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*Presidential Address*

ETHICS FOR THE NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY:  
WHAT CAN IT MEAN TO BE PROFESSIONALLY RESPONSIBLE?

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In this address, I build the case that a new political economy of education, dominated by what Pauline Lipman calls the “neo-liberal social imaginary,”<sup>1</sup> is changing the moral context in which educators imagine their professional roles. I argue educators are placed in relation to others in rather complicated ways, leading to new and stunning moral problems and twisted versions of old and stunning moral problems. In what follows, I name two moral problems that most concern me: first, the valorization of the educator-as-entrepreneur,<sup>2</sup> to pull a phrase from Lipman, and the second, the normalization of the educated self.<sup>3</sup> I have been thinking and writing about this second problem for the past few years, and reading Lipman and other authors working on political economy has challenged me to see the problem a little differently. Taken together, I believe the two problems I name point to a fundamental danger we face in the United States, the potential privatization (or elimination) of social responsibility for public education. These moral problems highlight moral concerns that certainly extend beyond the scope of the individual educator’s moral actions. Nevertheless, drawing from Michel Foucault and James Brassett and Christopher Holmes, I argue for a professional ethics: one that engages rather than opposes power so we might have a chance at creating and sustaining some notion of professional responsibility in light of current challenges brought about by a changing political economy.

My motivation for this paper came just after finishing writing a book on professional ethics in the accountability era.<sup>4</sup> Almost immediately after sending off the last draft, I read Pauline Lipman’s book about school reform in Chicago, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education*, and Lipman made me wonder if I had it all wrong. It was not that I questioned the sufficiency of my argument, because I was not arguing for its sufficiency. I wondered instead whether anything I was suggesting would work at all, or if the actions I suggest would instead fall victim to the neoliberal regime. I know the context of

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<sup>1</sup> Pauline Lipman, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Michael G. Gunzenhauser, *The Active/Ethical Professional: A Framework for Responsible Educators* (New York: Continuum, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

neoliberalism matters; I refer to the term neoliberalism six times in the book without defining it. I go into detail about Gert Biesta's distinction about economic relations replacing relations of responsibility between families and schools.<sup>5</sup> Through Lipman's work, I came to appreciate the power of the new political economy of education to change power relations seemingly more quickly than with which any form of Foucaultian resistance could hope to keep pace. While Lipman writes her book about Chicago, her interpretations apply rather clearly to what we are experiencing in Pittsburgh, as my students working inside Pittsburgh Public Schools attest.

This line of thinking led me to pen our conference theme, since I wanted to draw the social and critical together in both those terms' doubled meanings. Lipman's challenge to me as a philosopher was to make the social and critical timely and complicate my thinking further with some additional "states of domination."<sup>6</sup>

## TWO MORAL PROBLEMS

### THE VALORIZATION OF THE EDUCATOR/ENTREPRENEUR

The first moral problem I address is the valorization of the educator/entrepreneur. One might call this the "Teach for America" (TFA) phenomenon, wherein teachers attend to their own individual needs for career satisfaction and professional respect by working for charter schools or becoming part of educational management organizations. This phenomenon includes the professional teacher who, constrained by the mandated practices of teaching to the test, constricted curriculum, and scripted instruction, chooses to work in a charter school, happening under Chicago's "Renaissance 2010" reform program.<sup>7</sup> Valorization comes in when teachers and the leaders for whom they work are repeatedly referred to as "reformers." The phenomenon also includes those who forego teacher preparation programs to join Teach for America.

Consider here the words of Megan Richmond, a fictional, TFA-like alumna writing for *The Onion*, under the title, "My Year Volunteering as a Teacher Helped Educate a New Generation of Underprivileged Kids":

Working as a volunteer teacher helped me reach out to a new generation of underprivileged children in dire need of real guidance and care. Most of these kids had been abandoned by the system and, in some cases, even by their families, making

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<sup>5</sup> Gert J. J. Biesta, "Education, Accountability, and the Ethical Demand: Can the Democratic Potential of Accountability Be Regained?" *Educational Theory* 54, no. 3 (2004): 233–250.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Lipman, *New Political Economy*.

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me the only person who could really lead them through the turmoil. . . . Ultimately, I suppose I can never know exactly how much of an impact I had on my students, but I do know that for me it was a fundamentally eye-opening experience and one I will never forget.<sup>8</sup>

The counterpoint is by fictional 4<sup>th</sup>-grader Brandon Mendez, one of Megan's students:

Just once, it would be nice to walk into a classroom and see a teacher who has a real, honest-to-God degree in education and not a twentysomething English graduate trying to bolster a middling GPA and a sparse law school application. I don't think it's too much to ask for a qualified educator, who has experience standing up in front of a classroom and isn't desperately trying to prove to herself that she's a good person. . . . I can't afford to spend these vital few years of my cognitive development becoming a small thread in someone's inspirational narrative.<sup>9</sup>

Captured in Mendez's framing is Richmond's focal placement on the teacher instead of the student as the primary agent in her calculus of her year of volunteer teaching's moral value. Richmond's valorization in the eyes of the public is embedded in Mendez's phrase, "inspirational narrative," in which he recognizes he is but a "small thread." While the public would never suspect Richmond of violence, Mendez does; he has to stick around in his school. He reframes concern for urban school reform around his substantive need for a professional teacher. He positions Richmond's empathy and altruistic motivation as both self-serving and unsustainable. Her competence is at issue; for Richmond, her ability to relate is primary.

In another passage, Mendez cautions: "Underprivileged children occasionally say some really sad things that open your eyes and make you feel as though you've grown as a person, but this is my actual education we're talking about here."<sup>10</sup> In light of Mendez's remarks, Richmond's confidence in her ability to relate as a teacher is parasitic on her belief in his family's inadequacy (or by association if other kids in the classroom say "really sad

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<sup>8</sup> Megan Richmond, "My Year Volunteering as a Teacher Helped Educate a New Generation of Underprivileged Kids," *The Onion*, July 17, 2012, paras. 2 and 6, <http://www.theonion.com/articles/my-year-volunteering-as-a-teacher-helped-educate-a-28803/>.

<sup>9</sup> Brandon Mendez, "Can We Please, Just Once, Have a Real Teacher?" *The Onion*, July 17, 2012, paras. 2 and 7, <http://www.theonion.com/articles/my-year-volunteering-as-a-teacher-helped-educate-a-28803/>.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 7.

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things”), which leads Richmond to conclude the school’s students are “abandoned by the system, and in some cases, even by their families.”

The precision of critical analysis makes this point/counterpoint from *The Onion* work as satire, and the piece highlights the parallel valorization of educator/entrepreneurs in popular discourse about school reform. About the time of TFA-veteran Michelle Rhee’s rise to prominence as chancellor of the District of Columbia school system, the mantle of “educational reformer” became attached to entrepreneurial leaders such as Rhee who arise outside teachers’ unions and university-based schools of education. Common characteristics of educational reformers are a connection to private philanthropy or investment, lack of experience teaching, and top-drawer educational pedigrees. Lipman’s identification of the teacher/entrepreneur is more endemic to the current political economy, however, because this group includes not only the transient altruist but also the frustrated professional seeking autonomy and flexibility, to which I presently turn.

#### THE NORMALIZATION OF THE EDUCATED SELF

The second moral problem I address is the normalization of the educated self, a phenomenon I seem to find everywhere lately, including this summer when entering the loan office of a car dealership. Upon hearing my son was about to start kindergarten at a school de-emphasizing standardized testing, the loan officer told me a story about her grandson, who I will call Hoss. Hoss’s grandmother told me how much he loves school and how he could not wait to go back in September, despite an experience with testing the previous year during fourth grade. Hoss and his classmates were in their classroom taking a standardized test, when the girl sitting next to him became agitated. His classmate apparently was upset about having trouble with the test. Hoss got up from his seat to help her, and the teacher told him to sit down. Hoss ignored his teacher and got up again to help his classmate. The teacher then threatened to send him to the principal’s office. Ignoring his teacher again, Hoss eventually was removed from the classroom and sent to see the principal. When asked by the principal why he had disobeyed his teacher, Hoss replied that his mother taught him he should help someone who was in trouble, no matter what, and his classmate needed his help. Further, he said he did not care what the school did to him, because what he did was right.

I hope this story is true and that I have the details correct, because it conveys a piece of a moral problem wrought by an oversized emphasis on students’ performance—individually and collectively—on standardized testing. Hoss had a standoff with his teacher, who insisted upon the integrity of the test. Whatever agitation Hoss’s classmate was experiencing, the teacher deemed it insufficient for intervention. Hoss apparently disagreed and intervened on principle. Further, he chose home over school: it appears his home-based moral guidance was strong enough to withstand his actions’ consequences in the school setting. His grandmother indicated this has been his only trip to the

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principal's office—and he remains unrepentant. His grandmother was clearly proud of him and eager to have me share his story with a bunch of strangers approximately one month later. Remarkably, Hoss refuses to subvert care to the project of the examination and is certain his family supports his priority. His grandmother certainly does.

Among the interesting (and, at least initially, “unintended”) consequences of *NCLB*, and as a consequence most significant to Hoss's story, educators now buy into the notion their own success depends upon their students' performance on tests, placing a heavy burden upon students to work toward the end of their teachers keeping their jobs. This poses a significant moral problem. Drawing from Gert Biesta, in this scenario the primary moral relation shifts from the teacher/student to the school/state,<sup>11</sup> which is itself a more powerful and disciplinary relationship by virtue of its vagueness and anonymity; in other words, it authorizes people to do crazy things like sending Hoss to the principal's office for attempting to care for his classmate's immediate needs.

About the same time *NCLB* was passed in 2001, researchers already knew predecessor reforms in states such as North Carolina, Kentucky, and Texas had led to widespread negative (unintended) consequences that needed attention if a test-based accountability reform system was to lead to growth in capacity, especially in the lowest-performing schools, and sustainable reform measurable beyond gains on states' own tests.<sup>12</sup> Subsequent research shows national accountability legislation indeed led to all the same consequences, with the invention of new consequences—the “bubble kid” phenomenon (placing emphasis and resources on the performance of children closest to proficiency levels to increase the likelihood of a school reaching proficiency goals) and institutionalized cheating (evident throughout the country but most

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<sup>11</sup> Biesta, “Education, Accountability.”

<sup>12</sup> See Richard F. Elmore and Susan H. Fuhrman, “Holding Schools Accountable: Is it Working?” *Phi Delta Kappan* 83, no. 1 (2001): 67–72; Martin Carnoy, Richard Elmore, and Leslie S. Siskin, *The New Accountability: High Schools and High-Stakes Testing* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004); James V. Hoffman, Lori Czop Assaf, and Scott G. Paris, “High-Stakes Testing in Reading: Today in Texas, Tomorrow?,” *The Reading Teacher* 54, no. 5 (2001): 482–492; Gail M. Jones, Brett D. Jones, Belinda D. Hardin, Lisa Chapman, Tracie Yarbrough, and Marcia Davis, “The Impact of High Stakes Testing on Teachers and Students in North Carolina,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 81, no. 3 (1999): 199–203; Richard A. King and Judith K. Mathers, “Improving Schools through Performance-Based Accountability and Financial Rewards,” *Journal of Education Finance* 23, no. 2 (1997): 147–176; Robert L. Linn, “Assessments and Accountability,” *Educational Researcher* 29, no. 2 (2000): 4–16; Linda M. McNeil, “Sameness, Bureaucracy, and the Myth of Educational Equity: The TAAS System of Testing in Texas Public Schools,” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 22, no. 4 (2000): 508–523.

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visibly in Atlanta’s public school system), a phenomenon so complex it led Berliner and his colleagues to develop a cheating typology.<sup>13</sup>

In my book, I posit concern as to the effect of accountability policy as a moral concern about the normalization of the educated self. Framed by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* as a technology of normalization, the examination has served its purpose under *NCLB* with sadomasochistic zeal by the educator who acts like a football coach using *Discipline and Punish* as a playbook. I argue this moral concern signals a full breakdown in educator professionalism, although that breakdown proves completely understandable and explainable. I argue, using Foucault’s theories of disciplinary power, that teachers and school leaders are now in a doubled domination role. They are dominated from above and dominate below, paying forward the ways in which they are themselves normalized by normalizing both one another and their students. Such doubled domination is not unique to accountability policy or *NCLB*; some would argue schools purposefully are organized for just this project (and Foucault theorizes the science of education indeed is built to support it).

In *The Active/Ethical Professional*, I argue for an approach to enacting an ethic based on Foucault’s ethic (through his concept of the care of the self) that requires an active philosophy of education and a robust sense of ethical responsibility. By “active,” I mean educators should “actively develop and assert a philosophy of education based on possibility (rather than normalization).”<sup>14</sup> To facilitate possibility, “the ‘ethical’ part is a call for educators to cultivate relations of responsibility (rather than accountability).”<sup>15</sup> Drawing from Foucault, I theorize relations of responsibility include the relation one has with oneself, proximal others, and the general public. My theory is evidenced by nine stories about teachers and administrators working under accountability pressure in Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, and North Carolina.

In some stories, the pressure is more severe than others, and throughout there are examples of acquiescence and resistance. I attend particularly to situations in which pressures are indirect—for instance, how schools and districts create policies and procedures more restrictive than state or federal law require. Often educators take this pressure for granted, disciplining themselves. I share a principal’s story in which he refuses to let teachers teach to the test or stop regular instruction to drill for state tests. The problem is teachers think they *should* stop and drill, since other schools they

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<sup>13</sup> Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, David C. Berliner, and Sharon Rideau, “Cheating in the First, Second, and Third Degree: Educators’ Responses to High-Stakes Testing,” *Educational Policy Analysis Archives* 18, no. 14 (2010), <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/714>.

<sup>14</sup> Gunzenhauser, *Active/Ethical Professional*, 7–8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

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know of are doing it. This principal is, in effect, working against teachers' desire to discipline themselves.<sup>16</sup>

I argue accountability ironically makes professional responsibility more difficult, because it causes teachers to distrust their own professionalism. The misuse of standardized tests as high-stakes measures of school quality are Foucaultian exercises of power that, on a daily basis, effect a power reversal: the measurement becomes the goal.

In response, I call for an ethics that helps on a daily basis, arguing:

I am interested in the ethics of the everyday—how we treat each other on a day-to-day basis in public schools, how we decide to act in response to explicit and implicit pressure of high-stakes accountability policy, and how we protect what we believe to be the meaning and value of education.<sup>17</sup>

An ethics of the everyday has a chance of enabling educators to make use of critiques of normalization and its exercise by use of the technology of the examination.<sup>18</sup>

To be ethical, educators not only need to resolve ethical dilemmas in defensible ways, but they also need to recognize themselves as powerful in relation to others. To be active, educators need to be vigilant for moments when they are placed in the position to be “reactive” to normalizing pressures, and they also need to develop clear notions of how they may create opportunities for the cultivation of educational selves—selves that are rich ethically, aesthetically, epistemologically, and politically. With these two notions taken together, the active/ethical professional is a grounded educator who is able to resist unreasonable demands placed upon him or her, to protect students from the worst of the normalizing pressures of accountability, and to create educational systems and structures that work against normalization.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE PRIVATIZATION OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Brandon's and Hoss's stories, examples of the moral problems of educators-as-entrepreneurs and normalization, together point to an underlying problem: one I call the privatization of social responsibility, an unfolding of

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 79–81.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> Gunzenhauser, *Active/Ethical Professional*, 9–10.

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neoliberal logic within public education. I do not argue this is a new phenomenon, for differential quality in educational capacity is a long-running scandal in public education. In educational history, the creation of the Julius Rosenwald Fund for African-American schools in the South could serve as an example, wherein a partnership between the Sears Roebuck fortune and the resolve of African-American community collectives worked in resistance to local communities' neglect regarding their children's education.<sup>20</sup> In this case, accepting double-taxation combined with collective uplift became forms of resistance. Lipman offers additional stories depicting the privatization of social responsibility. As she points out and I explain subsequently, collectivism effectively is not only systematically dismantled and discouraged, but in some cases, a community's history of collective resistance is co-opted to serve neoliberal logics. Coincidentally, such co-opting and dismantling occurs most starkly in Sears, Roebuck, and Company's hometown of Chicago.

### POLITICAL ECONOMY

In this section, I build a context of danger, if you will, mostly drawing from Lipman's *The New Political Economy of Urban Education*, in which she employs sociology and critical geography to disclose education's and urban reform's resistance to the neoliberal regime, arguing for greater attention to the voices of the dispossessed and displaced amidst the gentrification of Chicago and its public schools since roughly the beginning of Richard M. Daley's tenure as mayor. She argues for a broader "right to the city" (drawing on Henri Lefebvre) than that made possible by the Commercial Club of Chicago's (CCC) neoliberal bent toward school reform in Chicago. Conditions now make community organization and social action more challenging and the need for resistance greater. In her work—part research, part theorizing, and part activism—Lipman uses a theoretical concept borrowed from critical geographers, who link accumulation of space with capital accumulation.<sup>21</sup>

In describing the "neoliberal social imaginary," Lipman attempts to ascertain how activists might assert and enact high-quality education for people of color and those in poverty<sup>22</sup> and contest injustice "with greater potency and clarity"<sup>23</sup> to involve a wider number of people in both school reform<sup>24</sup> and the city's transformation.<sup>25</sup> Her approach offers an alternative to elite-driven, neoliberal, policy experiments that, through "pathologizing [the] racial discourse of the 'ghetto'"<sup>26</sup> and use of tax-increment financing to declare areas

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<sup>20</sup> James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 152–183.

<sup>21</sup> Lipman, *New Political Economy*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

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as blighted, between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s rendered portions of Chicago unrecognizable. Lipman yearns for (at least parts of) the grittier, more distinctive, and more diverse city she knew in the early 1980s.

The neoliberal social imaginary plays itself out in Chicago schools in at least two waves. The first wave brought the institution of top-down, test-based accountability under Paul Vallas, the mayorially appointed superintendent.<sup>27</sup> The first step toward Chicago schools' eventual, widespread privatization was the creation of selective-enrollment, magnet schools in wealthy, gentrified areas, coupled with direct instruction and military-type schools in African-American and Latino, low-income neighborhoods. The turn to market-driven reform in schools solidified with the next reform in 2003, "Renaissance 2010," a plan supported by the CCC planning an assortment of market-driven approaches: competition, closing schools, chartering and contracting schools, and employing non-union labor. Lipman analyzes the racist and racialized implications of this reform initiative, saying, "This expropriation of working class public schools is justified by what George Lipsitz calls a racialized social warrant for competitive consumerism and private expropriation and the racialization of space."<sup>28</sup>

In Renaissance 2010, privatization thrives, with differential effects. Those charter schools with access to private financial resources thrive, while those organized by community activists and parents do not. Lipman documents the processes of closing schools and reopening them as charter or turnaround schools, effectively "rebranding" areas of the city to attract more-affluent residents.<sup>29</sup> Renaissance 2010 policies call for public hearings anytime the board proposes to close a school. Lipman describes these hearings as farcical: community members have little opportunity to speak, no one responds to community members, and board members admit to not reading hearing transcripts.<sup>30</sup> The thin illusion of community participation is managed so it will not get in the way of neoliberal educational reform's "great idea." It proves, in fact, quite difficult to counteract hubris. Whereas the previous era of reforms relied upon compensatory programs that furthered a deficit model and promoted Eurocentric, middle-class-norming curricula, market-driven reforms

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<sup>27</sup> See Lipman, *New Political Economy* for background on predecessor reforms. These reforms reached their peak during Harold Washington's administration with the 1988 School Reform Act, which instituted Local School Councils and greater community involvement. The councils were starved of resources and eventually failed. See also Dorothy Shipp, *School Reform, Corporate Style: Chicago, 1880–2000* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Lipman, *New Political Economy*, 69.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

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further enact a colonial project through relocation and carving an ever-finer point on individualized deficit arguments.<sup>31</sup>

As Lipman sees it, moral effects become evident at the individual level to include teachers, community activists, and parents. Their roles are juxtaposed with those of the “new lords of urban education”: the venture philanthropists who become evermore powerful in educational reform. Laws, processes, and procedures come to favor the well-connected and well-financed. Lipman reveals the turn to school choice as an allegedly democratic act, a pillar of neoliberal economic discourse,<sup>32</sup> drawing from interviews with parents of children attending the “CollegeBound” charter network. These parents talk about their process of choosing to send children to charter schools, quite often rationalizing the local public school as low quality, focusing too much on testing, and lacking individual attention. In other words, what educational policy researchers describe as low-capacity responses to accountability policy<sup>33</sup> in district schools have led parents away from local, public schools. Lipman quotes one charter school parent, whose inflection was even stronger in person: “I don’t feel like I should have to feel like I have to sacrifice for my children’s education, you know, because I’m in support of public schools because this is still a public school as well.”<sup>34</sup>

These new conditions contrast with community-based struggles for greater school access and quality Lipman witnessed prior to neoliberal reform. In contrast to earlier reform efforts that involved community organizers and collective struggle among communities of people of color, she features a vignette of an urban charter school with a corporate board of mostly white, male, business executives. This school also has a group of mentors, also mostly white, male business executives—some from academia—but “no mentors who are community organizers, activists, artists, teachers, or working class men in the community.”<sup>35</sup> These absences further are troubling because in its promotional materials, the school positions its mission within the African-American tradition of collective uplift. Lipman finds,

Entrepreneurship and individual success replace social movements. This neoliberal rendition disarticulates the struggle for Black education from its emancipatory history and rearticulates it to individual advancement and middle class uplift of the poor, echoing the logic of the deconcentration thesis that justifies mixed-income schools and housing.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 46–47.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 137; see also Biesta, “Education, Accountability.”

<sup>33</sup> See Carnoy, Elmore, and Siskin, *New Accountability*.

<sup>34</sup> Lipman, *New Political Economy*, 135.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

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Discourses and practices operating within the neoliberal frame transform prior sources of activism, such as parent organizations. She describes a parent organization that runs New Schools Expo events, which helps parents figure out how to select a school for their children:

The parent organization does not work collectively for quality education but advises parents how to become savvy consumers and individual advocates for their children, including how to locate one of the new private transportation companies that have sprung up as a cottage industry to serve parents who are sending their children to schools around the city.<sup>37</sup>

In light of these developments, Lipman draws two interpretations. In the first she reveals neoliberalism working its way into the fabric of everyday decision-making by individual actors, especially the “marginalized and oppressed people acting in conditions not of their own making.”<sup>38</sup> Second, she argues it is crucial to understand the appeal of charter schools to these individual actors if “counterhegemonic alliances” are to be successful toward an “expanded definition of public education.”<sup>39</sup> Conditions have changed. The rules of participation in public education have changed. Actors channel their energies into individualized projects, matching one’s child to what is available, looking out for oneself. Collective action is made much more difficult for people without access to significant resources and centers of power.<sup>40</sup>

The neoliberal economy’s influence on education also affects the lives of teachers and the decisions that they make. Teachers likewise are forced into a market for their livelihood as well as their professionalism. What motivates a teacher to participate in a reform, to stay in a public school, or to relocate to a charter school? If a teacher is concerned with how he or she is made to normalize children, for instance, there is no counterhegemonic group to join. Instead, teachers (like students and parents) relocate themselves in the absence of collective locations. This is where Lipman names “the emergence of a new teacher subject—teacher as entrepreneur.”<sup>41</sup> Teachers seeking professional sites for their work may just find them in small locations and settings that are protected by forces of the market. They may find greater autonomy and flexibility, even if it means giving up tenure in order to get away from the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>40</sup> The Chicago teachers’ strike, going on at the time of this address, is an example of a counterhegemonic opportunity, and in which teachers were largely vilified, notably by Mayor Rahm Emanuel certainly, but also by observers throughout the popular press, including Nicholas Kristof, “Students over Unions,” *The New York Times*, September 12, 2012, A31.

<sup>41</sup> Lipman, *New Political Economy*, 127.

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routinized, standardized approaches to education demeaning to them and their relationships with students.<sup>42</sup> Teachers who wish to be treated as professionals find situations where they can grow as professionals, leaving the rest to fend for themselves. Lipman is justifiably concerned with what this means for the teacher profession.

### ETHICS AND POWER

Do the approaches Lipman advocates help us deal with the moral problems of the new political economy? Because Lipman only lightly touches on ethics, I would argue her approaches do so, but partially. Whereas Lipman takes the lead by naming the shifting grounds upon which teaching professionals are forced to operate, her solution is a political response that requires activism and collective action in the name of democracy. She proposes an alternative social imaginary where collective action is nurtured. At the same time, Lipman notes the problematic position of the educator/entrepreneur, the one who seeks out the charter school as a site of agency, as an escape from the challenges of non-charter public schools—test preparation, top-down management, and lack of resources. She comes to the conclusion the teacher living in the neoliberal imaginary is placed in an ethical dilemma, and the teacher’s response is engagement in collective action.

Neoliberalism seems so hegemonic and adaptable it is difficult to imagine how to respond to it without both an ethics and a politics. As someone with interests mostly in preparing teachers, principals, and other educators who work in educational settings, I am interested in what ideas one might put forward as a philosopher of education that may nurture an ethics and politics for a political economy entirely dominated by neoliberalism. I maintain part of that response is to cultivate more professionalism, and it takes a few moves to get to what I mean.

A first move would be to get ethics and power to come together—an ethics hip to power—that gives us a richer sense of the ethical actor as a political actor. For such an ethics I turn to James Brassett and Christopher Holmes, who argue political economists typically place ethics in opposition to politics as a corrective to power.<sup>43</sup> They write about the field of international political economy (or IPE), and I argue the same logics could be applied to the economic political discourse in education. They argue the study of IPE, “has been implicitly underscored by a concept of power *as obligation*,”<sup>44</sup> such that the ethical goal of IPE is to remove or refashion power relations “to preserve

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 127–128, 130.

<sup>43</sup> James Brassett and Christopher Holmes, “International Political Economy and the Question of Ethics,” *Review of International Political Economy* 17, no. 3 (2010): 425–453.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 427.

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freedom, justice, etc.”<sup>45</sup> In most IPE discourse, “power is the ability of one to obligate another.”<sup>46</sup> So, in other words, the big opposition in political economy is between freedom and limits on freedom, with the ethical project putting freedom as its end.

One could apply this same stark logic to education. This positioning of ethics in relation to power is echoed in depictions of high-stakes-accountability policy’s effects on teachers’ lives. Teacher morale, according to RAND’s extensive reports, is the chief victim of *NCLB*,<sup>47</sup> and, as argued by David Hursh in his review of neoliberalism’s effect on education, a chief struggle is to imagine alternatives to what neoliberalism’s mix of accountability and privatization seem to require.<sup>48</sup> Philosophers of education’s initial responses to *NCLB* proved prophetic about what kinds of effects it would have, and include such voices as those of Maxine Greene, Henry Giroux, Susan Franzosa, and Tom Popkewitz. And, so, education’s chief ethical struggle appears to be against accountability policy itself, defeating *No Child Left Behind*, etc., in the name of freedom.<sup>49</sup> There are many reasonable arguments against *NCLB*: arguments for altering the policy to make its goals more effective or to limit negative consequences. However, educational philosophers’ tremendous difficulty lies within how to begin to argue a replacement logic, which one knows by now is quite complicated, since the legislation itself has so radically altered teaching and schools’ relationships with families and communities. (One easily could argue the existence of a policy vacuum created by the failure of *NCLB*’s logic, leading venture philanthropists to seize unquestioned leadership of the reform debate.)

For their part, Brassett and Holmes are instructive in their summary of how IPE scholars characterize ethical responses to dominant political economies. In their telling, IPE is a largely critical discourse and takes one of

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 428.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 434.

<sup>47</sup> Laura S. Hamilton, Brian M. Stecher, Julie A. Marsh, Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Abby Robyn, Jennifer Lin Russell, Scott Naftel, and Heather Barney, *Standards-Based Accountability Under No Child Left Behind: Experiences of Teachers and Administrators in Three States* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007).

<sup>48</sup> David Hursh, *High-Stakes Testing and the Decline of Teaching and Learning: The Real Crisis in Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> See Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988); Henry A. Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* (Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1988); Susan Franzosa, “Authorizing the Educated Self: Educational Autobiography and Resistance,” *Educational Theory* 42, no. 4 (1992): 395–412; Thomas Popkewitz and Marie Brennan, “Restructuring of Social and Political Theory in Education: Foucault and a Social Epistemology of School Practices,” *Educational Theory* 47, no. 3 (1997): 287–313; Thomas Popkewitz, *A Political Sociology of Educational Reform: Power/Knowledge in Teaching, Teacher Education and Research* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991).

two approaches to incorporating ethics: either removing the freedom-curtailling effect of power or arguing for superior ethical obligations.<sup>50</sup> Both approaches reify neoliberalism and its notions of the individual, property, and market; instead, Brassett and Holmes accept particular power arrangements as a condition of ethics and expand their definition of power from *power over* to *power to*.<sup>51</sup>

Rejecting the power/ethics relation leads Brassett and Holmes to question IPE's liberalist groundings. Modernist IPE is based on the principle of freedom, particularly as articulated by John Stuart Mill, tying individual freedom to the principle of utility and the greatest good for the greatest number, and to the most definitive rendering of Rawls' first principle of justice. Many assume "Freedom is thus constituted as the absence of coercive power, and, vice versa, power implies the curtailment of freedom."<sup>52</sup> The modernist political economy's project maximizes individual freedom and minimizes coercive power, leading to reliance on contracts (both parties must exercise agency in order to enter into a contract). Neoliberal economics are therefore based upon the coexistence of freedom and contracts. Free markets are based on contracts freely entered into. "On this basis, a free market economy is concluded as the most just, most ethical solution to the distribution of goods, since ideally, it is made up of bilateral contracts."<sup>53</sup> According to Friedman, Hayek, von Mises, and Nozick, morally just government roles are circumscribed within actions that enable contracts to be honored.<sup>54</sup>

The other alternative present in IPE's discourse is building ethics from a different kind of obligation—"finding the obligations that human beings owe to each other, the environment, or the state."<sup>55</sup> Again, this is Rawls. The separation of ethics and power (and the privileging of the first) "risks reifying a set of particularly neo-liberal conceptions of the individual, property, and the market, albeit couched in the language of ethics."<sup>56</sup> This leads one to the old problem Frederick Douglass notes about moral suasion: the elimination of slavery relied upon convincing whites of their actions' immorality. Such thinking privileges the privileged as moral actors, and subsequently the project becomes persuading the powerful to give up power and eliminate their coercion of others.

As Brassett and Holmes argue, this ethics/power distinction does not include the voice of the subjugated other, the other's agency, or possibilities for

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<sup>50</sup> Brassett and Holmes, "International Political Economy," 428.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 434.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 428.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

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transforming relations of power. Instead, what one gets is continual frustration. Instead, they say,

. . . resistance is something that requires constant input in the form of thought and action within the existing field of power relations. Its task is not simply the overthrow or removal of power, whatever that might mean, but rather to articulate new modes of being, new “truths” and new possibilities, putting agents right back at the centre of the debate.<sup>57</sup>

Brassett and Holmes argue one is best served by a poststructural notion of power that integrates ethics and power, rather than separating them. In contrast to Lipman and Hursh, for whom naming ethical dilemmas is but one part of their work, Brassett and Holmes aim to center ethics and work toward making IPE a moral social science, making ethical possibility part of the inquiry, rather than a discourse of opposition to the political economy as it operates. Ethics, for Brassett and Holmes, is a constitutive discourse rather than a corrective to power. Their turn, following Foucault, is to look at the “content and potential violence(s) that ethics can enact.”<sup>58</sup>

Their approach makes for a contingent and constitutive ethics. Rather than relying upon a set of moral principles, such as a universal right to education, they envision ethics as an iterative process of what they call “ethical proposals” and “their empirical manifestations.”<sup>59</sup> They summarize their view in this way:

Theoretical as much of this argument may seem then, the actual proposition is to “demythologize” ethics—as something “outside of power,” or a way of “taming power”—and begin treating it as a subject for critical empirical enquiry like any other. In this way, the role of ethics in IPE can start to be seen rather like an ongoing conversation where propositions are made, ethical limits are identified and new resistances are made thinkable.<sup>60</sup>

They imagine their notion of ethics working in IPE because its use leads to rethinking traditional foundations of those theories guiding the discipline and to new understandings of democracy across nations, especially since, now more than ever, nations embrace democracy as a practice.

As examples of resistance thought about differently, Brassett and Holmes critique marquee anti-neoliberal practices such as buying fair-trade

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 441. Quoted passage represents Foucault’s ideas.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 427.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 428.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

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coffee and carbon trading as not necessarily flawed but in need of a critical eye. They argue these practices are themselves “already political and ethical at the moment of utterance”<sup>61</sup>; they are creative forms of resistance that not only make use of existing power arrangements, but also create new ones. These forms of resistance make new problems and carry new dangers, yet this does not mean they should not be enacted. However, it does mean that those who practice these forms of resistance cannot claim a moral high ground. In fact, it puts such forms of resistance in the impossible position of an ethical alternative to neoliberalism’s unethical (amoral) power.

Such forms of resistance are instead practices in need of the same scrutiny as any moral action, subject to adjustment and rethinking. Any such resistance is part of power; any rethinking and redoing still operates within and creates power relations. This inescapable relation between resistance and power is evident in Brassett and Holmes’ critique of fair trade:

For instance, as is the case with fair trade, an apparently straightforward intervention is unavoidably imbricated in the power/knowledge relations, which made the problem possible. Thus, resistance, as the “odd term,” involves tracing the line of fragility in the logic that produces concepts of “trade,” “fair trade,” and the relations between the two.<sup>62</sup>

They point out some argue a violence in fair-trade coffee is enacted against small farmers in coffee-producing countries who struggle to meet the demands of “ethical accountancy directives.”<sup>63</sup> Brassett and Holmes characterize a Foucaultian ethic as calling for more creative forms of resistance and “slower” forms of existence. It is especially important IPE’s disciplinary discourse seeks creative resistance because of signal issues like climate change, for which there are major structural impediments to large-scale improvement. In education, it seems to me a Foucaultian ethic is our best chance for getting ahead of those contexts limiting our ability to be professionals and develop as professionals.

Alas, Foucault is not especially helpful in his own words, and one might come away with the impression collective action is impossible. In some dialogues late in his life, Foucault reinforces the idea his is a different kind of ethics. In his genealogies he focuses on the history of problems as opposed to the histories of solutions, since the framing of problems is more illustrative of his theory and attention to the dangers of our ethical positions is of utmost importance. In his words:

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 446.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 447.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

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is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger.<sup>64</sup>

Research literature on the effects of high-stakes accountability policy is filled with examples of competing dangers associated with implementing *NCLB*.<sup>65</sup> As shown in the RAND studies, some of the most widespread and dangerous choices are not those mandated by *NCLB* but those made by school districts and schools for the sake of compliance, such as focusing on “bubble kids” and limiting instruction to what is covered on tests, both found in nearly all RAND study schools.<sup>66</sup> Such dangerous choices are also richly evidenced in recent exposés of institutionalized cheating scandals. As Gert Biesta argues, the greater danger is that these choices place the relation of the school to the state in a superior position to the relation between the teacher and student.<sup>67</sup> When I wrote my book, these were the contexts in which I was most interested (and the most familiar): schools and school districts in which, on a smaller scale, these kinds of decisions were being made: the small, day-to-day decisions that added up to large-scale, moral problems for teachers and students. And so I came to articulate what I refer to as the active and the ethical and their relation.

For guidance on what to focus on more positively, Foucault turns to creativity. He asks: “Couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life?”<sup>68</sup> His move is away from basing one’s life on knowledge of the truth (“truth about desire, life, nature, body, and so on”).<sup>69</sup> One does not work toward authenticity in the sense that one works toward the image of one’s true self.<sup>70</sup> Foucault’s approach to ethics as the care of the self sets up a difference in moral action. His is a different kind of ethics: “the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, *rappor à soi*, which I call ethics, and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions.”<sup>71</sup>

#### COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

One ends up with a dangerous ethics and an unavoidable ethics. It is also a wiser ethics. One can understand from a more-fully ethical perspective why Lipman finds the privatized professionalism of teachers proliferating in

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<sup>64</sup> Foucault, *Michel Foucault*, 256.

<sup>65</sup> Gunzenhauser, *Active/Ethical Professional*, chap. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Hamilton et al., *Standards-Based Accountability*.

<sup>67</sup> Biesta, “Education, Accountability.”

<sup>68</sup> Foucault, *Michel Foucault*, 261.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 261–262.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

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Chicago so troubling: the danger is that neoliberalism's move to privilege privatization channels the professional impulses of teachers into pedagogical roles in which their relations of responsibility are curtailed. In order to embrace their own autonomy, they must become complicit with the new, "pseudo-democratic" view of students and parents as consumers of educational services. In so doing, teachers give up a certain amount of collective responsibility.

What can collective responsibility look like? Unless collective responsibility embraces the full community, it cannot be envisioned as collective responsibility. Foucault argues one has to get away from the idea that individual actions affect the whole world. And, at the same time, he argues our choices will not lead to the destruction of society. Believing individual actions affect the entire world relies upon reasoning from universals, rather than honoring the particularity of individuals' situations. Foucault does not mean personal decisions do not have implications for others. He instead argues one's actions create a moral life, not obedience to principles.

### CONCLUSION

Each example I offer of a moral problem calls for reframing. I return now to the valorization of the educator/entrepreneur, to Brandon Mendez, the prophetic fourth grader, responding to the heroic anti-professionalism that undergirds the Teach for America movement. This satire is its own resistance. Its point is not that TFA is bad, but that it is dangerous for the very reasons stated. Megan's rationale for teaching becomes a metaphor for solely ethics-based, class-bound approaches to teaching. These are the limits: Megan is incompetent, focused on herself, yet through good intentions and superior class position, positioned to reinforce an anti-professional disposition toward teaching. Her actions provide a corrective to the entire ethical enterprise; she fails to see the greater danger. Or, maybe she also read Foucault and thought she was fighting hegemonic power.

The normalization evident in Hoss's story picks out the dangers associated with framing testing as schooling's goal. His is a story that needs to be told and retold for the appreciation of its moral sentiment. One should romanticize it if only in order to reframe it. The actions of the teachers in this example fall in line with the deferral of responsibility evidenced throughout educational research literature. High-stakes accountability policy encourages self-disciplining over and above what is required by the policy itself. On an everyday basis, multiple decisions get made which extend the negative consequences of high-stakes accountability policy, and these decisions are made by people at all levels. My wish is for our undergraduate, pre-service teachers and graduate students who are educational leaders to develop a disposition toward their practice where they see themselves as both active and

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ethical—an active assertion of a philosophy of education based on possibility and the ethical cultivation of relations of responsibility.<sup>72</sup>

Upon reconsidering my argument on the active/ethical in light of the neoliberal economy's political discourse, I suspect ethics without some notion of collective action is potentially deadly to individuals' moral agency. Public responsibility (or collective responsibility, as Lipman calls it) is certainly the most challenging aspect of our current ethics.

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<sup>72</sup> Gunzenhauser, *Active/Ethical Professional*, 7–8.

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