

FOREWORD: THE CRY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE MAW OF THE IRON CAGE

This marvelous and humane book is a cry for schools to be something other than the pawns of the state educational bureaucracies no matter at what level it exists, from Washington to Sacramento or Albany. Educational systems are being restructured by legislative fiat to become efficient machines, replicas of Max Weber's (1930) "iron cage" metaphor, in which extreme rationality erases everything that one would consider the mark of being human and humane. In this process, learning is sacrificed for test scores and the joy of teaching is eradicated, replaced by a form of routinization that transforms teachers into mindless martinets.

In the march to reduce the human variable to one that can be measured and then subsequently paid for "performance," that is, produce better test scores, we are witnessing the return of Frederick Taylor's piece rate plan under the guise of "scientific management" now called "accountability" or "educational reform" (Mullen, Samier, Brindley, English, & Carr, 2012). These reforms:

- *Sacrifice the ideal of the common school and the sale of public space in the mantra of voucher plans and charter schools which are the epitome of the privileged to retain control in their own interests (Carnoy, Jacobsen, Mishel, & Rothstein, 2005; English, 2014);*
- *The degradation of the service ethic of a profession to the basest form of greed which has already led to a cascade of corruption and disgraced superintendents who sponsored or condoned massive cheating schemes in El Paso, Washington DC, and Atlanta (Gillum & Bello, 2011; Saario, 2012; Sanchez, 2013);*
- *The commodification of public space into for profit centers for the aggrandizement of business interests (Saltman, 2005);*

- *Extreme forms of union busting because unions represent an obstacle to the form of managerialism which requires absolute, authoritarian control based on the erasure of all forms of dissent* (English, 2014)
- *The technicization and de-professionalization of teaching and of leadership preparation programs in schools of education in order to replace them with management models based on a free market ideology* (English & Crowder, 2013).

The “iron cage” has been slowly but steadily erected on a variety of fronts, sponsored by a mélange of business and government officials, neoliberal think tank pundits and incorporated into the national *Race to the Top* initiative. Put this puzzle together and you have a standardized curriculum, standardized testing, standardized teacher evaluation, and a piece rate pay system in which tests scores count for a portion or a majority of teacher compensation, depending upon the state. This is the “iron cage” Weber warned us about.

Into this emerging mechanical maw, we have the authors of these chapters: teachers, college students, attorneys, professors, and NGOs who take up the cause of social justice in schools and in the larger society, a topic which is rarely heard from those carefully constructing the “iron cage” and who vigorously defend the inequality which exists in the nation as “good inequality” and label those who see the wealth gap as a problem as “inequality warriors” (Cochrane, 2014, p. A12).

According to the Pew Research Center’s latest report, “... the wealth gap between the country’s top 20 percent of earners and the rest of America had stretched to its widest point in at least three decades” (Cohen, 2014, p. B3). This same report indicated that the median net worth of upper-income families reached \$639,400, “nearly seven times as much of those in the middle, and nearly 70 times the level of those at the bottom of the income ladder” (Cohen, 2014, p. B32). The stark reality today is captured by economist Joseph Stiglitz (2012) who put it this way:

We can judge our system by its results, and if we do so, we have to give it a failing grade: a little while ago those at the bottom and in the middle got a glimpse of the American dream, but today’s reality is that for a large segment of the population that dream has now vanished. (p. 55)

The voices in this timely volume represent a rising tide of resistance to the neoliberal dogma that is advancing and perpetuating the economic system which continues to advantage some citizens from the day they were born over others who simply happen to come into the world with less of everything all the way around (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Under the

banner of “choice,” this neoliberal agenda fails to acknowledge that for some classes of people, their *choices* are considerably more advantaged and available than others and privatization will not change those circumstances (see Bratlinger, 2003).

What some economists are pointing out is that contrary to the criticism of neoliberals that if taxes and welfare benefits are ample that condition destroys the incentive to work, data from Scandinavian countries clearly shows it isn’t true. Data from Norway, Denmark, and Sweden show that “more people may work when countries offer public services that directly make working easier, such as subsidized care for children and the old, generous sick leave policies and cheap and accessible transportation” (Irwin, 2014, p. B1). The implications are that:

... it could have broad implications for how the United States might better use its social safety net to encourage Americans to work. In particular, it could mean that more direct aid to the working poor could help coax Americans into the labor force more effectively than the tax credits that have been a mainstay for compromise between Republicans and Democrats for the last generation. (Irwin, 2014, p. 8)

The chapters in this book speak to those implications and point out how attention to social justice benefits everyone, for no society is safe from itself if some members in it have no hope for a better life and have little to lose to support or sustain it, or to blow it up. The voices in these chapters give us hope and provide examples of the way schools and society can become more caring, compassionate, and successful at the same time. That these goals run together and complement each other is worth the price of the book alone. As you encounter how social justice connections and intersections in this book can transform the schools and their societies, the voices in these chapters become a magnificent and mighty chorus.

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