Youth Culture, Education and Resistance: Subverting the Commercial Ordering of Life

Brad J. Porfilio and Paul R. Carr (Eds.)

Youth Culture, Education and Resistance: Subverting the Commercial Ordering of Life is a groundbreaking collection of essays that illustrate how youth culture has the potential to build solidarity amongst teachers, activists, scholars, and practitioners for the purposes of confronting the dominant ideological doctrine influencing life at today’s historical juncture—embazoned through neoliberalism—as well as building a society free from oppressive social formations. Several leading international scholars and educators provide empirically and theoretically rich portraits of youth challenging the commercialized status quo inside and outside K-12 classrooms. They also illustrate how cultural manifestations of youth speak directly against the social actors who continually vilify youth as the source of their own marginalization and the world’s suffering and misery.

Youth Culture, Education and Resistance: Confronting Commercialization and Neo-Liberalism continues the important legacy of critical pedagogy by remaining defiant in the face of what seems an unimpeachable foe. Given the daunting task faced by critical educators, it is heartening to see Brad Porfilio and Paul Carr bringing together such a relentlessly creative and courageous group of critical educators, who refuse to give up the struggle to bring social justice to education and the world-at-large, a world increasingly eviscerated of social services on behalf of finance capital.

—Peter McLaren, UCLA (from the Foreword)

Youth Culture, Education and Resistance by Brad Porfilio and Paul Carr is a timely and powerful intervention in contemporary literature on youth, education, and neo-liberalism. Collectively, the authors and editors open up the discussion around young people today, offering us a new and richer language to think about the specific kinds of inequalities young people face today—and how they are being resisted.

—Greg Dimitriadis, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York (from the Afterword)

What I find valuable about this volume is the way in which the authors look beyond tinkering with the policies of current or outgoing leaders. As this volume emphasizes, the real hope is to be found where it always has been found: in the resistance of youth. Our masters criminalize youth for the same basic reasons that they marginalize and racialize others: to divide and subjugate. I strongly recommend this volume to teachers and academics interested in looking beyond our immediate and localized concerns.

—Douglas Fleming, University of Ottawa

The contributors to this volume present both a theoretically complex analysis of neo-liberalism and the negative consequences for education, and a pedagogically rich portrayal of what is possible if we only placed people before profits. Engaging, critical, and ground-breaking.

—David Hursh, University of Rochester

Brad J. Porfilio is Assistant Professor at Lewis University, and Paul R. Carr is Associate Professor at Youngstown State University. Both teach in the areas of Foundations and Educational Leadership.
TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy’s (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity—youth identity in particular—the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.
Youth Culture, Education and Resistance

Subverting the Commercial Ordering of Life

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of Joe L. Kincheloe (1950–2008), who lived humanely, inspired many, loved life, and was a good friend.
Youth Culture, Education and Resistance: Confronting Commercialization and Neoliberalism continues the important legacy of critical pedagogy by remaining defiant in the face of what seems an unimpeachable foe. There are many positions articulated in this book, and each and every one deserves a hearing. All of the authors are committed to changing the social conditions that racialize, criminalize, pathologize, militarize, and de-skill our youth, who often have little more than opportunities for dead-end, service-oriented jobs once they get through their “corporate- generated high-stakes examinations”. Given the daunting task faced by critical educators, it is heartening to see Brad Porfilio and Paul Carr bringing together such a relentlessly creative and courageous group of critical educators, who refuse to give up the struggle to bring social justice to education and the world-at-large, a world increasingly eviscerated of social services on behalf of finance capital.

—Peter McLaren, UCLA (from the Foreword)

Youth Culture, Education and Resistance by Brad Porfilio and Paul Carr is a timely and powerful intervention in contemporary literature on youth, education, and neoliberalism. Collectively, the authors and editors open up the discussion around young people today, offering us a new and richer language to think about the specific kinds of inequalities young people face today—and how they are being resisted. The topics are as broad as the treatments are deep. We are asked to look beyond an (exclusive) focus on “urban education” towards rural settings as new loci of inequality. We turn our gaze towards white working-class youth in first ring suburbs in the US. We are pushed to de-link questions of nation and culture, turning towards the range of ways young people around the world—from Arab youth in France to young people in the West African country of Burkina-Faso—pick up and deploy hip-hop music to address local concerns. And, of course, we look at the ways young people are resisting their place in this new, brutally realigned world.

—Greg Dimitriadis, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York (from the Afterword)
PRAISE FOR YOUTH CULTURE

This book comes at a good time. As various authors in this volume point out, public education in the West has been perverted from Dewey’s vision of a progressive engagement with experientially-based learning to transmission-based models that serve corporate, militaristic and imperial purposes. Our youth are increasingly bored and disengaged as citizens, both in and outside of the classroom, while subjected to regimes of testing and curricula processes focused on externally defined objectives and standardized notions of competencies. These tensions have existed for a while, of course. However, what I find valuable about this volume is the way in which the authors look beyond tinkering with the policies of current or outgoing Presidents and Prime Ministers. As this volume emphasizes, the real hope is to be found where it always has been found: in the resistance of youth. Our masters criminalize youth for the same basic reasons that they marginalize and racialize others: to divide and subjugate. I strongly recommend this volume to teachers and academics interested in looking beyond our immediate and localized concerns.

—Douglas Fleming, University of Ottawa

The contributors to this volume present both a theoretically complex analysis of neo-liberalism and the negative consequences for education, and a pedagogically rich portrayal of what is possible possible if we only placed people before profits. Engaging, critical, and ground-breaking.

—David Hursh, University of Rochester

Youth Culture, Education, and Resistance brings together some of the best theoretical and qualitative work currently being done in the field of youth studies and critical pedagogy. It explores the impact of global neo-liberalism—as both policy and cultural practice—in reshaping youth culture; and even more importantly, it reveals how young people today are responding in ways that do not merely reproduce their own domination. The book ultimately leads the reader beyond critique and deconstruction, toward the hope of a radical and creative democratic praxis. The extraordinary set of essays collected in this volume raise fundamental issues of educational theory and practice in the contemporary era. This is a bold, accessible, and timely volume.

—Dennis Carlson, Miami University
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is dedicated to Joe L. Kincheloe, who has been sorely missed since his untimely death in late 2008. Although we had known Joe for a few years, he had a profound impact on our intellectual, personal, and professional development. Joe’s passion for learning and commitment to transforming schools and society came across in his intellectual work, and it inspired us, and many others, to become open to new ideas, new approaches to conducting research, and new ways of teaching. We also found Joe to be genuinely concerned with the growth and development of practitioners and scholars who recently entered the world of criticality. He was happy to spend time to help launch intellectual projects, conduct guest lectures, support candidates for positions in the academy, and befriend scholars who came under fire in academic circles for challenging the intellectual or social status quo. Finally, Joe had an incredible zest for life, which was contagious. He enjoyed playing music as much as he enjoyed having dinner with his colleagues, family, and friends. He lived every day to its fullest. It is with great pleasure that we can say that Joe was truly a model academic, pedagogue, and, especially, a friend.

We would like to thank Peter McLaren for his unwavering support of our scholarship and cultural work. Not only does he inspire us to reflect critically upon how neo-liberal globalization impacts social life in First World and so-called Third World regions, he provides us with the theoretical insights, courage, and language necessary to image how the cultural manifestations generated by youth can lead us to build a society predicated on democracy, love, freedom, and equality. We would also like to thank Greg Dimitriadis for proving us with the intellectual platform to critically examine the cultural manifestations proffered by youth and their educators within various social contexts across the globe.

Brandi Stillman, a student at Youngstown State University, was extremely helpful in providing some technical support, as well as the team in the Instructional Technology Center, including the Director, Mohamed Jadun, and Matthew Sprankle, Donald Masny, and Adeel Abbas. We would also like to thank Ginette Boucher, a good friend and artist from Montreal, for the wonderful art-work on the cover (Ginette can be reached at gin.boucher@videotron.ca).

We are also both very grateful for the support we have received from our families, and, in particular, our partners, Shannon and Gina.

Brad J. Porfilio and Paul R. Carr
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For the past two decades critical educators, their imaginations fired by the templates of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Che Guevara and others, have raised the hope that they would bring with them a new era of radical reform. This once refulgent hope flickers much more dimly today than it did during those heady years when critical pedagogy became the most shining jewel in the diadem of educational reform. As usual, the battle for educational reform was—and still is—between the liberals and the conservatives, and more recently between the liberals and the far-right. The revolutionary or critical left has never had the same power to change educational policy as the far-right. Much of that has to do with the foofaraw made by the right when critical educators speak out about pro-choice, or the death penalty, or global warming, or the debate between developing nations and the developed nations, or crimes committed by Chevron-Texaco against indigenous populations in the Ecuadorian Amazon, or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or especially when capitalism is criticized as a constitutive social relation of exploitation. When socialism is even hinted at as an alternative to capitalism, the right becomes apoplectic. And given that the corporate media sides with the far-right on protecting capitalism from any serious threat, or heavy-handed criticism, U.S. citizens have never been able to discuss publicly, and seriously, alternatives to a capitalist future.

Mainstream liberal educators have tried over the last twenty years to palliate the worst effects of the neoliberal order it has helped to unleash when it made the choice of remaining, at best, politically tepid in the face of this relentless capitalist juggernaut. While the liberal left is changing its tune somewhat in the face of the worst crisis of capital the country has seen since the Great Depression, it has allowed esurient far-right demagogues, talk-show media pundits and the Republican Party to continue to stalk the land with its anti-socialist, free market philosophy spewed forth in the most virulent pseudo-populist rhetoric imaginable, and in so doing has given them unmolested space to titivate their reputations as stalwart guardians of the ‘Real America’.

While the far-right media machine continues to serve as an ‘amen chorus’ to neoliberal social policy, effecting a political gaucherie of the most repugnant kind, liberals, in their studied refusal to challenge capital head-on (instead of focussing on capital’s excesses), have assured that this present era will end up another dark and barren patch of history. Their whispered pleas to reform and not abolish capital have helped assure inequalities will continue to persist and the social division of labor will not be seriously redrawn.

Today world capitalism is trying to re-establish itself in transnationalized formations, since its current forms are virtually unsustainable. In other words, the transnational capitalist elites are seizing opportunities to use military force to
protect their markets and create new ones. In fact, a more dangerous threat than individual acts of terror today are the multifarious contradictions internal to the system of world capitalism. Throughout its history, U.S. capitalism has tried to survive in times of crisis by eliminating production and jobs, forcing those in work to accept worse conditions of labor, and seizing opportunities that might arise in which the public would support military action to protect what the United States defines as its vital interests. One of the major mechanisms used by the ideological state apparatus to prevent a legitimation crisis over the necessity of global capitalism is the school. Students are taught to believe that if capitalism falters, democracy is doomed. But, as Marx argues, capital is an historically produced social relation that can be challenged (most forcefully by those exploited by it). A renewed engagement with and challenge to capital by means of critical revolutionary pedagogy fibrillates our social imagination, which largely has been flatlined since the ascendency of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and their successful assault on Keynesian welfare state capitalism. Meszaros has argued that capitalism’s functional division of labor is horizontal and is potentially liberating because it partakes of a socially viable universality—the harmonisation of the universal development of the productive forces with the all around abilities and potentialities of freely associated individuals. However, it is the vertical dimension of capitalism and its hierarchical division of labor that constitutes capital’s ‘reproductive horizon’ and ‘command structure,’ ensuring that living labor is subsumed by dead labor and that capital’s productive developments remain containable by the imperative of surplus labor accumulation. This results in the structural/hierarchical subordination of labor to capital. In other words, this creates a permanent structural crisis within capitalism in contrast to what some believe are only periodic, conjunctural crises. Now when we talk about the transnational capitalist class, new forms of imperialism, and the like, we need to see this in terms of the theory of the state that educators work with.

For lack of better terms, there exists left-liberal critical pedagogy, liberal critical pedagogy, conservative critical pedagogy, and variants of each of these. And as both an adjuvant to, and critic of, these versions of critical pedagogy, you have revolutionary critical pedagogy that some of us, myself included, have been trying to develop. These are very rough terms, of course, and there are probably better terms. The crucial point here is that these approaches to pedagogy have implicit or explicit views of the state. Critical pedagogy in the United States is overwhelmingly liberal, and converges, unintentionally in most instances, with neoliberal ideology, policy and practice. In general, it views the state as the “social state” (here I shall borrow some terms from Tony Smith) where symbolic and moral philosophy is the systematic expression of the normative principles of the Keynesian welfare state. In other words, it is a version of the state that offers wage labor as the normative principles of modern society. Some conservative and even liberal-centrist educators take a neoliberal state as the norm, which we could call the entrepreneurial state—in which generalized commodity production requires a world market and they follow Hayek’s principle that capital’s law of value in the abstract must be followed. Some left liberal educators look to create a new model of the state which
could be called an “activist state” (again, borrowing these terms from Tony Smith) that is based, in large part, on the work of Polyani, and includes methods of aggressive state intervention into its industrial policy. International capital still predominates in this model, and there will be an inevitable government and global trade dependence on international capital. Of course, those who govern the activist state desire to place government restrictions on its rules and regulations for attracting global investment capital. So there is a concerted attempt to lessen the worst and most exploitative aspects of the state. Then again, you have some left-liberal educators who prefer the concept of the “cosmopolitan state”. This model is largely derived from the work of Habermas, where forms of global market governance can prevail that is intra-national rather than national; here there is a focus on the development of a global civil society. Well, I don’t ascribe to any of these models. I believe it is impossible to manage democratically wage labor on a global scale by placing severe restrictions on global financial and derivative markets.

What about the question of property ownership of the mass means of production. Nathalia Jaramillo and I spoke a few weeks ago at IMPA-Industrias Metalúrgicas y Plásticas Argentina, where 172 workers make aluminum products, such as cans, foils and wrappers. How would the cosmopolitan state help these workers? Yes, there would be a stress on greater democratic control of the economy by those who lack access to capital, but it would still support wage labor—and Marx has shown us that wage labor only “appears” to include an equal exchange. Workers sell their capacity to labor to an employer who is able to extract a higher value from the worker than the worker’s means of surviving. How could a global state founded upon wage labor work? It is, in my mind, impossible to build a socialist state based on nationalized property because, as Peter Hudis has pointed out, capital can exist as a social form of mediation even in the absence of private ownership. Well, of course, there are other models, such as market socialist models. Some of them incorporate a commodity market within a system of democratically self-managed and worker-run industries. I am not denigrating these more progressive models; some of them have good ideas and are much better than the neoliberal state model that has now international reach.

So basically, let me break the situation down in these two fundamental terms. We need to understand two basic and competing visions of globalization. Let me begin with the first version, that we could call civil societarian. For instance, if we believe that we have witnessed a qualitative transformation of capitalism, beginning in the post-World War II era, a transformation that is grounded in information-based technology and automation, that has basically marginalized manufacturing and productive capital, and if we believe that finance capital flows effortlessly across national boundaries, and if we believe that we have an information or knowledge economy of immaterial labor where productive capital and the working classes are becoming increasingly irrelevant to social transformation, and that the nation state is powerless, then you will probably ascribe to some kind of civil societarianism—putting one’s faith in civil society, in NGOs and in the new social movements—because you probably believe that civil society or the public sphere is at least partially autonomous from the state and the market. But such a
position ultimately facilitates the privatization of former state-run services, and represents a turn from the global to the local for public funding of social service projects, as John Holst and others have argued. However, I take another position. This position maintains that we have not arrived at the end of the nation state (although we should de-reify the nation state and not assume a nation state-centric position) but that the world has been divided into the global proletariat and working class, and the working-class and the peasantry are at the forefront of anti-neo-liberalism struggles. This view maintains that the fundamental contradictions of our time are not external relations such as the local versus the global, but contradictory relations internal to the process of capitalism itself, contradictions that manifest themselves through the long history of vertical and horizontal expansions of capitalism.

So instead of ascribing to the civil societarian position which utilizes a limited reproductive praxis (where one merely tries to better one’s position as an individual or a group within a dialectical relation) I ascribe to a critical revolutionary praxis where one understands the internal relations of capital and struggles to overcome them, to transcend them by means of creating a world where value production ceases to exist. But the question we need to ask is: How do you abolish value production, wage labor? We need to go beyond state intervention into the economy, since this is not socialism. State intervention into the economy doesn’t prevent value-producing labor, alienated labor. In fact, capital is a social relation of abstract labor, and it is precisely capital as a social relation that must be transcended. Of course, this is the challenge for all of us. To go up against the ideological state apparatuses (that also have coercive practices such as non-promotion and systems of privilege for those who follow the rules) and the repressive state apparatuses (that are also coercive in that they secure internal unity and social authority ideologically via patriotism and nationalism) is not an easy task. There are disjunctions and disarticulations within and between different social spaces of the superstructure and we must work within those, in spaces of the legal and ideological systems that can be transformed in the interests of social and economic justice.

The struggle is multi-pronged. Let me say that I do not think the civil societarian position is useless. It can do much good. And I do not think we should juxtapose the civil societarian position against the critical revolutionary position. We should take a dialectical approach. Dialectics is not about juxtaposition or “either-or” but about mediation or “both-and”. So we can use them both. But the main point I have been making is that we need to be guided by a larger social vision that does not assume the state and civil society are autonomous. Let’s face it, civil society is part and parcel of state apparatuses. We fool ourselves if we think there is a strong autonomy in civil society. So the larger vision takes into consideration the social totality, the way capitalism has permeated all spheres of social life, including civil society or the public sphere. This mandates that we need to create a social universe outside of capital’s value form. Anything short of this will not bring about emancipation. Revolutionary critical pedagogy strives for the abolition of capital as a social relation. This is the major difference between my position and that of many
other critical educators. Now if you change the economic basis of production, will this change our behavior as social beings? The evolutionary biologists seem to be saying no, that there wouldn’t be much change. While people might still be inclined to further their self-interest, that doesn’t seem much of an excuse to jettison the search for a socialist or ecosocialist alternative to capitalism. Although it might be possible to get better therapy for the persistence of rampant self-interest in a socialist society, given that the world of capital seems to have been invaded by what Barbara Ehrenreich in her book, *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking has Undermined America*, calls “positive psychologists”— those therapists who are out to claim a market share in our corporate world, selling happiness (on the bizarre concept of a ‘positive social science’) to corporations eager to increase employees’ optimism, health, and ability so that they can perform their jobs more efficiently and without complaint, since managed care providers and insurance companies have turned against traditional pathology-oriented psychotherapy because it’s too ‘negative’ (meaning too expensive).

*Youth Culture, Education and Resistance: Confronting Commercialization and Neo-Liberalism* continues the important legacy of critical pedagogy by remaining defiant in the face of what seems an unimpeachable foe. There are many positions articulated in this book, and each and every one deserves a hearing. All of the authors are committed to changing the social conditions that racialize, criminalize, pathologize, militarize, and de-skill our youth, who often have little more than opportunities for dead-end, service-oriented jobs once they get through their “corporately-generated high-stakes examinations”. Given the daunting task faced by critical educators, it is heartening to see Brad Porfilio and Paul Carr bringing together such a relentlessly creative and courageous group of critical educators, who refuse to give up the struggle to bring social justice to education and the world-at-large, a world increasingly eviscerated of social services on behalf of finance capital. The real protagonist in this book is, of course, youth, and youth-led initiatives in the face of the havoc of capitalism—what the editors refer to as “bootstrap capitalism”. The contributors to this work are closely aligned with youth, youth culture, and youth movements that are not only resisting the blandishments of neoliberal capital and policies and actively resisting them, but also searching for alternatives to the social relations that continue to hold the United States hostage to a dream swindled and a vision betrayed.
INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter provides a framework and background to understand the political, economic and social forces behind the intense suffering and oppression experienced by citizens in a globalized world at today’s socio-historical juncture as well as the concomitant damage inflicted upon the environment and other ecological species. We attempt to capture how the current manifestation of capitalism—neoliberalism—is responsible for generating, arguably, a child-hating environment, one that is antithetical to fostering the social, physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being of children. This chapter also suggests how, despite the stark social and economic realities that exist in the age of “disaster capitalism” (Klein, 2007), some of the cultural manifestations and cultural work generated by youth, both inside and outside of educational institutions, have the propensity to serve as sites of resistance to, and transgression from, the commercial ordering of life. Specifically, the contributors of this volume get beyond the socially degenerative portraits continually generated by corporate leaders, politicians, and right-wing fundamentalist religious zealots, who often characterize youth as violent, lazy, aberrant, or disaffected social animals, individuals who ought not only be contained by the state by force, repression and intimidation, but also ought to be blamed for their own as well as the world’s suffering and misery (Giroux, 1997, 2009a; Carlson, 2005). It is ironic that those who characterize youth as pathological or as the source of social problems are the same individuals who have the power to implement policies and practices, within socio-political and economic outlets, that perpetuate the very conditions causing the prevalence of social maladies as well as the social and economic dislocation of youth.

Through their own engagement with youth in K-12 classrooms, through their work with youth in various informal learning spaces (Haworth, this volume; Dimitriadis & Weis, 2008), through their critical analysis of youths’ cultural manifestations and social activism, which are often part of broader counter-hegemonic social movements, the contributors in this book, individually and collectively, clearly demonstrate that many of today’s “border youth” are socially-aware, civic-minded citizens who possess the critical capacity and courage not only to confront the institutions, arrangements, and policies fueling inequity in their communities, schools, and in other socially-mediated environments, but also hold the determination to forge collective movements predicated on challenging the classist,
PORFILIO AND CARR

racist, misogynist, and able-bodied status quo. Following the line of research generated recently by transformative scholars who are committed to characterizing youth in a more socially-generative light, as critical agents capable of challenging institutional failure in schools, their communities and the wider society (Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarto, 2006; Dolby & Rizvi, 2008; Giardina, & Donnelly, 2008), the contributors take us inside K-12 classrooms to pinpoint how youth function as stewards of social and personal transformation through the creation of youth-led initiatives that are designed to bring awareness to, and the excavation of, social inequalities, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. Further, they elucidate numerous alternative narratives generated by youth through music, photographs, and other forms of technology, which speak to the forces causing over-policing within racialized and impoverished communities, consumerism, environmental degradation, militarism, and poverty, and highlight how the neo-liberal agenda in schools is pushing minoritized youth to engage in various forms of resistance strategies for the purposes of empowering their ethno-cultural, racial, or class-based communities, seeking to maintain a sense of empowerment within debilitating educational structures. Finally, the contributors suggest how the current economic crisis provides critical educators with the opportunity to cross age, class, race and intellectual boarders to build a movement of solidarity with youth and other progressive colleagues in academia with a view to engendering cultural work capable of subverting the corporate and military hijacking of childhood, schooling, and other socially-mediated activities unfolding across the global landscape. Ultimately, to not engage in such a struggle would signal a further acquiescence for diverse peoples and interests outside of the power structure in the face of deleterious hegemonic forces that diminish the possibility of a vibrant democracy in and through education (Kincheloe, 2008; Lund & Carr, 2008).

The Rise of Neo-liberalism and its Impact on Youth

Over the past thirty years, transitional corporations, many Western politicians, captains of industry and others enmeshed in neo-liberal expansion have been on a relentless quest to commodify all social life (Hill, 2003). Stressing the virtues of the market-place within education has had the effect of further distancing communities and societies from accessing power, reducing educational debates to functionalist aims, scores and rankings (McLaren, 2007; Kincheloe, 2007). Although most political pundits and news reporters do not make reference to the term in the mainstream media, neo-liberalism is the most dominant doctrine influencing the unfolding of events across the globe. According to Piven, (2007, p. 13) the doctrine is behind the creation of policies and practices that led to “the deregulation of corporations, and particularly financial institutions; the rollback of public services and benefits programs; curbing labor unions; ‘free trade’ policies; and wherever possible the replacement of public programs with private markets.” To implement pro-capitalist policies and corporatist logics that strengthen their interests, corporate leaders have utilized communication technologies, military forces, and international associations, which have coalesced to form a de facto
world government, with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization forming the center-piece (Chomsky, 1999; Giroux, 2004; Klein, 2007; Porfilio & Malott, 2008). This “any means necessary approach” to propagate policies, practices and knowledge designed to control labor power and extract the world of its resources has exponentially intensified suffering and pain inflicted on large swaths of the world’s population, while concomitantly concentrating the ruling elite’s wealth and power. For instance, Hill’s (2008, p. 41) analysis of the impact of neo-liberal policies and practices on so-called “First World” and “Third World” regions underscores how the poor have gotten poorer, demonstrated by middle-income and low-income workers having to work even harder for the past decade to keep the same standard of living. “They (have) suffered pay cuts, union curbs, and a slashed social wage—a sundered social support and survival network of services, provisions and benefits. In contrast, billionaires live in ‘Richistan’.”

Children, across various social contexts, have experienced significant suffering from an ever-increasing corporate and militaristic ethos impacting the decisions formulated by the world’s government and corporate leaders. For instance, with the globalization of culture being based upon market-forces, consumption, and a “survival of the fittest” mentality, youth in North America are not viewed by the state, corporate-leaders, or most citizens as valuable social investments who symbolize “the promise of a better world” (Giroux, 2009a, p. 289), but, rather, are often considered as disposable, violent commodities who do not deserve to be provided social entitlements, such as health care, housing, an adequate education system, and public facilities, such as parks, playgrounds, and libraries, which are some of the essential building blocks for positioning the next generation to become critical, caring, engaged citizens. Critical educators and other concerned social actors must consider the elite’s desire to privatize childhood, social entitlements, and other elements of life, along with their desire to use violence and intimidation to solve social problems, tantamount to a war on youth. This agenda is responsible for fostering an economic, political, and cultural context for children that is “intolerable and unforgiveable” (Grossberg, 2007, p. 95).

For instance, the current economic crisis, spurred by market-driven decisions and the US’s financing of a fanatical “war against terror”, is causing more and more families with children in the US to live out of their vehicles, makeshift housing, such as tents, boxes, caves, and boxcars, and moving in and out of homeless shelters (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2008a, 2008b). The impact of the crisis on youth becomes even more telling when considering that 1 in 50 US children are homeless, and about half of all school age children in the US who are “experiencing homelessness have problems with anxiety and depression and 20% of homeless pre-schoolers have emotional problems that require professional care” (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009). Moreover, Grossberg (2007) underscores how an “epidemic of violence” is plaguing youth at today’s historical juncture:

The U.S. infant mortality rate is higher than that of any industrialized nation in the world. More importantly, 75% of all violent deaths (including homicide, suicide, and firearms-related deaths) of children in the industrialized world
occur in the United States. The suicide rate for kids under the age of fourteen is double the rate of the industrialized world...And while it is hard to get statistics, it appears that for every violent and sexual offense committed by kids, there are three such crimes committed by adults against kids. (p. 97)

Youth in North America, particularly minoritized, youth of color, are also frequently living amid blighted and over-policed urban communities, where they are subject to police harassment and surveillance as a matter of routine. The normative prevalence of the White population to impose an official narrative of color-blindness, predicated on individualism, materialism and merit, further alienates and obfuscates critical pedagogical work that challenges hegemonic forces that are antagonistic to meaningful social justice critical multiculturalism (Carr & Lund, 2007, Kincheloe, 2008). The state not only has egregiously placed blame on youth for the pejorative social conditions pervading urban spaces, but has also criminalized social issues, such as poverty, homelessness, and violence (Giroux, 2004a; Giroux, 2004b; Kozol, 2006). This has led to the creation of a prison-industrial complex, in which communities that have been negatively impacted by de-industrialization, corporate downsizing, and neo-liberal globalization, turn, ironically, to the source of their problem—corporate leaders—to build juvenile detention centers and prisons in order to secure jobs for its citizens, which most often comes at the expense of minoritized youth of color, who are, ultimately, forced to live, at an increasingly younger age, life in confinement (Giroux, 2009a). Dixon (2007) captures the deleterious impact of the state’s policy of incarcerating and criminalizing more Black youth for the past thirty years:

America leads the world in numbers of prisons and prisoners, and African Americans, though only one eighth of its population, make up nearly half the locked down...America’s malevolent social policy of racially selective mass incarceration is so ubiquitous, so thoroughly part of its statutes, courts, its law enforcement apparatus and traditions that it’s hard to believe it was enacted in a single generation, since the ending, about 1970 of the black Freedom Movement. But as late as the 1960s whites, not blacks, were the majority of the nation’s prisoners. Since 1970 the U.S. prison population has multiplied about sevenfold, with neither a causative or accompanying increase in crime, and without a public perception that we are somehow seven times safer.

The present level of mass incarceration and its deleterious effects for decades to come upon the black work force, on economic and health outcomes, on culture and family formation are facts of African American life that seem to demand a political response, a concerted and long-term effort to change these awful public policies, much like that called forth by lynching and legal segregation.

Unfortunately, rather than functioning as cultural sites capable of guiding youth to reflect upon what forces give rise to oppression in their schools and communities, schools function as mere appendages of the state, the criminal justice system, and the business world in an age of “bootstrap capitalism.” The corporate
and militaristic takeover of schools in North America has further debilitated the intellectual development of youth, promulgated policies and practices that criminalize youth, and forced many students to disengage from the schooling process. Youth are frequently pushed out of schools, left to engage in criminal activities, to search tirelessly to secure dead-end, service-oriented jobs, to join the US’s imperialistic forces, or to perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline (Casella, 2008; Farahmandpur, 2008; Kozol, 2006). For instance, many urban schools across the US, plagued by the state contracting its economic support of education, are unsafe, unsanitary, dilapidated, racially segregated and overcrowded institutions, where ill-equipped educators implement “drill and kill” methods of instruction. While many urban teachers are committed, engaged and focused on the needs of the students, others often make students remain silent and passive in their classrooms in the hope that they pass a battery of corporately-generated high-stakes examinations. These assessments tie students’ test scores to the amount of funding schools receive from the state, and can also determine whether schools are taken over by the state or by corporate entities, or whether teachers and administrators lose their jobs or endure other sanctions, such as being ostracized by parents or other community members for not performing as well as “competing” (often well-funded and Whitewashed) academic institutions. Kozol speaks clearly to how NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001) is responsible for the vast implementation of draconian classroom teaching methods and standardized assessments, which hinder the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of Black and Latino(a) youth:

At a moment when black and Hispanic students are more segregated than at any time since 1968 (in the typical inner-city school I visit, out of an enrollment that may range from 800 to 4,000 students, there are seldom more than five or six white children), NCLB adds yet another factor of division between children of minorities and those in the mainstream of society. In good suburban classrooms, children master the essential skills not from terror but from exhilaration, inspired in them by their teachers, in the act of learning in itself. They’re also given critical capacities that they will need if they’re to succeed in college and to function as discerning citizens who have the power to interrogate reality. They learn to ask the questions that will shape the nation’s future, while inner-city kids are being trained to give prescripted answers and to acquiesce in their subordinate position in society. (Arran, 2007)

This debilitating environment for youth is further magnified when youth, particularly poor youth and youth of color, are criminalized by zero-tolerance policies. Over the past decade, youth across the US are considered suspects as they arrive on school property. Typically, certain types of youth are scanned by metal detectors, searched by public and private security forces, and kept under constant surveillance through video cameras and other forms of technology (Casella, 2008; Giroux, 2004a). They are also frequently suspended, humiliated or expelled for any range of activities, illustrating, again, how the US’s “get tough on crime policy” is considered the panacea for solving social problems affecting youth. Clearly, it
would not be in the best interests for proponents of market-driven social reforms to engage in a serious “analysis of the systemic failure to provide safety and security for children through improved social provisions” (Giroux, 2009b). For example, youth have been suspended by school officials if they believe students will hinder the schools’ performance on standardized exams, if schools do not want to undertake the “hard work of exercising critical judgment, trying to understand what conditions undermined school safety, and providing reasonable support services for all students, and viable alternatives for troubled ones” (Giroux, 2004b), or due to overt racist attitudes held by school officials in relation to students of color.

This disturbing trend in criminalizing youth in schools overlaps with the reality that US military recruiters have been afforded the unbridled authority to cajole poor youth and disaffected youth of color into the military. With the passage of the NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act) in 2001, the US military has been permitted to recruit students in the confines of classrooms as well as being afforded access to students’ contact information. Goodman (2009) shows how the US government uses this venue as a conduit to find additional information so that the military target youth who have little social (and cultural) power in educational circles and, therefore, might, incorrectly, believe that the military is the only option for social or economic mobility:

In the past few years, the military has mounted a virtual invasion into the lives of young Americans. Using data mining, stealth websites, career tests, and sophisticated marketing software, the Pentagon is harvesting and analyzing information on everything from high school students’ GPAs and SAT scores to which video games they play.

Therefore, there has been a seismic shift in relation to how schools function in the age of neo-liberalism in the US, and, presumably, to varying degrees, elsewhere as well. Instead of holding to the ideal that educational institutions ought to be “valued for its role in developing political, ethical, and aesthetic citizens and personal growth” (Hursh, 2000), schools are, contrary to Dewey’s (1916/1997) vision of progressive, engaged and experiential education, functioning as corporate and military breeding grounds. They can, as a consequence, generate insidious teaching and learning practices that treat students as objects, employ technology and security officials to control and contain youths’ bodies and minds, and call on military officials to secure more bodies to advance the US’s “permanent war on terror.” (McLaren, 2007). Neo-liberal schooling is responsible for an increasing number of youth disengaging from the formal (and formative) educational process, for youths’ increased presence in juvenile detention centers or prisons, for youth joining the military without reflecting critically on the personal and societal ramification of their choices, and for youth remaining silent as to what forces are oppressing them and the majority of global citizens (Porfilio & Malott, 2008).

Within the wider social world, youth are not only viewed increasingly as objects by corporate leaders who attempt to inculcate youth in hegemonic ideologies of consumerism, individualism, and intolerance, but as a lucrative market to secure wealth for the corporate world. Corporate leaders realize children and their caregivers
spend their excess of dollars to amuse themselves, whether it is through MTV, the Internet, the gaming world, the Western music industry, Hollywood, or the consumption of a myriad digitized texts and goods to embody the supposedly ‘cool’ lifestyles of Western pop icons (Muehlenberg, 2002; Schor, 2004). Shrewdly, they exploit unjust social conditions facing youth to their advantage. Since many youth face the prospect of working dead-end, service-oriented jobs, lend their time and some of their income to help their families remain economically and socially solvent, and face (as illustrated above) a dehumanizing environment in schools as well as stark conditions in their communities, they are apt to fill social and emotional voids through many “teaching machines,” such as computers, television, video games, and music. These are the very sites that condition youth to become loyal to specific brands and products. (Kellner, 1997; Macedo & Steinberg, 2007). Giroux (2009c) spells out with precision the “culture of consumption” that has been propagated by corporate business leaders and the marketing industry for the past thirty years, and how this culture has become hyper-intensified over the course of the last decade:

Subject to an advertising and marketing industry that spends over $17 billion a year on shaping children’s identities and desires, American youth are commercially carpet-bombed through a never-ending proliferation of market strategies that colonize their consciousness and daily lives. Multibillion-dollar corporations, with the commanding role of commodity markets as well as the support of the highest reaches of government, now become the primary educational and cultural force in shaping, if not hijacking, how young people define their interests, values and relations to others.

Moreover, corporate leaders also realize they do not need to focus their energy on using media and schools to produce compliant workers in North America. They continue to outsource labor to less “developed” countries, and have instituted the processes of automation, integration and networking, which have resulted in massive erosion, deskilling and the gradual alienation of work for many (Millar, 1998). As a result, they have accentuated marketing strategies and media campaigns, which have the power to attract more youth to their products or services. This type of entertainment runs counter to the process of political literacy required to allow disenfranchised youth to critically understand, dissect and alter realities that may not be to their advantage (Carr & Thésée, 2008).

Certainly, the influx of corporate ideologies, arrangements and practices to so called “Third World” regions has not improved the quality of life for working-class citizens or children. According to Parenti (2007), the globalization of capitalism to the social context outside of Western countries has allowed Western business leaders to take “over the lands and local economies of Third World peoples, monopolize their markets, depress their wages, indenture their labor with enormous debts, privatize their public service sector, and prevent these nations from emerging as trade competitors by not allowing them a normal development.” Children across these contexts are often without food, clothing, and shelter and must toil in unsafe conditions so as to produce goods and
services for corporate conglomerates, such as Nike and Disney, which often sell the very goods and services they commodify childhood in every corner of the globe. They also serve as “child soldiers” who are not provided an education that can lead to personal or social transformation. “According to Global March against Child Labor, a third of all children don’t make it through the first five years of primary school, the minimum needed for basic literacy. And more than 100 million throughout the world never attend any primary school. As a result, today there are more than 140 million illiterate young people in the world” (Leyva & Leyva, 2004). Globalization is not a neutral prospect, and to crystallize it to mean gainful employment in the US or other Western countries is to belittle the interdependent and nefarious relationships that are established with peoples around the world, often resulting in entrenched, systemic racism, military conflict and visceral poverty (Chossudovsky, 2003; Macedo & Gounari, 2007).

Although the social and economic conditions make it arduous for youth to raise their opposition to the commercialization and militarization of their lived experiences, to the proliferation of global poverty and child labor, to the continuation of Western imperialism and hegemony, and to the demeaning media-driven portraits that characterize them as anti-intellectual criminals who lack any redeeming qualities, some youth are critically aware of the policies, practice, and institutions that oppress children, foster injustice, and perpetuate social inequalities. As a result, they channel their frustration, marginalization and/or opposition to the neo-liberal social order into cultural artifacts, research projects, and social-justice initiatives that can bring awareness to the forces that breed oppression as well as to movements that can build a more just and decent social world. In the past, critical scholars in the field of cultural studies and the sociology of education have provided us with portraits of working-class youth who function as critical agents inside of working-class schools. These youth chose to formulate “counter school cultures” in opposition to the cultures promoted by the state and their teachers. They realized that being successful in school only provided a glimmer of hope that they would transcend their class status in an economic system built on the marginalization of most working-class peoples. Consequently, they engaged in behaviors that ultimately led to the reproduction of their class status (McLeod, 1987; McRobbie, 2000; Willis, 1977).

The importance of documenting how youth are consciousness of the reality that schooling has little redeeming value for many within a capitalist-dominated system, since landing a middle-class occupation is often linked to having established connections in the working world rather than based on one’s academic record and lived experience. However, researchers, policy makers, and educators must also unearth other forms of youth resistance that not only illuminate youth being cognizant of the constitutive forces that mediate social relationships in schools as well as the relationships between themselves and other working-class peoples across the globe, but also capture how youth are channeling their critical insights into outlets and initiatives that can subvert the structures, policies and practices fueling oppression, hate, and inequity evident with intricate social relations characteristic of today’s society. This is where the contributors to this book begin their examination of neo-liberalism, youth culture and resistance.
The chapters in this volume are divided into three sections. In the first section, Carolyn M. Shields, David Requa, Kevin Gosine, Carl E. James, Julie Gorlewski, David Alberto Quijada Cerecer, and Darren E. Lund, and Maryam Nabavi pinpoint the impact of corporatist policies and practices on youth and their teachers in K-12 classrooms as well as the forms of resistance that youth take up to denounce the institutions, policies, and practices perpetuating inequalities and injustice inside and outside of schools. Several of the contributors also document how youth have found fissures amid this commercialized context to implement social-justice initiatives that are intended to provide emancipatory spaces to reflect upon how the neo-liberal agenda is perpetuating oppression inside and outside of their learning communities as well as to develop collaborative movements designed to unearth structural barriers and unjust practices that are causing oppression in youths’ social worlds. In the second section, Darius Prier, Brad J. Porfilio, Shannon M. Porfilio, Touorouzou Herve Some, Curry S. Malott, Robert Haworth, Katie Johnston-Goodstar, Alma M. O. Trinidad, and Aster S. Tecle examine the various alternative learning spaces that youth traverse, along with the cultural artifacts that youth consume, produce, and distribute, which give them the outlets to reflect upon what gives rise to injustice and social inequalities in their social circles, in their communities and in the wider society. Several of the contributors also capture how youth are resisting the neo-liberal social order by developing collective movements predicated on bringing awareness to, as well as the excavation of, policies, practices and structures generating an unjust global world order on the structural axes of class, race, gender, sexuality, and age. The contributors map how resistance takes “place in numerous sites and settings with and in-between multiple texts” (Dimitradis & Weis, 2008, p. 335, as cited in Haworth in this volume). In the final section, Michael O’Sullivan and Paul R. Carr and Gina Thésée address the connection between neo-liberalism and education, seeking common ground for diverse interests inside and outside of the formal school experience. O’Sullivan suggests that the financial collapse of late 2008 has brought the world into a post-neo-liberal age, where there has been some discrediting, in both political and academic circles, of the neo-liberal doctrine that has intensified suffering, oppression, and misery for citizens across the globe for over the past thirty years, and Carr and Thésée round out the book with an interrogation of how political literacy is affected and countered by neo-liberal hegemony.

Section 1: Neo-liberal Schooling, Youth, and Resistance

In the first chapter of this section, “Minoritized youth, cultural capital, and the (micro) policy context of schooling,” Carolyn M. Shields and David Requa provide a critical document analysis of the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) policy legislation, and examine the lived experiences of Latino migrant students, who move between Illinois and Texas during the school year, in order to illustrate how corporatist forms of schooling, “with a heavy emphasis on testing, forces (minoritized) students to conform to a system that seems largely irrelevant to their daily lives and ill-designed to provide them with educational opportunities of quality.”
By employing Bourdieu’s theoretical insights in relation to how schools perpetrate the marginalization of impoverished youth and youth of color, the authors also reveal how hidden power relations in schools mask the numerous ways these institutions are complicit in Latino migrant students’ lack of educational attainment. Here they show how schools fail to meet the migrant students’ particular needs:

For example, these migrant students like many of their peers, verbalize ambitious career goals; nevertheless, their understanding of how society and schooling are structured is severely limited by their parents’ lack of formal schooling as well as their limited awareness of any possible counselling or academic guidance offered by either school. They seemed to believe it to be “normal” that they should have difficulty making and sustaining friendships or good relationships with teachers. They saw nothing particularly unusual in their need to live apart from their families.

The authors also show that youth embody a passive form of resistance towards schools and the economic system, which make it difficult for them to succeed academically or to help secure a living wage for their families. The Latino migrant students have internalized that it is “normal” not to be provided the intellectual and social support needed to meet their personal and career goals. The authors conclude their chapter by offering several suggestions for thwarting the neo-liberal agenda in schools and in the wider society.

In the second essay in this section, “Racialized students resisting: Hindrance or asset to academic success,” Kevin Gosine and Carl E. James cull the extant literature surrounding the strategies marginalized youth employ to gain a sense of empowerment in schooling structures that are openly hostile to the ‘Other.’ The authors demonstrate clearly that commercialized values and an individualistic ethos work to deflect educators and other citizens from seeing unjust practices and institutional inequalities making it difficult for minoritized students to succeed in schools. In turn, this reifies “the perception that differences in educational outcomes for racialized group members are attributable to the cultural deficiencies that minority students bring to the classroom.” To gain a sense of empowerment in schools, minoritized youth typically implement two strategies of resistance:

1. striving for academic success while maintaining a commitment to their ethno-racial community; and
2. ‘opting out’ of the system which could take a form of, among other behaviors, dropping out of school, limiting school attendance (or being truant), being unconcerned with punctuality, challenging teachers, being disruptive in school and classes, and/or choosing to participate in school primarily through athletic endeavors.

Although the youth resistance strategies do not directly confront the neo-liberal agenda, according to the authors, educators and activists can work with students’ knowledges in relation to how they view schooling and social inequality, and can fold students’ “social justice desires” into a movement to promote equity and social justice in schools and in society. In the next entry in this section, “White working-class high school students and resistance to neo-liberalism,” Julie Gorlewski provides
anecdotes from her grade 11 English classroom, which is located in an inner-ring suburb in New York, populated by White working-class high school students. She illustrates how neo-liberal policies, through the implementation of high-stakes examinations and standardized curricula, have ensured that teachers in working-class schools have feelings of “disempowerment, demoralization, and deprofessionalization,” as they recognize the standardization of teaching and learning produce a feeling of frustration, anxiety, and insecurity amongst their students. Teachers also are alienated because they recognize that “working-class public schools, social languages and language arts practices that diverge from academic or ‘standard’ English tend to be treated as deficient, and students are often silenced on the basis of their modes of expression rather than the quality of their ideas.” She documents how the dialogic, transformative pedagogies that she implemented broke down students’ resistance towards two content areas: poetry, and the college entrance exams. Her students’ resistance became a resource to recognize the value of poetry and to get beyond viewing higher education as purely a means to securing gainful employment. She concludes her reflective essay with the belief that teachers have the ability to use dialogic, transformative pedagogies to “challenge existing neo-liberal power relations to channel the resistance that Foucault asserts is a perpetual constituent of power. True dialogue offers the possibility to facilitate solidarity between working-class students and their teachers.”

In the fourth chapter in this section, “Every day education: Youth rethinking neo-liberalism by mapping cultural citizenship and intercultural Alliances,” David Alberto Quijada Cerecer challenges the reader to get beyond looking at youth as consuming subjects who are preoccupied merely with obtaining one of the few dead-end and service-oriented jobs that exist in many communities, or are focused on buying commodities to satisfy their market-driven wants, impulses. This detached gaze views youth as subjects who occupy the desire and critical insights “to advocate for social justice as civil rights for others”. Through his ethnographic research in a high school setting, he documents how a group of working poor, urban youth of color engages in “cultural citizenship practices to forge intercultural alliances across communities by facilitating diversity workshops for other youth in school settings”. Specifically, the Youth Dismantling Oppression (YDO) project illustrates the critical insight and determination that his minoritized participants hold in relation to using art and performance to build intercultural alliances for the purpose of positioning “themselves collectively in society as cultural citizens, who demonstrate civic and social engagement, build community, and take action in relation to racism, sexism, and homophobia through everyday conversations and engagement.” Quijada concludes the chapter by arguing that this political form of education and critical form of citizenship have the power to forge a society that embraces “equity, civil rights and full democratic participation for others.”

In the final chapter in this section, “Renewing youth engagement in social justice activism,” Darren E. Lund and Maryam Nabavi provide readers with data from a research project they launched in the Prairie region of Western Canada, seeking to capture how teachers and students, despite teaching and learning amid socio-political structures that downplay the persistence of systemic inequalities as
well as the need to unearth the forces generating hate and hostility in schools and in the wider society. From their conversations with youth aimed at “form(ing) and sustain(ing) coalitions and collaborative projects” in schools that are dedicated to eliminating racism, the researchers determined the motivation for youth joining coalitions to eliminate racism, and the challenges they faced from their peers in putting into place social-justice initiatives, and, further, documented an overriding skepticism related to how they were not being taken seriously by adults who engaged in similar social-justice activities. Despite the obstacles and resistance their participants faced pertaining to the implementation of cultural work within schools, the authors conclude that the anti-racism work designed by the students can serve as a pedagogical guidepost to others who hope to formulate similar social-justice initiatives in schools “to resist the neo-liberal agenda and the positioning of students as consumers in a market economy.”

Section II: Informal Education, Youth and Resistance

In the first chapter in this section, “Hip-hop as counter-public space of resistance for Black male youth,” Darius Prier documents how the neo-liberal hegemony in schooling, de-industrialization, over-policing of urban communities, and the elimination of social entitlements in urban contexts have merged together and are responsible for many Black male youths’ “investments in the counter-spaces such as hip-hop”. Drawing on Stephen Haymes’ (1995) critical pedagogy of urban struggle, Prier illustrates how hip-hop has provided an outlet for “the voices, narratives, and experiences of Black people, who often struggle to construct and affirm their identities within neo-liberal urban spaces emptied of economic opportunities by neo-liberal reforms.” Next, Prier takes up three discursive genres of hip-hop, and captures how Black youth identities have been situated by the various social and economic forces influencing life in contemporary urban contexts: social and politically conscious rap, gangsta rap, and commercial rap music. The pedagogical exemplar has the potency to guide scholars, schoolteachers, and researchers to use hip-hop to achieve transformative ends in classrooms and in urban communities. Prier states:

…hip-hop as form of popular culture can offer knowledge that is of necessity for teachers and students who are concerned with the moral and political ends of education and schooling in relationship to forms of injustice and inequality.

It is also of importance for educators who seek alternative curricular and pedagogical spaces that open up new dialogical and material spaces for urban youth to resist oppression.

In the second chapter of this section, “Hip-Hop Pedagogues: Youth as a Site of Critique, Resistance, and Transformation in France and in the Neo-liberal Social World,” Brad J. Porfilio and Shannon M. Porfilio pinpoint the constitutive forces behind banlieue youth appropriating critical elements of hip-hop culture, which were generated by disaffected Black and Latino(a) youth in the US in the late-1970s, to speak directly to the unjust realities they experienced with the onslaught of neo-liberal policies and get “tough on youth” practices impacting their home countries, the
French banlieue, and other contexts such as schools. Next, the authors highlight their critical analysis of hip-hop artists’ music to show how the depth and level of critique has heightened, as France as well as other global communities have become further militarized, commercialized and impoverished through the implementation of a spate of neo-liberal practices. Finally, the authors conclude their chapter with an examination of the artists’ cultural work. They show how the trajectory of the movement has broadened over the past decade to include other critical youth and citizens who are rallying against the corporate and militaristic takeover of the globe. The hip-hop pedagogues’ cultural work provides insight to scholars, schoolteachers and other concerned citizens in relation to how they can engage in similar social movements, which are designed to foster social justice and equity in their schools, their communities and in other globalized contexts. They show that:

In addition to their music, many hip-hop intellectuals have joined other activists, organizations, and countercultural movements to free the globe from institutional oppressions and to generate new social and economic structures that are in line with fostering the needs of humanity and respecting the ecological world. Many of the artists utilize the stage to create a sense of solidarity among minoritized peoples and activists from the dominant culture, to bring awareness to salient issues affecting French society as well as the global community and to raise money for and support of political and social organizations fighting neo-liberal policies and practices.

In the next essay in this section, “Popular music and neo-liberal globalization in Burkina Faso: Counter-hegemonic possibilities and limits of a youth movement,” Touorouzou Hervé Somé analyzes the lyrics of several genres of music generated by the youth of Burkina Faso: Blacksomania, Takiborsé (or interchangeably, Takborsé), and the hip-hop movement. He evaluates their potential to engage the citizens in this country to challenge neo-liberal globalization and the country’s entrenched political hierarchy. Hervé Somé shows that several artists are very critical of the impact of neoliberalism on the peoples of Burkina Faso and in other communities across Africa. For instance, he argues that rap has been a transformative culture for the youth in Burkina Faso, a critical space where youth express their awareness, outrage and opposition to neo-liberal policies gutting social entitlements in their communities, bludgeoning their communities’ value systems, and privatizing their health care system and other sectors of society. He states:

Today, hip-hop is a powerful movement in Burkina. Rap, more generally hip-hop, is shaping a new destiny for the Burkinabé music…It is arguably the case that hip-hop music speaks to the idiom of (youths’) daily lives. For sure, the socio-economic conditions in the late 1990s had not attained the degree of squalor, which now prevails as neo-liberal globalization gains has commodified life in Burkina Faso.

The author concludes the chapter by arguing that it would be shortsighted to think all of youths’ cultural formations have the potential to bring awareness to the destructive path of neo-liberalism by demonstrating how Takiborsé music, for
example, promotes “materialism that boils down to advancing uncritical consumerism. A new trend observed in Burkina Faso is the conspicuous exhibition of luxury items, from high fashion, clothing, glittering jewelry, and super-expensive personal effects, items that are totally out of reach for the commoner.”

In the third chapter in this section, “Anarcho-punk: Radical experimentations in informal learning spaces,” Robert Haworth orients the reader to the aims of the anarcho-punk movement through a self-reflexive narrative of how he became involved in the punk scene during the early-1980s. As a privileged member of the White, middle-class world, punk rock provided him a critical window to “learn about political movements in El Salvador, Reaganomics and the ill effects of trickle-down economics explicitly through punk lyrics. Punk songs became stories or vignettes of the ugliness of capitalism and US imperialism”. Based on his experience in the punk movement, he critically assesses whether various manifestations of the movement have the power to lead us beyond the corporate malaise to engender a social system predicated on meeting the social and emotional needs of all citizens. He argues that in the contemporary era anarcho-punk is a venue to resisting co-optation by corporate executives. This movement is also effective because it lends a layered “political and cultural critique of capitalism and a willingness to develop non-statist communication and actions that take place and evolve in situated and sometimes temporary communities”. Haworth concludes the essay by explicating how critical scholars, teachers, and teacher-educators can also “connect or build an affinity” with youth in informal learning spaces, such as anarcho-punk. “Anarcho-punk offers just one of many outside informal learning spaces where youth engage in discussions about the world beyond capitalism. More importantly, these spaces create moments where subjects may communicate and act within these re-imagined communities”

In the next chapter in this section, “Using God to turn off the radio: Punk rock and the complexities of human resistance,” Curry S. Malott argues that right-wing politicians use religion to squash opposition movements forged by youth during the 1980s. The ruling elite uses rhetoric configured by Christian fundamentalists to place blame on working-class peoples and youth for the social problems, such as teen suicide and gang violence, stemming from structural inequalities, the gutting of social entitlements, and de-industrialization. Malott underscores the absurdity of the fundamentalist Christian movement when he states the dominant American mythology of people’s economic success being “informed by a version of the Protestant work ethic that explains the accumulation of wealth as God’s reward for those who have been good Christians—and a good Christian in this context is one who uncritically works hard for the bosses and is intolerant of any ideas or values that differ from those held by the conservative right.” Next, he provides a specific example of how elite leaders have used laws and police officials to scare youth away from movements that offer a challenge to neo-liberal hegemony. They went directly after Jello Biafra, who was noted nationally for his alternative political views and political projects. The author concludes the chapter with a critical analysis of the lyrics of punk rockers, providing readers with empowering alternative narratives. Youth use this cultural medium to courageously vocalize
their critical insights of the elite’s use of religion to promote intolerance, to fuel war, to embrace individualism, and to demonize radical youth and their cultural manifestations, such as punk rock.

In the final chapter in this section, “Critical pedagogy through the reinvention of place: Two cases of youth resistance,” Katie Johnston-Goodstar, Alma, M.O. Trinidad and Aster S. Tecle share their findings from two-community-based youth programs. The first case study, which started in 2006, involved the first author, urban Native American youth and community members. The pedagogy for the project “investigated environmental injustice in an urban community with Native youth”. The participants used a participatory-action research methodology—Photovoice—in order to encourage youth to “take pictures of their world, to tell the stories of their visual investigation through narratives and to critically engage those stories, in praxis for social change”. In the end, the project not only positioned students and community members to become critically aware of the injustices wrought be neo-liberalism in their community, but also nudged them to recognize community strengths “by centering Indigenous theories of place, education and justice. It also served to connect youth participants and encourage commitment and action on behalf of their communities and knowledges.” The second project, Youth Organic Farm, “is a social movement to develop a comprehensive plan and sustainable local food system by educating youth, fighting hunger, improving health and nutrition, and being part of the growing organic agricultural industry.” This project is located in a rural area in Hawai’I, and the community “mirrors the political, economic, social, and cultural barriers facing today’s minoritized, rural families and youth.” The authors document how the project was instrumental in engaging youth in a critical praxis of their lived world. The youth “became actively involved with community issues, gained “awareness of injustices that exist in their community,” and developed “an identity of resistance” to the forces causing oppression in their community. The authors conclude the chapter by showcasing the value of critical Indigenous pedagogy of place and participatory action research in terms of guiding minoritized youth and communities to become agents of change “who critically respond to and resist neo-liberalism and cultural hegemony from an Indigenous standpoint.”

**Section III: Post-Neo-Liberalism, Youth and Resistance**

In this section, Michael O’Sullivan writes a chapter arguing that “the dramatic meltdown of the global financial system in 2008” has provided the impetus to discredit neo-liberal capitalism. He believes critical transformative intellectuals have been afforded the perfect opportunity to “offer a fundamental challenge to the policies, practices, and ideologies of contemporary globalized consumer capitalism”. O’Sullivan also claims workers and intellectuals alike must build on the political movement generated by youth in the US, who spearheaded the election of President Obama, if the state is to “adopt progressive post-neo-liberal policies, a platform to serve the interests of the social base that elected him and not reward the traditional corporate hegemony, as the administration is doing with its multibillion dollar bailout (AKA stimulus).” The author also argues that teachers and teacher-educators
have the responsibility in this new era to guide young people to have a critical understanding in relation to how knowledge is produced, how “their worldviews and their values are socially constructed,” and how they can work collectively with others to build “a democratic movement for social change.” The essay concludes by examining the role critical literacy ought to play in K-12 schools during the post-neo-liberal age. The author believes that “using the skills and perspective associated with critical literacy,” along with “values of participatory democracy, social justice, and ecological balance,” will provide the pedagogical ingredients to broaden students’ identities in relation to how their world functions and the role they must take to ameliorate it.

In the concluding chapter to this book, Paul R. Carr and Gina Thésée examine the notion of political (il)literacy emanating from the formal education process. They interrogate how neo-liberalism can stimulate a teaching and learning deficit that tacitly and explicitly works to establish a benign acceptance of political, economic and socio-cultural hegemonic forces that serve to eviscerate the advent of meaningful transformation in and through the formal education process. Borrowing from Freire (1973/2005) and Kincheloe (2008), they discuss how identity, lived experience and (inequitable) power relations shape the educational context, and advocate for a more salient foray into knowledge construction (and a critical reflection of epistemology) as a mode of building a more just, and democratic, educational experience. Further, they question how accountability is used to marginalize the marginalized, and also how educational policy-making avoids, omits and diminishes the political reasons for poor educational performance. In addition, they target how education is formulated, and question how fundamental issues, such as political literacy, democracy and critical engagement, can be purposefully neglected by the overseers of formal education. In their conclusion, they provide two models for interrogating political literacy, which also attempt to promote a more equitable and transformative model of education for all peoples.

REFERENCES
THE NEO-LIBERAL SOCIAL ORDER


SECTION I:
NEO-LIBERAL SCHOOLING, YOUTH, AND
RESISTANCE
2. MINORITIZED YOUTH, CULTURAL CAPITAL, AND THE (MICRO) POLICY CONTEXT OF SCHOOLING

Fifteen-year-old José spent this past summer, as he had since he was 12, trudging through a hot, dusty corn field in Illinois, cutting the tassels off seed plants by hand so that the next year’s corn crop would have just the right characteristics. His workday began, as usual, at 5 a.m. when he boarded a school bus to take him to the fields; it ended 12 hours later when he started home, covered with corn pollen and dust, to shower and change his clothes before heading off again to catch the bus for the summer migrant program at the local high school.

The home to which he returned was a decrepit, three-story factory building, with kitchen facilities only available to residents of the first floor. Unfortunately José’s family lives upstairs, so they must use one of the grills in the yard for their food preparation. There are no refrigerators; ice chests hold whatever should be kept cool in the blistering summer heat. To shower, he must take his turn at a “gang” shower down a hallway. The facility serves a full floor of residents.

José’s parents, undocumented workers from Texas, are particularly anxious that he attend the summer program designed to assist him educationally. To please them, as well as to advance his personal goal of creating a better life for himself, José agrees to participate. The reality, however, is that, exhausted from the day’s grind and unfamiliar with his classmates or the program structure, he only attends 3 or 4 of the 19 summer sessions. When he does attend, his day ends with another bus ride home, this one at 9 pm, giving him time to grab a few hours sleep before the routine begins again.

Most years, José is still working in the fields when school starts in Illinois. He stays in the fields for the first two weeks of the school year because he and his family need the money. His father is now working in Texas; but his mother’s work, bagging and sorting seed corn, lasts into October, about a quarter of the way through the school year. José’s family then packs up a truck and drives back to Texas where he enters school again, taking his Illinois grades and partial credits, and hoping to “make up” what he needs to be able to graduate in Texas in order to receive a high school diploma.

It is obvious, as described in this portrait of a young migrant worker, that the transient lifestyle of José and the almost 900,000 other migrant agricultural workers in the United States under the age of 18 (see Méndez, 2005) poses significant...
CHALLENGES TO THOSE WISHING TO ATTAIN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION. Moreover, Mehta and colleagues (2000, p. vii) report that the median income of US farm worker families in the 1990s remained below $10,000 a year, and that more than half of their minor children did not live with their parents. Further, they report that 85% of migrant workers have less than a high school education, with the average being about six years of schooling; many are functionally illiterate. Huang (2002, p. 6) states that more than one third of the children of migrant workers fall behind academically or drop out of school.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we examine the experiences of Latino migrant students as illustrative of the ways in which the policy context of American schools neglects, ignores, and marginalizes many groups of students whose lived experiences are distinctly different from the White middle-class norm. The transient nature of migrant students’ lives makes the challenges they face particularly poignant but not necessarily very different from those faced by many other students (African American, Indigenous, some immigrant groups) whose lived experiences are disregarded in today’s educational policy frameworks. Here, we provide a critical analysis of how current policies structure educational experiences in ways that often create barriers to students’ academic achievement. We argue that the current neo-liberal policy framework (Giroux, 2005), with its heavy emphasis on testing, forces students to conform to a system that seems largely irrelevant to their daily lives, and is ill-designed to provide them with appropriate and quality educational opportunities. Further, we examine the ways in which solutions to student failure tend to place blame and the onus for change on individual students, teachers, and even schools, rather than on the system itself.

Given that the January 8, 2002, version of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESEA), now commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has likely become the best known, most lauded, and most critiqued education bill in recent US history, it provides an appropriate and relevant focal-point for this examination. We explore the experiences of migratory students in the light of some tenets of the NCLB policy framework to better understand how the micropolitical context of education affects the experiences and opportunities of minoritized students. We sought to understand the nature of their resistance (if any), and to identify ways in which the detrimental impact of neo-liberal schooling policies could be challenged to create educational environments that are more inclusive of, and responsive to, students, minoritized by virtue of their race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, or religious persuasion.

The chapter draws primarily on the NCLB legislation and policy documents widely available on the Internet. To supplement this information, we conducted interviews with five migrant students and three White school administrators who, like the majority of administrators who serve migrant students in Illinois, reflect the privileged norms of the US middle class. The interviewed students were randomly selected from a group of students whose primary residence is in Texas, but who,
like José, had spent their summer in Illinois and were enrolled for the fall 2008 term at an Illinois high school. They were asked questions about possible challenges their migrant status posed for school success and how they thought educators might help them to achieve their goals. The administrators, who comprised a small, convenient sample, were asked about their perceptions of the constraints and problems that NCLB poses for minoritized youth, and, importantly, how educators might overcome these difficulties.

In our first section, we introduce students’ comments as background to our analysis and critique of the NCLB legislation. Here, we note an overwhelming sense of resignation and even capitulation to existing norms of schooling. We then present a brief, critical overview of NCLB as reflective of some ways in which the policy context imposes conformity to middle-class norms as well as reproducing the current inequitable status quo. We argue that rather than providing support for the distinct needs of children, the overall effect of the Act, with its neo-liberal overemphasis on managerialism, surveillance, and control to the exclusion of more meaningful considerations of the needs of students, is to deny both mainstream and migratory students’ opportunities for school success.

We believe that Bourdieu’s (1997) work on reproduction, including his discussion of habitus, fields, legitimation, and, especially the concept of symbolic violence, provides a strong heuristic framework for understanding the impact of current policies on the schooling experiences of all minoritized students, including the Latino migrant students studied here. In the final part of this chapter, we use the lens of social and cultural reproduction to examine, in more detail, how the micro-political policy context of American high schools negatively influences minoritized students’ opportunities for academic success, and, at the same time, constrains their life chances beyond school. We conclude with some implications that may encourage educators to resist the dominant policy trends of this decade, and to improve schooling for migrant students, and, by extension, other minoritized groups as well.

The Student Perspective

In this section we present, largely through the words of migrant students we interviewed (in italics the first time they are mentioned), a picture of how our interviewees respond to and navigate their experiences, including their social relations, their schooling experiences, and their career goals.

José, unlike his more reserved peers, is both friendly and outgoing. He is quick to describe his discomfort with peers in Texas who “josh” and tease him, by calling him “Mexican”; ironically, he also uses this term in a pejorative sense when talking about a fellow migrant student in Illinois, Teresa, age 15. José says the apartment building in Illinois where her family stays has many people her age, but that she has only one friend there. Perhaps this is due to a medical condition that prevents her from working in the fields with other students, requiring her to spend her days babysitting. In Texas, she says, she has many friends, and the rest of her family, including her two older brothers (one has long ago dropped out of school; the other
is in jail). Reyna relates that it is "hard to make friends" when you transfer from school to school, but tells of counsellors advising her to attend college far away from home. Except, others are more concerned about family. Dorena, for example, lives in Illinois with her aunt, having left her family behind in Texas, near the Mexican border, to facilitate her summer employment. Most are living apart from some immediate family members. José lives in Illinois with his mother, grandmother, and four brothers, while his father and a younger brother remain in Texas. He explains that he works hard to earn money. However, since he supports a younger sibling, he does not always have enough money left for lunch. He sends money to his little brother in Texas. He does much better than me. He's smart, way smarter. I'm paying private school for him. I send over $9,000 up there. He's my brother and he wants to learn a lot so I send it to him.

These students tended to see themselves in terms of the labels often imposed on them, as "migrant students" or "Latinos," labels that serve to reinforce their awareness that educators often do not expect them to attain the necessary academic standards to graduate from high school, let alone proceed to college or university. Despite these perceptions and the difficulties of their daily lives, the students generally expressed ambitions and the difficulties of their daily lives. Teresa, for example, indicated that despite her health problems, her goal was to become a Border Patrol agent—a law enforcement position with which she was familiar on a daily basis and one that she perceived to be highly respectable. She explained that she was well aware of the work an agent does and that the three of them have the same goal; they also plan to go into business together. José explained that his goal is to be a lawyer, but was unable to tell us whether or not he had passed all his courses the previous year. Despite having failed to earn most of his freshman year credits, he was determined to be the first in his family to finish high school. He explains that he has two cousins born the same day and year, the other one, the third cousin, he makes stories. We're so good at that. We did a movie. Our own movie...only we never finished it because it takes a lot of money.\n
I send money to my little brother in Texas. He does much better than me. He's smart, way smarter. I'm paying private school for him. I send over $9,000 up there. He's my brother and he wants to learn a lot so I send it to him.
Here, José’s statement that he wants to go to college but is unaware that one can actually study graphic arts and design, once again highlights the disconnect between his enthusiasm and ability and the lack of guidance he has received with respect to attaining his career goals. Overall, we found considerable dissonance between these students’ goals for the future and their naiveté about what is necessary to graduate from high school or to pursue their desired careers.

Dorena, the girl who wanted to be a lawyer, reported that she had little difficulty moving between Texas and Illinois, and considered her “B’s” and “C’s” to be good grades—certainly a reality given her circumstances, but unlikely to permit her access to her chosen career. José expressed a desire to both further his goals and maintain his culture and family traditions. He reports that, in spite of a history of fighting and school suspension, he still plans to go to college. His wealthy uncle (rich due to his connection with drugs) promised José that he would financially support his future studies; at the same time, he says agricultural work is his “tradition,” so even if he finished college, he “would always come back to corn.” Jorge, on the other hand, has simply given up doing work in school. He says he wants to earn a better living than his migrant worker parents but he steadfastly refuses to do any homework or accomplish anything his teachers ask of him. He attends solely because his parents require him to be in school. This passive resistance is leading directly to the likelihood of his being pushed out of high school.

Dorena and Reyna explained that when they return to Texas, they take the grades they have achieved with them, and immediately join the classes already underway in their home schools. Dorena explains that “the teachers just give you review sheets for what they have been doing,” and that she just does them in class, choosing not to take advantage of the tutoring available through her homeroom teacher. Reyna told us the same thing but observed: “They just give me the classes, and they give me a lot of homework.” Reyna is frustrated trying to get her extra work done because she has chores at home, including caring for her sisters, ages 1 and 3. As a result of her responsibilities, she participates in no school activities, a choice that, once again, makes maintaining friendships, and an attachment to the school, difficult. Prior to the Texas state-wide tests that ultimately determine school success, teachers provide review sheets and offer extra study sessions, opportunities in which neither girl participates; nor do they do additional homework, believing instead that they can be successful simply by following directions, and working as they are told. Yet, Dorena’s admission that she is “not sure” whether she passed all her classes the previous year reveals, once again, the lack of help provided to these students to understand and negotiate the system.

Bourdieu’s sociological lens of reproduction helps us to understand how the forces in the wider society contribute to what appears to be an untenable situation for these and many other students. In fact, as Swartz (1997) argues, Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) introduce the concept of symbolic violence in which situations appear to be legitimate by “concealing the power relations” that impose legitimacy. For example, these migrant students, like many of their peers, verbalize ambitious career goals; nevertheless, their understanding of how society and schooling are structured is severely limited by their parents’ lack of formal schooling as well as...
their limited awareness of any possible counselling or academic guidance offered by either school. They seemed to believe it to be “normal” that they should have difficulty making and sustaining friendships or good relationships with teachers. They saw nothing particularly unusual in their need to live apart from their families.

Although these students seem to accept, without overt rebellion, these elements of their daily existence that severely limit their future choices and opportunities, we interpret them to be examples of symbolic violence perpetrated both by society and by its educational institutions. Moreover, we argue that the micropolitical framework, with its heavy emphasis on test-taking, reporting, and uniform standards, serves, in fact, to weed out students, ignoring their social realities and neglecting to make them aware of the nature of the “schooling game.” The problem is exacerbated as educators are already so overwhelmed by the need to raise test scores that they fail to recognize the impact of the neo-liberal context on these or other minoritized students. In general, as we present in the next section, their needs are far from central to the reform agenda of NCLB, and consequently, far from the radar of most educators struggling to meet their statutorily defined minimum accountability demands.

*The Policies of NCLB*

Our contention is that, for the most part, students from other than White upper-and middle-class families continue to be marginalized in neo-liberal policy contexts, exemplified by *No Child Left Behind*. Moreover, we acknowledge that, although the policy space may be dominated by the NCLB policies that we examine here, other national, state, and local policies also impinge on the ability of administrators and teachers to conceptualize teaching in broad and meaningful ways and to create welcoming, inclusive spaces in which students truly have the opportunity to learn.

Within the 670 pages of the NCLB statute is an exhaustive list of provisions for the various federally funded “Title” programs, with the Title I provisions, purportedly designed to address students of poverty and their additional need for resources, comprising approximately one third of the whole document. Within each section, there are multiple additional programs and provisions. Part C of Title I of the Act, for example, requires each state to develop a comprehensive plan to ensure that “migratory children will have an opportunity to meet the same challenging State academic content standards and challenging State student academic achievement standards that all children are expected to meet” [(sec. 1306,(a)(1)(C)](1306,(a)(1)(C)]. Other titles extend the focus beyond students: for example, Title II addresses teacher quality, while Title IV focuses on school drug and violence prevention programs.

Despite the intent of Part C of Title I of NCLB to ensure additional measures be taken to support the schooling of migratory youth, it appears that in most cases the student experience is constrained, and largely defined, by a crowded policy space in which there is a singular emphasis on standards as exemplified by testing and test scores. For the most part, there seems to be little room for spaces in which students may negotiate and (re)construct identities so that they become mature and reflective citizens, able to participate in meaningful ways in what Green (1999)
calls a deep concept of democracy “that expresses the experience-based possibility of more equal, respectful, and mutually beneficial ways of community life” (p. vi).

In general, as we examined the tenets of NCLB, Bourdieu’s constructs resonated in the background. The more we probed the Act, the more we became aware of the ways in which the current US policy framework legitimates and reproduces the status quo and, in so doing, also permits ongoing, sustained, and symbolic violence to be perpetrated on youth on a daily basis. Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) state that:

Every power to exert symbolic violence, i.e. every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations. (p. 4)

It must be acknowledged, however, that symbolic violence has actual and material consequences related to narrowing students’ life choices and chances. In other words, the force of symbolic violence is not simply symbolic, but actual as well.

A closer look at some of the provisions of the Title I section illustrates some ways in which it imposes a set of power relations that perpetuate reproduction and legitimation of the status quo as well as symbolic violence. The stated purpose of this section, known as Title I: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged is:

- to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.

To accomplish this goal, among other provisions, the Act includes the mandate to close “the achievement gap between high and low performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (1001.a.3), and to hold schools, local educational agencies, and States accountable (1001.a.4). It responds to a capitalist agenda by providing grants to schools that use packaged programs (Reading First, Early reading, etc.) to improve literacy. States are required to submit comprehensive plans demonstrating their “challenging academic content standards and challenging student academic achievement standards” to serve as a benchmark for the education of all children (regardless of home language or identified special need). States are also required to provide an overview of their standards for meeting “adequate yearly progress” (AYP), and the sanctions and rewards, bonuses and recognition they will provide to ensure compliance. Additionally, Title I includes a stringent timeline, requiring that by 2014 all students within each sub-group (economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency) “will meet or exceed the State’s proficient level of academic achievement.”

The above account of the importance of all students and all sub-groups meeting AYP demonstrates the difficulty of offering a unique and flexible program for migrant and other minoritized students. The provision for students to transfer does
not ensure they will receive a better, more culturally responsive education; rather, the addition of supplemental educational services is most often fulfilled by private contractors and outside tutors who focus entirely on attaining the desired outcomes on standardized tests. At the end of the year, the school must provide evidence that migrant students (and other minoritized groups) have attained the same level as their peers—“regardless of identified special need.” NCLB lacks any provision for addressing the different needs of various students and instead, evaluates them all by one uniform standard. This helps to account for the practice, reported by Reyna and Dorena, of having to jump into classes in Texas, where their classmates are, without any specific attention being paid to what they may have learned in Illinois. Apparently, there is no room for individualization when benchmarks and standards must be met.

Title I requires that each school receiving federal funds “implement an effective means of outreach to parents of limited English proficient students to inform the parents regarding how the parents can be involved in the education of their children ...” (1468.4, italics mine). José’s statement that his mother, an undocumented worker who has lived at least 18 years in the US, is afraid to come into the school, demonstrates the need to carefully consider the lived realities of parents. If the goal is better communication, it must be a two-way interaction, not one that focuses on informing parents about how they can support the school, but one that also emphasizes learning from parents about their unique perspectives and needs. The Act is severely limited for this group of students whose parents are unwilling or unable, or understandably afraid to participate in school life.

A careful examination of the legislation for its understanding of culture is revelatory. Culture is recognized in sections of the legislation as pertaining exclusively to educational, cultural, apprenticeship, and exchange programs for Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and their historical whaling and trading partners in Massachusetts—a limitation that implies somehow that no other cultures warrant recognition or attention in public schools. There is no explicit discussion in the 670 pages of the Act related to the need to incorporate students’ home languages or cultures or to take account of multiple perspectives or various materially different lived experiences. It is little wonder that our student respondents had been so conditioned to believe schooling was simply about doing the assigned work, preparing for, and taking tests, that they could hardly suggest changes in school policy or practices that might help them learn. Once again, in NCLB, there is no recognition of the extensive bodies of literature related to culturally responsive pedagogy (Cummins 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Shields, 2008) or anti-oppressive education (Dei, 2002). In fact, ignoring the home cultures and hence the social and cultural capital brought to school by these students comprises a form of violence often called color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), a phenomenon sometimes addressed as contributing to the lack of achievement of minoritized students (Freeman, 2005; Shields, 2003).

Perhaps in part because of the lack of attention to students’ backgrounds, traditions, or cultural needs, the interviewed students had learned to think about schooling primarily in terms of their own individual responsibility. José told us,
for example, that he used to fight because others told him that was how he gained respect. Now, he says, “I don’t fight. I always think about school. I look to my own self. I had other people controlling my life. It was not me it was other people.” He expressed the hope that taking responsibility would result in fewer suspensions and a greater likelihood of school success. Despite the positive change in his attitude, we are struck with the fact that neither he, nor his peers, attribute any of their social or academic difficulties to elements of schooling itself. Jorge’s assertion that he wanted to succeed, even though he was often truant and failed to do his assigned homework, was expressed as another example of individual responsibility.

Nowhere in our data did our student respondents identify the fact that the very structures and cultures of schooling and the pedagogy and curricula to which they were exposed might fail them. Yet, this does not suggest that our students were unaware of inequity in the wider society. José was clear about the historical inequity in this country when he asserted, in a somewhat convoluted argument:

This is Mexico and this is USA (draws with fingers). We just draw this little line to get to here. You all … crossed the whole ocean and we just crossed this little land and you call us wetbacks. It’s not fair.

He recognized the inequity of White immigrants easily gaining legal status, while so many Mexicans, quite nearby, are often barred from access. We believe this is another illustration of how overemphasis on statewide tests and conformity to prescribed curriculum exclude discussion of students’ insights in relation to the marginalization of their ethnic group within schools and the wider society. The dominant perspective is so legitimized that, although students may question the ways in which their ethnic group have been historically constructed, many of them seem unprepared (or at least unwilling) to extend any critique to the norms of schooling itself. Yet, with the words of the students ringing in our ears, we wonder why José’s perception is not front and center. He was clear that his favorite teacher was “messing with his brain” to make him think. He said that when he got to Illinois, he thought he could “blame all schools” because in his previous class,

they used to judge people … They said, “You’re Mexican, you cannot do all of these things. They josh people. So I thought, “forget about school.” Then I started knowing people and I started doing better and better. Here the teachers don’t give up on us and don’t let us get away with anything.

For José, as for many other students, disaffection with schooling came as a result of teacher perceptions and attitudes—a reflection of what many scholars have identified as the need to reject deficit thinking and to support the learning of all students (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawì, 2005; Valencia, 1997). Likewise, the successes he experienced came largely as a result of relationships formed by caring educators whose encouragement facilitated some academic success. Unfortunately, too few educators, perhaps due to the arduous nature of teaching amid overcrowded classrooms and preparing students for a battery of standardized examinations, foster these relationships, opting instead (likely without being aware of it) to support the stem that perpetuates symbolic violence on many students.
Widgets, Fungibility, Reproduction, and Symbolic Violence

Based on the above summary of some of the provisions of NCLB, it is easy to understand why one superintendent from a district that houses a large migrant population, explained that he thinks there is a “great attempt to over-simplify people generally, students specifically, to widgetize them, to make them fungible items as opposed to individuals.” He continued: “I think the policy framework, often because of its rigidity and lack of taking into account differences acts as a sorting process, because those who don’t fit within the patterns that are dictated get filtered out ... NCLB sets a single standard and says this is what success is and what isn’t.” The implication, he suggested, is that schools in middle and upper-class areas are going to perform well, and “lower income schools that fit less well into the single pattern...are not going to perform as well.”

The superintendent was clear: It is possible to push the requirements of NCLB to one side so as to make student learning a chief priority. To be sure, he still met the requirements of the law, for example, inviting students daily to say the Pledge of Allegiance or permitting military recruiters (as mandated) to come into the school. But he had begun to think differently about education, acknowledging that “when our goal in having students in school is to make them like us, that does violence” to children. He added that, unfortunately, he believes that it is the goal of many teachers to say, “I’m a middle class White person and that’s what you should aspire to be; you should aspire to have my characteristics, and my traits, and my culture.”

High Standards and Pedagogical Conformity

Extensive research literature stresses the need to hold high standards and expectations for all children (Alexander, Entwisle, Bedinger, 1994; Marzano, 2004; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1982). Unfortunately, too often, high standards are equated with test scores. Schools often have with little or no goals beyond test-taking, and have no understanding that standards may be high but do not need to necessarily be the same for all. Critical theoretical perspectives must challenge and inform the ways in which practitioners and policy makers interpret the focus on high standards. For example, there is a persuasive body of literature related to critical pedagogy (see for example, Freire, 1990; Giroux, 2005; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007; Macedo, 1995) that addresses the need for pedagogy that understands that some “differences make a difference” (Bateson, 1972). Such approaches emphasize the need to incorporate the lived experiences of students and to acknowledge that no curriculum is neutral. This literature suggests that a school culture that is not only dissonant from that of the home but that tends to devalue and negate home culture is insensitive and counterproductive (see for example Cummins 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ryan, Chandler, Samuels; 2007; Shields, 2008). Here, the underlying rationale is that when all students feel included and can see themselves reflected in the school curricula, and when they can bring their own lived experiences to make sense of the formal curricular topics (Grumet, 1995), they will ultimately achieve the greatest possible academic success. Perhaps because
this literature is sometimes wrongly perceived to be unscientific, to lack an empirical base, to be too ideological, or even threatening to the status quo, it is not incorporated in any way into the thinking reflected in the tenets of NCLB.

Other dominant trends in research come from such theoretical perspectives as critical race theory (Bell, 1987; Parker & Villalpando, 2007), critical feminism (Brady & Kanpol, 2000), anti-oppression (Dei, 2002; Dillard, 2007), or cultural and multicultural studies (Banks, 2008; Delpit, 1990; Sleeter, 2003)—all of which address the need for educators to attend to issues related to race, ethnicity, home language, poverty, advantage, ability/disability, gender and sexual orientation, and so forth. These theories, as well, emphasize the importance and validity of multiple perspectives, of encouraging students to learn through dialogue and critique instead of from drill and (s)kill strategies or programs proclaimed to be “best practice” in which everyone is treated the same. Once again, these perspectives are ignored in NCLB.

A third, extensive body of literature addresses the need for democratic education, which calls on educators to attend to patterns of systemic inequalities in the historic development of citizenship rights—injustices that are still present at today’s historical moment (see for example Barber, 2001; Green, 1999; Giroux, 2005; Torres, 1998; Shields, 2009). Yet, once again, there is little attention paid to any of these salient factors in NCLB or in the micro-political contexts of US schools in the 21st century. Indeed, the focus on identifying a single standard that all children must attain and the requirement that all students from whatever circumstances pass the same test, regardless of socio-cultural differences or physical and emotional dissimilarities, are manifestations of the superintendent’s notion that patterns of injustice are neglected in the pedagogical work of today’s schools.

The cycle is ferocious. The NCLB requirement that all sub-groups meet an identical standard leads to blame—blame on the part of the rest of the school and wider community when, because of a specified sub-group, the school fails to meet its annual goal. Conversations reported by our administrator respondents include comments like, “If it weren’t for that group of kids...” or “we shouldn’t have to try to prepare African American students for college.” Students are believed to be “substandard” in some way if they have not previously passed state tests; they are then forced to stay at noon hour or after school for extra tutoring, the implicit message being that they are not smart enough to learn what is necessary in the normal five hours of schooling. Then, if their sub-group does not achieve the arbitrary state standard, they are blamed for school failure. It is little wonder that the process narrows the options of minoritized students, pushes them out of school, and actually leads to a situation in which the same social groups are soon over-represented in the criminal justice system. Here, the issue is not that standards should be lowered for minoritized students; rather we argue that all students should be held to high academic standards, but they should not be widgetized (see for example, Shields, 2009). There is no pedagogical rationale for assessing all students in the same way, at the same time, on a single standardized measure as required by NCLB. Indeed, each of these requirements is illustrative of the ways in which neo-liberal policies and practices can, and generally do, work against the ability of these migrant students to succeed.
Dominance and Reproduction

Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) argue that educational systems perform two fundamental functions: (1) they reproduce the dominant culture (cultural reproduction); and (2) they reproduce the power relations between the groups or classes that comprise society (social reproduction) (Pajak & Green, 2003, p. 395). These notions of dominant culture, cultural reproduction, and power relations are notably missing from most practical discussion of the micro-political context of today’s schools, and of attendant issues of curriculum and pedagogy. Moreover, we would argue that unless educators and policymakers acknowledge the explanatory power of these concepts for understanding how and why many reform efforts fail and for thinking differently about educational institutions in the 21st century, schools will continue to sort and select students on the basis of largely unconscious assumptions about ability, achievement, and success.

It is for this reason that Bourdieu’s (1977) sociological focus on fields, habitus, and types of capital provides an important starting-point for analyzing how the policy context we have examined here reflects broader attitudes and values of the wider society. In introducing the concept of fields, Bourdieu identified education (along with other areas such as the state, church, political parties, and the arts) as a “relatively autonomous” site of struggle with its own internal logic in which “those occupying dominant positions will necessarily adopt defensive and conservative ‘conservation strategies’ in order to preserve their status” (Swingewood, 1998, p. 92). Moreover, as sites of struggle, fields are structured, in part, through an “unequal distribution of the forms of capital pertinent to them; forms of capital whose possession and definition are precisely the objects of the aforementioned struggles” (Crossley, 2003, p. 44).

The dominant actions, policies, and relations within each field have developed over long periods of time, through what Bourdieu (1997) calls habitus—the system of traditions, rules, and practices that have come to be interpreted as normal through their arbitrary legitimation of certain forms of capital (and their denial of the legitimacy of other forms).

Habitus tends to generate all the ‘reasonable’ and ‘commonsense’ behaviors (and only those) which are possible within the limits of these regularities, and which are likely to be positively sanctioned ... At the same time…it tends to exclude all ‘extravagances’ (‘not for the likes of us’), that is, all the behaviors that would be negatively sanctioned because they are incompatible with the objective conditions. (p. 55–56)

Hence, the ways in which we have come to think about schooling, governance, achievement, accountability, and so forth are reflected in the policy framework discussed earlier, but without any recognition that they represent arbitrary forms of legitimation of certain approaches and delegitimation of others. Indeed, if we accept Bourdieu’s explanation, it becomes obvious that educators themselves are often unaware of how habitus constrains both thought and action with respect to how we might do schooling differently. This may help to explain the ideology that
pervades the normative practices of schooling, an ideology that devalues migrants (and other minorities). When the rightness of this ideology is unquestioned, the concomitant assumption is that the minorities must adjust but that the dominant structures do not need to change. This supports the practice, for example, of reintegrating migrant students into regular classes, already underway, without providing structural modifications for this large group of students.

**Legitimized Cultural Capital**

Even more detrimental to the possibility of school success for minoritized youth is the fact that *habitus* legitimizes certain kinds of cultural capital and rejects others. Bourdieu (2004) explains that within any field, several kinds of capital operate simultaneously: economic, social, and cultural capital. He explains that cultural capital is capital that manifests itself as dispositions of the mind and body, as cultural goods such as books and instruments, and in institutionalized states such as educational qualifications. Social capital is made up of “social obligations and connections which are also, under certain conditions, convertible into economic capital” and may also be “institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility” (p. 47).

An understanding of these forms of capital makes it possible to understand Bourdieu’s notion of social reproduction and his conceptualization of the school’s role in this process. Bourdieu (2004) argues that too often we ignore “the contribution which the educational system makes to the reproduction of the social structure by sanctioning the hereditary transmission of cultural capital” (p. 17) and the fact that “the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family” (p. 17).

For the most part, educators seem to believe migrant students’ familial cultural capital is confined to their hard work in the cornfields. Despite the insistence of our student respondents that their parents want them to get a better education and “make something of themselves,” their schools apparently fail to offer the necessary guidance and support that might help them to develop realistic plans. Apart from José’s contention that his drug-involved uncle will support his college education, none expressed any clear idea of what it would take to get to college, or of the time or cost involved. In a very real way, these students have a vision but no concept of the means to attain that vision. Schools must take the responsibility here to go beyond offering test-taking skills; they must assist students to navigate the paths to post-secondary education—paths that value the social and cultural capital of schooling more than that of their homes.

The role of the family is particularly important to Bourdieu’s understanding of how capital is reproduced and explains the dissonance often experienced by children and youth between what has been taught and valued at home and what is valued at school. Bourdieu believes that child-rearing is “primary pedagogical work”—in other words, children’s first opportunity to develop cultural capital and to learn cultural mores occurs in the home. However, as Herr and Anderson (2003) explain, there is often a “disconnect between the cultural capital they obtain
through child-rearing (primary pedagogical work) and cultural capital implicitly valued in formal schooling and the mass media” (p. 418). Picking up Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1997) concept of symbolic violence, Herr and Anderson go on to state:

Moreover, the disconnect, because of its very invisibility, has the potential to powerfully “exert symbolic violence” to children whose capital may have high value at home, but be little valued in contexts of schooling. It is incumbent on us to recognize how this disconnect has not only been nurtured by historical inequities in citizenship, but is perpetuated by their persistence in society at large. (p. 418)

Here, then, is the explicit connection between the foregoing discussion of the micropolitical context of schooling in the US and the ongoing lack of achievement of migrant and other minoritized children in school. When the child’s culture is not valued at school, it is not obvious how additional tutoring, test preparation, or increased pressure to attain certain standards on tests will overcome the disconnect. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, there is strong evidence (related to the persistent achievement gaps, the drop-out statistics for migrant youth and youth from other visible minority and impoverished families), that such policies and practices are ineffective.

**Symbolic Violence**

What makes this situation even more critical are the assertions by Bourdieu and Passeron, that:

> educators are all directly implicated in: (a) committing acts of symbolic violence against students by imposing the arbitrary culture of dominant groups, and (b) perpetrating a conspiracy that maintains the illusion that education and schooling provide an avenue for lower classes to attain upward social and economic mobility. (summarized by Pajak & Green, 2003, p. 396)

Pajak and Green assert: “this misrecognition of education’s role in perpetuating inequities, we propose, could very well be partly responsible for thwarting needed reform” (p. 396). The issue is not that any individual educator (or group of educators) is consciously imposing practices that thwart the achievement of certain groups of children; rather, that failing to understand the power mechanism of social reproduction supports the invisible and unconscious nature of the neo-liberal “conspiracy”—one educators as well as policy makers must begin to address.

This misrecognition of education’s legitimizing role may also explain why minoritized students often appear acquiescent and accepting of the norms and structures of schooling. The only forms of resistance they have learned and that appear permissible (conditioned and sanctioned by the habitus of schooling) are those that are passive rather than active, requiring individual rather than collective action. Our respondents have been conditioned to take the responsibility for their own educational difficulties and bear the blame for their educational failures rather than to consider that the school or school system bears any responsibility for the violence that destroys dreams or thwarts achievement.
Herr and Anderson (2003) studied not only symbolic violence but the ways in which student violence is often framed in educational organizations through such interventions as anti-bullying or conflict resolution programs. They argue that we too often “focus on behaviour as if it were independent of its socio-historical context” and state that this approach is “embedded in a narrow psychological paradigm that limits solutions to classroom or organizational interventions” (p. 429–430). This insight is telling, given the number of incidents recounted by our student-respondents of getting into fights, being in trouble, and being suspended from school. In each case, they and the educators dealing with the situation simply addressed their individual behavior, without consideration of the ways in which migrant students were constructed and addressed by their classmates or even, as José indicated earlier, by some of their teachers. With Herr and Anderson (2003), we believe that the lack of attention to the needs of both individual students and minoritized groups of students is, indeed, a form of violence. To redress this violence, educators and policy-makers must address the socio-historical contexts of schooling that continue to perpetuate the historic inequities in citizenship found in society at-large, for these inequities support the habitus of schooling that actually does violence to many children.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has elucidated the large rhetorical gap between a mythical education system in which no child is left behind and the actual situation in which many children do not succeed—even in meeting the basic academic standards required by the state. More significant, however, is the fact that the negative micro-political context of schooling reflects rather than challenges elements in the wider society that create environments in which violence is perpetrated on students. Students bring to their schooling experiences the violence of the material situations of poverty and low levels of education forced upon their families by the nature of their work and an immigration policy that too often forces them to maintain a low profile as “illegals.” As educators fulfil the sorting and selection required by legislation, the violence is continued and exacerbated through the assumptions inherent in this sorting mechanism, and, perhaps most importantly, in terms of the constraints placed on students in their development as reflective, contributing human beings.

Bourdieu’s theory of change is explanatory with respect to the continuation of social inequality. First, it draws attention to the advantages (in the form of social, economic, and cultural capital) bestowed upon children of dominant families. Second, it subverts the myth of meritocratic schooling in which individual aptitude alone is the determinant of success. It thus helps educators to understand why educational change is so difficult and, at the same time, why it is necessary to take a broad system approach (rather than a psychological or programmatic one) if we want to institute reforms that have the potential to truly effect change in educational outcomes. Finally, it offers a wake-up call to action. As Herr and Anderson (2003) state:

Just as Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence involves many forms of capital and many sites of oppression that occur on multiple levels, altering
relations of domination will require struggle on many fronts, including, both
the critical pedagogical action of committed teachers who understand how
symbolic violence operates, and large-scale political struggles. (p. 431)

If we are to enjoin the struggle to promote equity and social justice in schools and
in the wider society, we must first recognize that change will not result primarily
from the use of additional resources, more certified teachers and administrators,
additional parent information, new instructional support or test preparation programs,
or better discipline policies, although these are certainly all important components
of efforts to achieve greater equity. Meaningful change cannot depend solely on
policies or programs but must start with recognition of the ways in which schools
reproduce the inequities of our wider society. To overcome the persistent (and
often stifling) habitus of today’s schooling will also require educators to value the
diverse cultural capital of minoritized students and to build strong and positive
relationships with them. It is time for educators to take up this habitus of activism—
to challenge the current neo-political political policies that reduce all children to
widgets and fungible commodities, and to affirm their differences. Unless educators
better understand how the dominant (largely White) middle-class capital has become
accepted as the norm, how it operates to advantage some and continues to dis-
advantage others, we will constantly grasp at reform initiatives that are individualistic
and inherently disconnected from the main systemic problem. Too often, the
current policy climate develops strategies to redress individual student failure by
rejecting or retooling “defective widgets.” Too often, educational policymakers fail
to understand or take account of the underlying ideologies and practices that support
current inequitable systems.

The policy context of today’s schools constructs not only migrant students, but
many others who are marginalized by reason of race, color, home language, religious
perspective, sexual orientation, and so forth, as problems, as deficient widgets,
thereby narrowing not only their individual opportunities for success, but inhibiting
the creation of a healthy democratic citizenry as well. Because the policy context
of NCLB is so all encompassing, so punitive, and so “high-stakes,” it has become
the touchstone for all activities in local schools. As adults capable of undertaking
and understanding the foregoing analysis, we must change the current policies that
convince children and youth that they are, alone, responsible for their failures. We
must recognize that within the field of education there are those who dominate and
those who are dominated, those whose cultural capital is valued and those whose
capital is not—and take immediate steps to ensure that schools affirm and include
different kinds of cultural capital. We can no longer ignore the ongoing failure of
education to help all children achieve the goals of knowledge acquisition,
individual freedom, and collective responsibility, thereby continuing to label and
blame them for the system’s shortcomings. We must make the system more inclusive
and more responsive.

We must not mistake acquiescence for engagement, nor interpret student
disengagement, lack of “discipline”, or academic failure simply as indications of
lack of motivation. Instead, as Ogbu (2008) might suggest, we must recognize that
these may be the only forms of resistance they have learned, and indeed, in this era
of conformity and control, in some cases, the only forms of resistance available to
them. Instead, we must find ways to “set them free.” Our argument is that we must
start by challenging policies that reinforce conformity and replace them with policies
that foster cultural understanding, creativity, and critical thinking. We must disrupt
the current violence that the micro-politics of schooling inflicts on youth. We must
ensure that the educational organizations of which we are a part create policy
communities and spaces in which youth are freed from acts of symbolic violence
and in which they are supported to achieve their goals of a better future for
themselves, and indeed, for the society in which they will later participate as adults.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. The chapter identifies some ways in which symbolic violence is imposed on
minoritized students. In what ways do you see students subjected to symbolic
violence in your school setting?

2. In what ways may a student express resistance in your context? What is the
institutional response to student resistance?

3. How has NCLB affected the way students (especially minoritized students) are
treated in your school? Does it narrow the curriculum? Affect the recognition of
various forms of students’ cultural capital? Permit alternate kinds of assessment?
Discourage a focus on preparation for achieving career goals, etc.?

NOTES

1  This and all other names of students are pseudonyms.

2  We use the term minoritized, rather than the more common word minority to indicate the process by
which those who are not members of the dominant middle class power group are ascribed
characteristics of subordinate groups, whether or not they are in the actual numerical minority in a
given school or community. For example, Spanish-speaking students may be in the numerical majority
in their Texas schools, but because the curriculum, rules, tests, and processes of schooling are still
those of the predominantly White middle class, one could appropriately refer to them as minoritized.

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