40.

<sup>28</sup> Hagopian, “Seattle Test Boycott,” 43.

<sup>29</sup> Chicago Teachers’ Union, “Petition to end the overuse and misuse of high stakes standardized testing,” accessed March 2015, <http://www.ctunet.com/blog/end-the-overuse-and-misuse-of-high-stakes-standardized-testing>.

to a school system that devalues its teachers. Teachers are motivated and guided daily by students, which is a type of accountability that is seldom understood by policymakers who have not devoted their careers to teaching. We are skilled curriculum developers and it is our ability to create curriculum that is standards based, yet responsive to our students, that distinguishes us as professionals.<sup>30</sup>

This group of educators, who call themselves Teachers of Conscience, aptly notes that the current climate of neoliberalism in education has made it commonplace for teachers who refuse to use tests they believe are harmful to students to be vilified by policymakers with no education experience.

Although no teachers have yet lost their jobs for refusing to administer a standardized test, they could lose them on the technical grounds that the refusal constitutes a breach of contract. A pattern that emerges in the stories of teachers' boycotts of the tests is that the more public they go, the more protection they have. Additionally, it seems safer for teachers to announce their refusal to administer high-stakes tests as close to the test date as possible. In March of 2015, in a NYCoRE Conference workshop on opting out of high-stakes testing, Jia Lee from Teachers of Conscience stated that a strategy that helps protect teachers' jobs is to "find a parent who is right there with you" and let that parent contact others because "you cannot fire parents."<sup>31</sup>

### **Social Movement Unionism: Addressing Neoliberalism on Multiple Fronts**

If the AFT has not been successful in resisting neoliberal education reforms, perhaps this is because teachers cannot achieve this goal alone. There have been instances

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<sup>30</sup> Teachers of Conscience, "Position Paper: Reforms and the Thinking Curriculum," April 2014, accessed October 2014, <http://teachersofconscience.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/teachersofconsciencepositionpaper.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Jia Lee, "Opt Out Clinic- Why, When and How," NYCoRE Conference, March 21, 2015.

in which teachers have built coalitions with parents and communities; each involves teachers' making connections between racism, identity politics, and economic justice in the face of neoliberal reforms. The following examples of coalition activism demonstrate that one of the most successful ways for organized bodies of teachers to resist neoliberal education reform is to engage in social movement unionism.<sup>32</sup>

In 2011, there was a series of strikes in response to Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's proposed Budget Repair Bill, a provision of which undermined collective bargaining for public employees (mostly teachers).<sup>33</sup> During the struggle, the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association (MTEA) underwent a transition from "bread-and-butter" organizing to social-justice unionism. As one activist noted, before the transition, "the importance of parent/community alliances was downplayed, and the union took the attitude that it was not their responsibility—but rather the administration's—to ensure quality education."<sup>34</sup> Becoming a social-justice union involved:

1. Building strong ties and coalitions with parent, community, and civic organizations, not only on educational issues, but also on broader issues of community concern.
2. Replacing collective bargaining with collective action. With collective bargaining limited to only base wages, we put more emphasis on organizing members to appear en masse at school board meetings, to lobby individual school board members, and to enlist parents and community members to do the same....
3. Building our union's capacity to reclaim our profession by becoming the leading education organization in the city and consistently promoting culturally responsive, social-justice teaching.

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<sup>32</sup> Both Social Movement Unionism and Social Justice Unionism are referenced in this chapter. While CTU uses the former, and Milwaukee Teachers Association uses the latter, they are essentially the same in practice.

<sup>33</sup> With the exception of police and firefighters.

<sup>34</sup> Bob Peterson, "A Revitalized Teacher Union Movement: Reflections from the Field," *Rethinking Schools* 29, no.2 (Winter 2014/2015): 15.



4. Transforming the internal dynamics within our organization to increase member and leader participation, change the role of professional staff, overhaul our communications with and among members, and encourage members to lead our work.<sup>35</sup>

Although it was not able to reverse Walker’s legislation, the MTEA measured the success of its shift to a focus on social justice in the increased participation of its members, who now see themselves as “leaders on all K-12 educational issues,” and who no longer see the union as just a place to go if “you [are] in trouble or [have] a question about insurance or retirement.”<sup>36</sup>

One of the most notable contemporary examples of social-movement unionism can be found in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). Four years before the CTU went on strike in 2012, a radical group within this AFT local known as the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE) emerged.<sup>37</sup> In 2010, Karen Lewis (an original CORE member) was elected president of the CTU, and took a firm stand against mayor-elect Rahm Emanuel’s tax-increment financing, a measure that rerouted public funds to corporations.<sup>38</sup> The CTU strike was about more than wages and workplace issues. Indeed, the CTU had worked for years to build coalitions with Chicago’s neighborhood activists,

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<sup>35</sup> Peterson, “A Revitalized Teacher Union Movement,” 15.

<sup>36</sup> Peterson, “A Revitalized Teacher Union Movement,” 17.

<sup>37</sup> CORE was inspired by Naomi Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York City: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007), a critique of neoliberal economic policies implemented in New Orleans post Hurricane Katrina. Tom Alter, “‘It Felt Like Community’: Social Movement Unionism and the Chicago Teachers Union Strike of 2012,” *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* 10, no. 3 (2013): 16.

<sup>38</sup> Tax-increment financing refers to the process by which an area is chosen to develop, bonds are used to pay for improvements, and private investors are encouraged to build infrastructure, which raises property taxes.

and sixty-six percent of parents polled supported the strike.<sup>39</sup> CTU employee Carol Caref notes,

One thing is the importance of building unity among teachers, parents, and students. I think that if you don't do that, your fight is really weakened. That was one of the things that made our strike successful. We were striking over demands for making schools better for students. The focus was not on what's good for teachers; the focus was on what's good for students, and making a conscious effort to be involved with parents and students in this fight.<sup>40</sup>

Sam Chaltain, an education advocate and former teacher, echoed this idea in an interview with CNN, noting that the CTU strike emphasized how teachers' working conditions are also students' learning conditions.<sup>41</sup>

Because no piece of education reform policy can attenuate all injustices that infest and affect public schools, it is imperative to continue to locate places where teachers, students, parents, and communities can build coalitions with each other.<sup>42</sup> The Baltimore Algebra Project, the Philadelphia Student Union, Youth United for Change (located in Philadelphia), the Boston Youth Organizing Project, Project South in Atlanta, and Coleman Advocates in San Francisco are all currently working to make the implicit right of universal education in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments explicit through the National Student Bill of Rights for All Youth.<sup>43</sup> This manifesto comes out of an education conference in Houston in 2009 at which a youth strategy meeting conceived a

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<sup>39</sup> Alter, "It Felt Like Community," 14.

<sup>40</sup> Carol Caref, telephone interview by author, March 17, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Sam Chaltain, My View: the whole world is watching Chicago, once again," *Schools of Thought (Blog)*, September 7, 2012, <http://schoolsofthought.blogs.cnn.com/2012/09/07/my-view-the-whole-world-is-watching-chicago-once-again/>.

<sup>42</sup> Lois Weiner, "Teacher Unionism Reborn" in *The Future of Our Schools: Teachers Unions and Social Justice*, ed. by Lois Weiner (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012): 191.

<sup>43</sup> Jay Gillen and Robert Parris Moses, *Educating for Insurgency: The Roles of Young People in Schools of Poverty* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014), 176.

list of student rights as an organizing tool with the potential to become legislation. The National Student Bill of Rights for All Youth includes:

1. Right to free public education.
2. Right to study curriculum that acknowledges and addresses youth's material and cultural needs.
3. Right to safe and secure housing.
4. Right to free public transportation.
5. Right to physical activity and recreation.
6. Right to safe and secure public schools.
7. Right to free health care.
8. Right to high quality food.
9. Right to employment.
10. Right to free day care for children.
11. Right to free college education.
12. Right to freedom from unwarranted search, seizure or arrest.
13. Right to restorative justice and peer evaluation.
14. Right to arts education.<sup>44</sup>

This student-led movement recognizes the need to address the ramifications of neoliberalism on multiple fronts.

The petitions, position papers, and other projects examined in this chapter make clear that teachers and students have already created blueprints for education reform. A discourse of opposition to neoliberal education in the United States is emerging alongside mounting demands for the restructuring of teachers' unions, respect for educators as creators of curriculum and useful tests, and reforms that address socio-economic stratification exacerbated by neoliberalism. This discourse of opposition is most effective when coalitions are formed, particularly when it is teachers who vocally declare an alliance with their students' communities. As Carol Caref says about the 2012 CTU strike, "We were striking over demands for making schools better for students." This is an argument that teachers' unions should continue to broadcast.

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<sup>44</sup> The National Student Bill of Rights for all Youth, "The Rights We Should Have," accessed January 2015, <http://nationalstudentbillofrights.org/the-rights-we-should-have/>.

## Conclusion

Since the controversial implementation of CCSS, educators have become increasingly aware that their autonomy in the classroom is being taken away. Their frustration is palpable in the AFT convention hearings and position papers, but both the occupational segregation in the teaching profession and the move toward Taylorism continue to limit teachers' ability to participate in education policy discussions. I argue that the AFT needs to take seriously (even more so than individual teachers) the string of neoliberal reforms that has led to CCSS, because privatization is a threat to both classroom teachers and their unions. The emergence of a free-market system in public education signals that for-profit education companies, not teachers, are the ones who have the ear of policymakers. Although unions have the power to hamper corporate access to the education system when they mobilize their rank-and-file members, the AFT has failed to do so despite the many local and international examples of teacher activism.

Because the AFT has historically allied itself against community members and teachers' unions in other countries, it lacks credibility with other activists who are challenging neoliberal reforms.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Chile, the AFT missed an opportunity to learn from CPC's successful militant tactics and coalition with students and community members that led to the discarding of neoliberal education policies implemented in the 1980s. However, the AFT can also look within the United States to model itself after examples of successful teacher activism. The 2012 CTU strike is an example of how a structural shift to social-movement unionism both empowers rank-and-file members, and alters community members' perception of teachers' unions. Because the increasing amount of neoliberal education reforms favors for-profit education corporations over

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of the Chile and the Oceans Hill-Brownsville strike.

teachers, it is vital for the AFT to invest in cultivating a unionism that empowers its rank-and-file members and partners with other activists to address neoliberalism on multiple fronts.

The education reformers of the past are not the same as contemporary reformers. During the Oceans Hill-Brownsville strike, they were parents and community members seeking to improve the quality of education in a highly segregated and underfunded district. Today reformers are elite, corporate, and, most important, they are neither teachers nor students and parents living in still-segregated and underfunded public school districts that disproportionately experience the consequences of neoliberal reforms.

Teachers need to ask questions about whom to align themselves with in the long run, and how they can broaden their framework of resistance to build coalitions. The 2012 CTU strike demonstrates that noteworthy successes can occur when teachers ask these questions and align with community-based interests. After conducting this research, I believe that is only through working with teachers, building coalitions, and addressing local educational needs in addition to federal education needs that education reforms will produce the outcomes that we all claim to strive for.

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