Pearson and the Neo-Liberal Global Assault on Public Education

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Abstract: Pearson, the British-based mega-publisher, testing company, and Third World edu-entrepreneur, has inordinate influence over education policy around the world, yet it also has serious vulnerabilities. Corporate over-reach generates inefficacies that alienate its customer base and contributed to "blowback" campaigns against the company. This essay explores the Pearson and neo-liberal threats to education as well as threats to Pearson itself.

Powerful forces are at work shaping global education in both the North Atlantic core capitalist nations and regions historically referred to as the Third World. Neoliberal business philosophies and practices promoted by corporations and their partner foundations, supported by international organizations, financiers, and bankers, and welcomed, or at least tolerated by compliant governments, are trying to transform education from a government responsibility and social right into investment opportunities (Larner, 2000; Hill, 2013). They defend their actions as reforms designed to increase educational equity and achieve higher standards; where possible they seek out local community support. But the underlying motivation behind corporate educational reform is extending the reach of free market globalization and business profits.

In the United States the reform agenda constitutes a general assault on public education. The neo-liberal agenda includes a push for both public and for-profit charter schools, school vouchers, the constant evaluation of teachers using value-added models, opposition to tenure and teacher unions, and a high-stakes testing regime promoted by politicians from both major political parties and test, textbook, and curriculum publishers. No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and Educating All Students each received bi-partisan support in an era when most legislation was stalled by partisan gridlock.

There is "blowback" against the privatization of education but it has been hindered by the economic and political power of neo-liberal corporations and foundations. While they operate on a global scale, most struggles against their influence and abusive behavior is local, such as opt-out movements against high-stakes testing in the United States (Schweig, 2016) and efforts to enforce health and educational standards in private academies in Uganda (Rumney, 2016).

Neo-liberal profiteers have also been successful at dividing communities along racial and class lines. In the United States they have enlisted Civil Rights groups to oppose the opt-out movement as middle-class and white and antithetical to the needs of minority youth. However, they have been less successful in attempts to win support for the expansion of charter schools in minority communities (Simpson, 2015; Rizga, 2016). In India, *The Hindu*, a national newspaper, reported that as a result of efforts by multi-national edu-companies like Pearson "Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have become laboratories for privatisation and commercialisation of education in India that is almost killing the Government school education sector and likely to rob the poor people of their right to education" (Reddy, 2016). India's teachers' unions actively oppose the privatization of education, seeing it as a threat to education as well as and their livelihoods, but privatization continues to expand.

An early twentieth century political cartoon from *Puck* magazine (Kepler, 1904) portrayed the Standard Oil Company as a giant octopus with tentacles encircling and corrupting national and state governments. The image can easily be applied to the British-based publishing company Pearson Education, a leader in the neo-liberal privatization movement. Pearson has tentacles all over the world shaping and corrupting education in efforts, not always successful, to enhance its profitability. Its corporate slogan is "Pearson: Always Learning," however critics rewrite it as "Pearson: Always Earning" (Reingold, 2015).

Pearson's business strategy is to turn education from a social good and essential public service into a marketable for-profit commodity. Among other tactics to promote its products it manipulates United Nation Sustainable Development Goals as entry into global education markets. At a September 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Summit world leaders adopted a series of goals including the promise that by 2030 they would "ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education" and that they would "substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries" (United Nations, 2015). Pearson and partner corporations and foundations responded by stepping up efforts to market for-profit education in the Third World and formed a private corporation, Project

Everyone, that copyrighted the icons and summary titles being used to promote the United Nations initiative (Adams, 2015). One of the private school projects supported by Pearson as part of this effort, Bridge International Academies, was forced to end operations in Uganda, is being pressured to leave Kenya, and is being investigated by the British Parliament (McVeigh and Lyons, 2017).

Although Pearson is not the only player, since the passage of No Child Left Behind in the United States in 2002 private, for-profit charter school chains have proliferated in the United States and Pearson's global business ventures have received support from the Gates Foundation and the International Monetary Fund, Pearson is clearly a leader in these efforts (DiMartino and Scott, 2013; Jessen and Scott, 2011; Burch, 2009; Hursh, 2016). Sir Michael Barber, Pearson's Chief Education Advisor from 20112016, led "Pearson's worldwide programme of efficacy and research ensuring the impact of the programme on the learner outcomes of Pearson and its customers." Barber, who was previously a partner at the McKinsey & Company consulting firm and head of its global education initiatives, "plays a particular role in Pearson's strategy for education in the developing world, and is chairman of the Pearson Affordable Learning Fund" (PALF). Barber is the author of a number of books on delivering education, including one co-written with Katelyn Donnelly, currently the PALF CEO, that provide a philosophical veneer for Pearson's business practices. (Barber biography on the Pearson website, 2014).

Other members of the Pearson team, including Saad Rizvi, Pearson's Senior Vice President for Efficacy and head of its Catalyst for Education group, share Barber's roots in McKinsey & Company, another shadow company with global reach (McDonald 2013; Kiechell, 2010; Leonhardt, 2011). According to its website, McKinsey & Company employs "more than 10,000 consultants and nearly 2,000 research and information professionals" in Europe, the Americas, Asia Pacific, the Middle East, and Africa. McKinsey's partners include the World Economic Forum, and its alumni are highly positioned at Google, Facebook, Morgan Stanley, IBM, American Express, Westinghouse, General Electric, General Motors, Merrill Lynch, Pepsico, Deutsche Bank, Volkswagen, Credit Suisse, JP Morgan, Time Warner, Hewlett-Packard, Kmart, and Citicorp. McKinsey was also an advisor for privatization efforts in Mexico and Tanzania, the Thatcher government in the United Kingdom, Enron, and the United States military during the first Persian Gulf War. Its representatives and alumni are imbedded in high governmental positions all over the world including, in alphabetical order Australia, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Netherlands, Serbia, United Kingdom, United States, and Zimbabwe (McDonald, 2013).

Pearson justifies its push to dominate education worldwide as a campaign for "efficacy," which it defines as "making a measurable impact on someone's life through learning" (Barber and Rizvi, 2013: 2). In a 70-page pamphlet, "Asking More: The Path to Efficacy," education is presented as the engine driving global development, an engine fueled by Pearson products. Curiously, the word "efficacy" appears 101 times in the pamphlet and although Pearson is a profit-making corporation "profit" is never explicitly mentioned. Everything in the Pearson efficacy framework is presented as a public service, but everything outlined in the master plan is about entering markets and enhancing corporate profit.

However, in the introduction to the pamphlet, Pearson CEO John Fallon makes it clear that the company expects to profit handsomely from the "huge opportunity offered by the growing evidence of what works, advancements in technology and our enhanced ability to harness the power of data" (2). According to Fallon, the world is on the brink of an educational revolution, as "elements of learning can be mapped out, the variables isolated and a measurable impact on learning predicted and delivered. This can be done at every level – a single lesson, a single individual, a classroom, an institution or a whole system. It can also be done for a product or service that's designed to help people learn," products and services that Pearson will be selling. Fallon states Pearson owes it to "families around the world who spend an ever-growing proportion of their income on gaining knowledge and developing skills (rising to become the third largest budget line after food and shelter), to ensure that this investment is as powerful as possible." The company's commitment is to attract those consumer dollars, either directly from Third World customers or from their governments.

In the United States and the global-North, Pearson efficacy means marketing much maligned high-stakes tests that push rather than assess curriculum and learning and serve to promote other Pearson products. It is also big in selling data management programs of questionable value and digital platforms that are supposed to enhance instruction (Riep, 2016). Pearson is motivated by what the news service Reuters.com describes as a K-12 market that is "tantalizingly huge." According to a 2012 report, "the U.S. spends more than

$500 billion a year to educate kids from ages five through 18. The entire education sector, including college and mid-career training, represents nearly 9 percent of U.S. gross domestic product, more than the energy or technology sectors” (Simon, 2012).

In the global South, Pearson efficacy means selling “low fee” “Pay As You Learn” private schools to the poorest segments of society in Ghana, India, South Africa, the Philippines, and through Bridge International Academies in Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, and Liberia. Pearson makes its profit partly by hiring low paid unqualified people to work in the schools. While Pearson claims that its schools offer access to basic education to the most marginalized populations, they actually charge much more than many poor people can afford to pay. In Ghana, a low-income family would have to pay approximately 40% of their earnings to send just one child to a Pearson school. In the Philippines, Pearson schools are explicitly designed, not to educate pupils, but to “produce a repository of cheap and flexible labour that can be employed by multinational corporations operating in the Philippines” (Riep, 2016).

Pearson is one of the largest and most aggressive neo-liberal companies profiting from what they and major media outlets and global foundations euphemistically call educational reform. In the United States, teachers from groups like Rethinking Schools and the National Center for Fair and Open Testing see these efforts as an attempt to promote substandard remedial education programs seamlessly aligned with the high-stakes standardized tests for students and teacher assessments they are also selling (Reingold, 2015).

Pearson operates in more than ninety countries, although sixty percent of its sales during the last decade were in the United States. Pearson standardized exams purport to assess how well teachers implement Pearson instruction modules and Pearson’s common core standards. But it is questionable what students really learn or whether students are actually learning things that are important to know. Pearson markets “multimedia textbooks . . . designed for pre-schoolers, school students and learners of all ages,” creates and evaluates teacher certification exams for a number of states, organizes staff development workshops to promote Pearson products, and sells school districts with Pearson assessment tools. If a school district is using material published under the names Scott Foresman, Prentice Hall, Addison-Wesley, Allyn and Bacon, Benjamin Cummings and Longman, it is using Pearson products (Singer, 2012; Consortium for School Networking website; Pearson Education website).

Pearson's ubiquitous tentacles taint academic research as well as government policy. A June 2014 NCTQ Teacher Prep Review (Greenberg, Walsh, McKee, 2015), supposedly an unbiased research study of teacher education programs, blamed Schools of Education and professors of education for the failure of American schools and teachers. One of the members of the NCTQ advisory board is Sir Michael Barber, Chief Education Advisor to Pearson International. The Education Development Center, based in Waltham, Massachusetts, is involved in curriculum and materials development, research and evaluation, publication and distribution, online learning, professional development, and public policy development. Its funders include Cisco Systems, IBM, Intel, the Gates Foundation, and of course, Pearson Education, companies or groups that will benefit from its policy recommendations (Education Development Center website).

Despite its global reach, Pearson Education has suffered through a series of financial crises, the product of changing global economic realities, increasingly hostility to the Pearson brand, and corporate "missteps." In January 2016 Pearson, facing financial difficulties, announced it would eliminate 4,000 jobs, about 10% of its 40,000 global workforce (Daily Mail, 2016). According to its financial report, "In 2015, Pearson generated approximately 63% of its sales in the US, 6% in Greater China, 5% in the Eurozone, 3% in Brazil, 2% in Canada, 2% in Australia, 2% in South Africa and 1% in India." However, Pearson faced several big problems. "In North America, our largest market, we anticipate US college enrolments will be flat . . . ; a smaller adoption market in K-12 learning services . . . ;" and "reduced testing revenues in North America reflecting State and National Assessment contract losses worth approximately £100m announced in 2015." Solvency depends on what Pearson describes as its "growth markets." There were problems in these areas as well. "In our Growth markets (which include Brazil, China, India and South Africa), we expect continued pressure in South Africa on government spending on textbooks and lower enrolments in CTI, macro-economic pressures in emerging markets, specifically China and Brazil, off set by growth from new products such as our Wall Street English new student experience" (Williams, 2016). CTI refers to Pearson's CT1 Education Group which rise private colleges in South Africa.

The low points of Pearson's 2015 annual report include sales down £4.5 billion ($6.5 billion) or about 5%; operating profit down £723 million ($1 billion) or about 3%; adjusted earnings per share between 2010-2015 fell about 2%; operating cash flow was down more than 15%; and share price on the London Stock Exchange was down 38.2%. (Fallon, 2016).

Pearson's problems continued into 2017 and led to a major shareholder revolt. In 2017 Pearson awarded CEO John Fallon a 20% combined bonus and pay increase even though revenues from the company's United States higher education business were down by 18% and the company was slashing dividends it pays to investors. The news of the bonus, the dividend cut, and the investor rebellion drove Pearson's stock share price down on the London exchange to £6.39, about $8.25, on April 28. Pearson stock was valued at £15 ($20) two years earlier, so mismanagement had wiped billions of dollars off the value of the company (Bond, 2017). In May 2017 at the annual shareholders meeting, in non-binding vote that was a repudiation of Pearson's leadership, investors overwhelmingly rejected the payments to Fallon (Sweney, 2017).

Education Imperialism

A big part of Pearson's global rebound dreams depend on Asia and Africa. The company uses the desperation of Third World countries to modernize to enter markets and act without regulation or oversight. In June 2016 tech and education companies held a self-congratulatory marketing conference in Nairobi, Kenya called Education Innovation Africa 2016. Its official purpose was to "seek" ways "to deliver transformational and sustainable education businesses as well as collaborative approaches with African governments." The event was held in Africa, but it was not an "African" event. Of the fifty-one speakers pictured on the website thirty-two appeared to be were of European background and many of the non-Europeans were also not sub-Sahara Africans. A featured speaker was Gregg Alpert of Pearson Affordable Learning Fund. Alpert is responsible for Pearson's "programs in emerging markets to build affordable education ecosystems" and for "business development in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America." His speech made clear the real purpose of the conference. He spoke on the "need to understand the different business models as well as required return on investment that investors are looking for in a sustainable education asset." Another featured speaker at the conference was Shannon May, co-founder of Bridge

International Academies, one of Pearson's major "African" partners the company whose expansion into Liberia (Education Innovation Africa, 2016).

In 2012, Pearson established the Pearson Affordable Learning Fund (PALF) to promote private equity investment in for-profit education companies that provide "affordable" education services in developing countries. PALF originally invested largely in sub-Sahara Africa. But according to the report, Katelyn Donnelly, PALF CEO, sees India as a "test market" for Pearson before it expands its operations to other developing countries (Moses, 2013).

This means Pearson will be marketing hope to and making money off of some of the world's poorest people. Two-thirds of India's population earns less than $2 a day and over 40% earn less than $1.25 a day. India, families must spend at least one-fifth of their monthly income per child to enroll them in these for-profit schools. This usually means sending only one child, usually a boy, to school (Kamat, Spreen, and Jonnalagadda, 2016; Education International, 2016).

PALF currently focuses on emerging markets in Africa and India, but it is potentially a model for Pearson business worldwide. It includes eAdvance (South Africa), which sponsors a blended learning chain called Spark Schools; Omega, a chain of thirty-eight private schools in Ghana; Bridge International Academies in Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria; and Zaya, an educational technology and service company contracted to operate twenty-seven schools; Suiksha, a chain of pre-schools; Experifun, which markets science learning products; Avanti, after-school test prep; and Village Capital (Edupreneurs) promoting private education start-up companies, all based in India Sulaiman, 2014; Singer, 2014). But while Pearson's sales were up by 4.2% in Asia Pacific markets, they still only consisted of 13% of Pearson's total sales, and Pearson's capital in this region, property, plants, equipment, and investments in joint ventures, declined by a whopping 50%. Meanwhile African ventures offered hardly any return on investments (Pearson, 2016: 152).

Bridge International Academies claims to be the "world's largest chain of nursery and primary schools bringing world-class education to families living below the international $2-a-day poverty line" (Shannon, 2016). Bridge operates more than 400 private "academies" in Kenya, 63 in Uganda and 23 in Nigeria, and is expanding into Liberia and India (Mwanza, 2016). Bridge is a U.S. company founded in 2007. The Wall Street Journal reports that Gates, Zuckerberg, and Pearson have made more than a $100 million investment in Bridge. The company is also funded by World Bank's private sector lending arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) (Stevis and Clark, 2015; Ravitch, 2015).

The secret behind Bridge's ability to delivery cheap education in Third World countries appears to be simply cheap education designed for the Third World. In Bridge International Academies teachers are no longer teachers, but classroom managers who deliver scripted instruction. Many barely have high school educations themselves. They are tracked by academy managers who submit data on student and teacher performance to headquarters in Nairobi and Massachusetts. The school buildings are also built on the cheap with corrugated metal sides and roofs (Ross, 2014).

Despite its claim that its model will bring low-cost education to Africa's poor, Bridge International Academies is meeting official opposition in Uganda and Liberia. In January 2016 the Liberian government announced plans to turn over its troubled pre-primary and primary school system to Bridge and other private companies. It is probably the largest and education privatization scheme in Africa. Aid agencies and global civil rights groups accuse Bridge of diverting public funds that should have been invested in improving "universal, free and compulsory basic education." Liberia's teachers unions are threatening to go on a nation wide strike in the fall if the government moves ahead with the proposed private take-over of the country's schools (Mwanza, 2016). In Uganda, where the wife of the President was just appointed Minister of Education, educational policy is highly political. In May 2016, the Ugandan Ministry of Education temporarily suspended the expansion of the Bridge International Academies and the closures were then made permanent (Citizen Reporter, 2016; Admin, 2016; Agence France-Presse, 2016).

Bridge International Academies is also a company that plays dirty. Educational International (EI) reported that Bridge International Academies had Curtis Riep, a Canadian researcher, arrested by Ugandan police on false charges when they realized he was investigating its Ugandan operations. According to an EI news release, "After arriving for a pre-arranged interview with school officials on 30 May, Riep was detained by police and later charged with impersonation and criminal trespass." He was held in police custody for two days until he was cleared of all accusations. In e-mail correspondence, Riep reported that the level of intimidation was so intense that "Every school inspector and ministry official I have spoken with has told me about their unwillingness to cooperate and withhold information." After his return to Canada, Riep learned that Bridge had published a "wanted ad" in a Ugandan national newspaper accusing him of impersonating one of its employees and demanding that he be turned over to the police (Gavrielatos, 2016).

Besides its ties to Bridge, Pearson operates programs in the Philippines, Pakistan, India, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Cambodia. While most of the Pearson Asia programs seem to focus on English language instruction, in the Philippines, where Pearson partners with APEC, which describes itself as a "chain of low-cost private secondary schools," Pearson's schools are explicitly designed, not to educate pupils, but, according to report by the Education International, to "produce a repository of cheap and flexible labour that can be employed by multinational corporations operating in the Philippines" (Riep, 2016, APEC linkedin page).

Returning to India, a study by Dr. Sangeeta Kamat of the University of Massachusetts, Dr. Carol Anne Spreen of New York University, and Indivar Jonnalagadda of the Hyderabad Urban Lab, for Education International documents how Pearson, with collaboration from Indian government officials, undermines public education in Hyderabad, a city of about 4 million people and the capital of the central Indian states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (Kamat, Spreen, and Jonnalagadda, 2016).

The study charges "Private for-profit multinational corporations are making billions of dollars by charging poor families around the world to go to school. Governments are diverting significant funds and attention to what global corporations have posited as 'the solutions' to the crisis in education, loosening regulations or outright ignoring the many violations of laws and standards by multinational companies" (8).

In India, as Kamat et al note, the mobile education market should expand dramatically if rural areas and urban slums receive reliable Internet service. According to some estimates, their use in schools could make the annual global market for electronic devices like I-Pads and tablets alone worth more than $32 billion by 2020 (Kamat, Spreen, and Jonnalagadda, 2016: 46).

Multinational technology giants, education programming companies, and curriculum providers are poised to exploit these opportunities even if there are negative impacts on families, communities, and nations. In Hyderabad, Pearson has been at the "forefront" of a network of multinational corporations, private foundations, consultants, non-government organizations and local entrepreneurs are building what they call an “educational ecosystem” to support the commercialization and profit-making capacity of all aspects of education (10).

They are active in other parts of India as well. In Andhra Pradesh, the state government is in the process of out-sourcing education to Bridge International Academies, which plans to operate 4,000 “low-fee” private schools there. In violation of local and national laws, these for-profit academies employ unqualified teachers and operate from residential buildings rather than equipped schools. While these programs may prove to be profitable for edu-corporations, they ignore the magnitude of the problems facing people living in areas like Andhra Pradesh. According to a 2016 government survey, fewer than one in five elementary schools in the state have electricity. About thirty percent of the public schools have computers and Internet connection (Prasadl, 2016).

Historically Andhra Pradesh has amongst the highest elementary school dropout rates in India especially amongst female students. Large numbers of young girls are in the labor force and probably more than three-fourths are married by age eighteen. As a result, almost two-thirds of the women in this state are illiterate (Times of India, 2004). Pearson’s solution, not really a solution, is MyPedia, marketed as an “integrated learning solution for Grades 1-5” designed to “transform education delivery in school classrooms across India” (54). To diversify and profit as much as possible, it has ties to edu-corporations operating a Delhi-based coaching institute, testing services, and a network of pre-K schools.

Meanwhile governments trying to do more with less are complicit. The authors accuse local, state, and national authorities of permitting “exemptions or loopholes for private providers” while failing to fund or enforce the Indian Right to Education (RTE) Act (86).

In India, education budgets are around 3.8% of the national gross national product. This underfunding is considerably short of the 6% recommended by the United Nations and constitutes a crime against the Third World poor (16).

In addition, Pearson is active in more developed Asian countries including Japanese markets where it partners with publisher Nikkei to deliver English language instruction, its “Wall Street English” experience, and Pearson’s “Versant” oral and written assessments. It also operates a Pearson Teacher’s Club to promote the company’s products. Sometimes corporate relationships, especially when there are informal ties, are hard to track. For the last decade Pearson Japan appears to have been in and out of a relationship with a company called Kirihara-shoten. In 2011, Pearson announced that Pearson Kirihara was a “new fully merged company of former Pearson Education Japan and Kirihara Shoten” and that it had “served as Pearson's Japan office since August, 2010.” But in 2013, Pearson transfered ownership and control of the Kirihara schools publishing business to a new business, Kirihara Shoten K.K. Pearson would continue to supply Kirihara Shoten with short term financial support and access to products and services but would retain no management or ownership interest. But in 2015, another company, TAC Co Ltd, was supposed to take over all businesses managed by Kirihara Shoten K.K., but that deal seems to have fallen through. TAC is another wonder company whose stock value declined by about 40% from August 2015 to today (Singer, 2016).

According to IBIS Capital, a London-based investment bank, annual worldwide spending on education exceeded $4 trillion in 2013 and it was expected to rise sharply in the future because only 25% of the world’s nations peg education spending at the 6% of their Gross National Product recommended by UNESCO, the United Nations (Cavanagh, 2013; EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2014: 18). Pearson and its partners are maneuvering to grab as big a share of future spending as possible from this market.

Corporate Incompetence

In the United States, Pearson has often brought on its own problems by promising education customers more than it can deliver or by behind the scenes deals that led to corruption charges. In Florida, state officials blamed Pearson Education when at least a dozen Florida school districts were forced to suspend online testing this April because students had trouble signing in for the test. Other problems included slowness when students tried to download test questions or submit answers and an inexplicable warning message that students should notify their teacher or proctor about a problem that did not exist. “State Education Commissioner Pam Stewart complained to Pearson that the “failure is inexcusable. Florida’s students and teachers work too hard on learning to be distracted by these needless and avoidable technological issues.” Pearson blamed the test problems on a third-party hosting service provider. However, in recent years Pearson has had similar problems with computerized tests in Florida before as well as in other states. In 2011, Wyoming fined Pearson $5.1 million because of software problems and then switched back to paper tests.

In April 2016, New Jersey was forced to cancel high-stakes PARCC exams when students could not access the exams online. Pearson was forced to acknowledge and apologize for “intermittent disruptions to some of our online testing services.” This time they blamed a different sub-contractor. New Jersey Education Commissioner David C. Hespe called the Pearson Access Next (PAN) system malfunction “totally unacceptable.” Pearson, who administers the online standardized tests said “sorry” for the mass disruption and blamed a technical glitch (Yi and Oglesby, 2016).

In Ohio, Pearson received over 9,600 phone calls, emails and chats from Ohio districts complaining about problems administering online PARCC/Common Core-aligned English and math standardized exams after testing began in February. According to The Columbus Dispatch, “Most of the queries — 86 percent — were related to problems with administering the test, including registering students, getting them into online test sessions and responding to test policies and procedures such as make-up testing” (Boss, 2015). Students couldn’t log on, some were cut off before finishing the test, and some computers couldn’t operate the system as promised. District technology staff members were forced to solve problems themselves instead of waiting on the phone for a response from the Pearson help line. The scores of the spring assessments will not be available until next fall, which means they will not be useful in diagnosing the needs of individual students. The Ohio state legislature is investigating the impact, delivery, and usefulness of the tests.

In Indiana Pearson was awarded the contract to create the state’s ISTEP standardized tests. But the tests are so expensive that the governor and state legislature were considering getting rid of the tests altogether (Colombo, Elliott, and Cavazos, 2015). In California, Pearson lost out in bidding to administer state standardized tests and is now threatening to sue. Pearson ranked lowest among the three bidders and was rated poorly in assessment development, test security and administration, technology support and its overall comprehensive plan and schedule of deliverables of the online assessments (Fensterwald, 2015). In New Mexico, a judge is hearing a suit brought by another testing company that alleges that there were irregularities when Pearson was awarded the contract to develop

PARCC tests for the state. The legal challenge could halt PARCC testing in the state (Associated Press, 2015).

Apparently school districts and State Education Departments across the country were finally getting savvy to Pearson's practices. In 2015, Pearson also lost a multi-million dollar testing contract in New York State (Strauss, 2015).

Global Blowback

Pearson has been so ravenous in its search for profit and so negligent in the delivery of its services that it has stimulated a global "blowback" against the company. In the United States, Pearson was forced to pay New York State $7.7 million in fines to halt an investigation by the State Attorney General that found "Pearson and the Foundation have a close working relationship. The Foundation's staff has consisted of Pearson employees; the Foundation's board was comprised entirely of Pearson executives until 2012; select Foundation programs have been conducted with the advice and participation of senior Pearson executives; and the Foundation continues to rely heavily upon Pearson Inc. for administrative support." While agreeing to the settlement, Pearson Foundation representatives claimed, "We have always acted with the best intentions and complied with the law. However, we recognize there were times when the governance of the Foundation and its relationship with Pearson could have been clearer and more transparent" (Hernández, 2013: A32).

In August and September 2014, Annie Gilbertson, Education Reporter for 88.3 KPCC, Southern California Public Radio, reported on emails that appear to show complicity between officials in LAUSD, Pearson, the Pearson Foundation, representatives of Apple, and America Choice, a Pearson affiliate, to influence a LAUSD contract decision and circumvent the bidding process. Three months later, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the Federal Bureau of Investigation seized twenty boxes of records about the LAUSD's $1.3-billion plan to provide iPads to every student and a federal grand jury is examining the matter. A subpoena demanded that LAUSD produce documents on deals with Apple, the maker of the iPad, and Pearson, who developed the I-Pad curriculum material as part of an "official criminal investigation" (Gilbertson, 2014; Singer, 2014).

The United States Congress has also investigated products with a Pearson connection. The Department of Education's research arm "found that students in schools that use

Reading First, which provides grants to improve elementary school reading, scored no better on comprehension tests than their peers who attended schools that did not receive program money." A 2006 report from the department's inspector general found that "some program officials steered states to certain tests and textbooks." In addition, Congressional testimony "revealed that some of those officials benefited financially because of ties to companies that produced those products." Pearson's Scott Foresman sub-division developed Reading First instructional material and Pearson marketed a Stanford Reading First assessment package in response to the Reading First initiative of No Child Left Behind.

Through a partnership with the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) and state education departments, Pearson now effectively controls teacher certification in a number of states in the United States. According to the SCALE website, education programs in over forty states rely on their edTPA exam, administered and graded by Pearson, to make teacher certification decisions (SCALE, 2014). In New York City and State, where Pearson creates and administers teacher certification exams that leave it in virtual control over the certification process, Pearson has faced a series of political and legal setbacks (Saunders, 2015; Singer, 2015).

With their edTPA program SCALE and Pearson essentially decided they could replace student teacher evaluations by university field supervisors and cooperating teachers with an electronic portfolio. However, the package takes so much time to complete that it detracts from the ability of student teachers to learn what they are supposed to learn, which is how to be effective beginning teachers who connect with students and help students achieve. In New York State, United University Professions (UUP), the union representing professors in the state university system, has been at the forefront of opposition to these tests. They submitted a Freedom of Information Law request to the State Education Department so they could evaluate the state's teaching certification exam contract with Pearson. The original response from the state was a useless document, heavily redacted. It was nearly 75% blacked-out including 25 entire pages. UUP appealed and finally received a copy of the Pearson contract with most of the information visible. New York does not pay Pearson to develop and administer the teacher certification exams. Pearson's profits are all from student exam fees, which means Pearson makes its money when students fail. According to UUP Vice President for Academics Jamie Dangler "This means Pearson has little incentive to fix flawed exams, since they profit when students take and retake them. With four new teacher certification exams in New York State administered by Pearson, students can spend up to $1,000 or more to take and retake tests" (UUP, 2016).

In addition, New York State has been cited twice by a federal district court for racial bias in its teacher certification requirements because of the "unlawful disparate impact" of its teacher certification exams. Judge Kimba Wood ruled that the State Education Department had not demonstrated that the exams, developed by a Pearson sub-division, actually measure the skills required to be a teacher. According to Judge Wood, the National Evaluation Systems (NES), now called Evaluation Systems and part of Pearson Education, went about the process of creating the Liberal Arts and Sciences test (LAST) backwards. "Instead of beginning with ascertaining the job tasks of New York teachers, the two LAST examinations began with the premise that all New York teachers should be required to demonstrate an understanding of the liberal arts." In addition, while NES sent surveys to educators around New York in an effort to demonstrate that the LAST's "content objectives" were relevant to teaching, the sample was too small to establish the validity of the tests (Harris, 2015: A15).

Outrage and Opt-Out

The opt-out movement in the United States, aimed at eliminating the national mandate for the high-stakes testing of students, is in part a response to Pearson designed and marketed tests. In spring 2016 The Wall Street Journal reported that almost 100,000 students on Long Island in New York State, about half of the eligible students in grades three-to-eight, refused to take the Common Core aligned ELA test. Statewide, over one-in-five students opted-out of the English and Math tests (Brody, 2016: Harris, 2016: A18).

The opt-out movement was fueled by public outrage at Pearson exams, especially one reading passage on the 2012 8th grade English Language Arts test. Pearson adapted the passage from a popular pre-teen book which itself was a remake of the classic Aesop's fable about a race between a tortoise and the hare (turtle and rabbit). In this case a talking "pineapple" challenged the hare to a race, infuriated the rest of the animals when he proves uncompetitive, and gets eaten in revenge. Ironically, in the story Pearson borrowed from, the fruit in question was an eggplant. After tremendous pressure from teachers and parents, the State Education Commissioner announced that "due to the ambiguous nature of the test questions the department decided it will not be counted against students in their scores," however he also defended the test saying that in the context of the full reading passage the questions that accompanied to selection "make more sense." "More sense" of course is an opinion, not a fact, which is a problem with many questions on Pearson-made exams, where students are frequently asked to identify the "best choice." In this case students were asked to decide why the animals ate the pineapple, which the animals never actually explain, which animal was the wisest, which is definitely an opinion since no criteria were offered as the basis for evaluation, and what would have happened if the animals had cheered for the hare instead of the pineapple, which we can't know based on the passage because IT DID NOT HAPPEN (Hartocollis, 2012: A18).

Often Pearson's problem is simply heavy-handedness. In Massachusetts, teachers rebelled against Pearson's insistence that teachers proctoring PARCC exams sign security agreements that threatened their jobs if they failed to comply. The agreement included the warning, in the test manual and on PARCC letterhead, "Failure to abide by the terms of the agreement may result in an investigation that leads to sanctions including employment and licensure consequences, according to your state policies." The state's teachers union demanded that the Commissioner of Education rescind the signing directive. In response, Commissioner of Education Mitchell Chester issued a memorandum that teachers did not have to sign the PARCC Security Agreement in order to proctor the test (PARCC 2105; Singer, 2015).

In New Jersey, Pearson contracted out "test-security services" to a company based in Salt Lake City, Utah. Caveon Web Patrol provides Pearson with "continual, consistent monitoring (of) the internet for illicit sharing of valuable intellectual property." Pearson agents monitored student social media and Twitter after students took Pearson PARCC exams to discover whether they were talking about exam questions. Pearson then notified state education officials of a possible "security breach" and pressured state education officials to demand that schools discipline the students. A group called the Badass Teachers Association demanded that the United States Justice Department investigate charges that Pearson's spying on children violates First Amendment and privacy rights. The American Federation of Teacher launched a petition campaign demanding to know "who Pearson is watching, what they do with the data and what agreements they have with states to monitor what our kids are saying." In Colorado parents protesting against the collection of student data by Pearson and are demanding to know how it is being used (Singer 2015).

Worldwide Fight Against Pearson and Privatization

On a global scale, the corporate take-over and privatization of education in sub-Sahara Africa has been sharply criticized by United Nations officials and advocates for investment in public education. In a 2015 statement, 190 education advocates from 91 countries, called on governments in the under-developed/mis-developed world to stop education profiteers and the World Bank to stop financing these efforts. In May 2016, Kishore Singh, United Nations special Rapporteur on the right to education, described the out-sourcing of public education in Liberia to an American corporation as "unprecedented at the scale currently being proposed and violates Liberia's legal and moral obligations" (Education in Crisis, 2015; Mungai, 2015).

In an open letter co-signed by educators from around the world, Mugwena Maluleke , General Secretary of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), and a former math teacher and Principal of Tshwane's Rodney Mokoena Junior Secondary School, accused Pearson of "turning its back on free public education for all" in its efforts to "commercialise and privatise education at all levels." According to Maluleke, "Pearson's efforts in the global south to make education a commodity to be bought and sold is a serious threat to democracy and will ultimately increase segregation and marginalisation" (Maluleke et al, 2015; Singer, 2015).

Maluleke argues that these private for-profit "schools can take advantage of families who just want what's best for their kids. And they don't just charge burdensome fees to local families, they also undermine the education system as a public good. Education is a human right, and a high-quality education should be free to every child." The South African Democratic Teachers Union is "fighting for a free system, accessible for every child, so that families don't have to worry about which child they can afford to send to a Pearson-backed school. That's what happens too often with these 'low-fee' schools: A family can only afford to send one child. No parent should have to choose which child can go to school."

In New Zealand, a group called Save Our Schools NZ is protesting the misuse of PISA (Programme of International Student Assessment) tests and rankings by national education departments (Save Our Schools NZ, 2014). They charge "Pisa, with its three-year assessment cycle, has caused a shift of attention to short-term fixes designed to help a country quickly climb the rankings, despite research showing that enduring changes in education practice take decades, not a few years, to come to fruition." Pearson holds the contract to prepare PISA assessments starting in 2015.

Opposition to Pearson's destructive attacks on public education worldwide and lousy business practices culminated in an April 2016 challenge to corporate leadership at the annual stockholder's meeting led by union pension funds. Major British and United States labor organizations, including UNISON, one of Britain's largest trade unions with 1.3 million public service industry members, the Chicago Teachers Pension Fund, Trade Union Fund Managers, and 130 individual shareholders, purchased 40,000 voting shares.

According to UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis, Pearson is "failing to respond to changes in the education market in the United States, where it makes 60 per cent of its profits. With the movement against compulsory testing growing in popularity across America, there's an increasing likelihood that many cash-strapped states could look to reduce or even axe their testing budgets. Pearson has put too many of its eggs in the US testing basket and unions are right to be concerned that the company risks gambling away the current and future pensions of hardworking public sector employees." Prentis argues that ""Rather than continue to focus the business on politically poisonous high stakes testing, and axing the jobs of thousands of employees, CEO John Fallon should be conducting a wholesale reassessment of Pearson's strategic vision" (Singer, 2016).

In support of the boring-from-within campaign, Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, charged: "Pearson could be a company that provides educational products and services critical to the success of students around the world. Instead, it has decided to embark on a politically risky path of high-stakes testing and low-fee private schools" (American Federation of Teachers, 2016).

The opposition resolution introduced at the stockholders' meeting declared: "We believe that Pearson PLC ("Pearson" or the "Company") is suffering a crisis of confidence precipitated by a confused business strategy. The evidence is presented by our reaction to the share price, which at the last Annual General Membership Meeting (AGM) held on 24 April 2015, was trading at approximately $20.68. On 15 December 2015, Pearson stock sold for roughly $10.70. This represents a drop in price of over 40% in only seven months. This significant drop in share price calls into question the board's efforts to address the lack of confidence in the Company. We believe that the current strategic business plan has failed to produce the profits or the potential for profits that investors need. Therefore, it is time that Pearson conducts a business strategy review" (American Federation of Teachers, 2016).

While corporate controlled voting blocks representing stockholders overwhelmingly voted to reject a motion to change the way Pearson operates, the revolt drew international attention to Pearson (Strauss, 2016). Cleary, for all its claims about efficacy, Pearson is not a very efficient company. For all its claims about valuing education, the only thing Pearson values is profit, in the United States, and in all of its global enterprises.

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