AN EDUCATION FUNDAMENTALISM?
LET THEM EAT DATA!

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Henry A. Giroux claims this to be the "worst of times" for US public education.[1] Not alone in this judgment, numerous other scholars stand in agreement with him.[2] These thinkers view the current corporate/accountability/ testing movement, with its iron grip on public school policies, as disfiguring and disparaging the US system of public schools. A system that, in the past, was viewed, primarily, as a "public good" now appears to be a "public problem." To be clear, the notion that schools served as a public good in the past does not mean negative criticism was absent; however, schools' problems could be addressed with a reform here or there, and schools could again serve well the nation and its citizens.[3] Language used to describe schools now, however, reliably has moved toward the notion of *failure* or *crisis*. Shifting from public perception as a public good to public problem precipitates change in vision, mission, and purposes for public schooling: a shift away from the strain of ideals embedded within certain educational philosophies that argue for the development of thoughtful, public citizens capable of participating in a functional democracy and a meaningful life, and toward the concept of preparing individuals for a market-driven, consuming society, whose citizens contribute to the corporate good. This turn leads to re-visioning knowledge as a set of accumulated facts and skills, with the completion of formal schooling ultimately leading to a job and consumerism.[4] I identify this current way of viewing schools and the accompanying educational policies that now dominate as an educational fundamentalism.

The current standardized accountability movement dominating US public schools has been analyzed through economic, educational, and political lenses, with numerous critiques finding the current system wanting, yet its iron-clad dominance remains. Perhaps this movement's strength lies in its

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[1] Henry A. Giroux, *Education and the Crisis of Public Values* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), ix.

[2] For example, the work of Gerald Bracey, Nel Noddings, Alfie Kohn, Susan Ohanian, Parker Palmer, Deron Boyles, and many others could be cited.

[3] This type of positive thinking about American schools is exemplified by Lawrence A. Cremin: "I happen to believe that on balance the American education system has contributed significantly to the advancement of liberty, equality, and fraternity." *Traditions of American Education* (New York: Harper Books, 1977), 127.

[4] See Deron Boyles, *American Education and Corporations: The Free Market Goes to School* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).

"religious" dimension. In *Public Education: America's Civil Religion,* Carl Bankston, III and Stephen J. Caldas make a reasoned, historically based argument that public education, since the inception of the common school onward, has served in various ways as a "central part of the belief in the nation."[5] In other words, Bankston and Caldas locate public schools as part of a civic, secular religion that valorizes nationalism, the values of the founding fathers, and major documents and events of the nation, with schools having faith placed in them to bring about the desired type of citizens needed for a democracy or, more recently, to serve as the "engine" for the nation's economic well-being.

Whether one agrees schooling is a part of a civic religion[6] or not, certainly the argument can be made that *metaphorically* schooling can be compared to religion, and, if so, then some qualities often associated with sacred religions can be associated with non-sacred schooling. Divergent and differing levels of belief, for example, exist within sacred organizations, and as religious scholars point out, disagreement as to "right" beliefs and practices abound. The same can be said of theories related to schools and the types of knowledge transmitted or inculcated there. For example, in educational literature twentieth-century disagreements between progressive educators and behaviorist, skill-driven advocates often are contrasted.[7] Sacred religious organizations often ascribe to contrasting or opposing doctrines simultaneously, yet they continue to hold together as a unit, and for a good portion of public schooling's history, the same can be said of those visions and purposes given public schooling, with faith in the value of schooling holding strong. In religious organizations, when a sub-group of that organization believes its particular set of values threatened or that it has the "correct" vision, that sub-group often detaches from or attempts to take over the larger group in order to secure its belief against all others; these individuals are usually called fundamentalists.[8]

Certainly, fundamentalism is a most contested term. Locating a specific definition is difficult, but religious scholars such as Karen Armstrong note fundamentalists are confrontational and love to battle "demons."

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[5] Carl Bankston, III and Stephen J. Caldas, *Public Education: America's Civil Religion* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009), 166.

[6] I definitely think a case can be made for schools being a civic religion, but that argument is already well made by Bankston and Caldas, and would require many more pages than this short essay allows to do their argument justice.

[7] Texts such as Fred Schultz, ed., *Sources: Notable Selections in Education* (Guilford, CT: Dushkin/McGraw-Hill, 1998) include analyses of various curriculum proposals, especially noting their points of disagreement, as do more recent texts, such as those by Gerald Bracey and Susan Ohanian, who especially note current schools' skills-driven curriculum.

[8] Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism* (New York: Random House, 2000), makes this point.

Additionally, she asserts fundamentalists are loath to take negative criticism or to hear and give thought to alternate visions.[9] Making similar claims, Lucy Sargisson describes fundamentalists in the following manner: "These groups seek to protect, preserve and re-establish the core of their belief-system, which they believe to be under threat."[10] Given that fundamentalist characteristics vary and are numerous, I use the following two aspects of religious fundamentalism upon which I structure this paper:

1. Fundamentalism is a response to a *perceived crisis or danger*.[11] The response includes a strict adherence to a set of principles, with the belief of the inerrancy of those principles and a tendency to defer to authority. Fundamentalists feel their policies are absolutely right.[12] This conviction leads to a refusal to hear alternative perspectives and visions.

2. Fundamentalists also embrace a powerfully rigid, limited discourse full of binaries. Following a utopian vision[13] and seeking certainty and perfectionism,[14] in their attempt to overcome "external threats" to their core beliefs fundamentalists truncate their basic discourse and advocate "violence toward the other" when "justified."[15]

In this paper initially I concentrate on these two aspects (crisis and discourse) often associated with religious fundamentalism to show how they are apt descriptors of current educational policy and practice. I then explore briefly why it is important for those involved with formal education and current schooling policies to understand fundamentalist tendencies.

The Perceived Crisis and Response

The complex nature of fundamentalism is obvious in the works of authors such as Joel A. Carpenter and other theologians who offer analyses of religious fundamentalist movements.[16] Carpenter's work leads his reader to recognize how specific qualities of fundamentalism change with the historical period in which the specific form is embedded and those qualities become both a result of and a change agent within the context of their time.[17]

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Lucy Sargisson, "Religious Fundamentalism and Utopianism in the 21st Century," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12, no. 3 (2007): 273.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 279.
[13] Ibid., 283.
[14] Ibid., 273.
[15] Ibid., 284.
[16] Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[17] Ibid.

Fundamentalism, then, has social roots, and these roots, with the accompanying attitudes, extend into institutions through individuals and groups that compose them, as the fundamentalist group seeks to militate against those holding "other" values or beliefs.

Religious fundamentalists, generally acknowledged as being in "defense" mode, then, are trying to protect or preserve through action and ideology. Theologian George M. Marsden argues current religious fundamentalists are opposed to modernism and their fundamentalist beliefs are a reaction against the cultural tendency to embrace liberal values both in public and religious life. He sees twentieth- and twenty-first-century US fundamentalists as "fighting against the inroads of theological modernism in mainline denominations…and a variety of alarming changes in culture."[18] Fundamentalists associated with this current historical time, then, are alarmed about the direction of both mainline religious thought and the movement toward social liberalism in secular cultural values and practices. In addition, they are concerned about progressive and scientific ideas, such as evolution; thinking of their own biblical teachings as inerrant truth, fundamentalists argue against scientific notions that erode their own accounts.[19]

Here I think it important to note the tie between this type of fundamentalist thought and all levels of educational institutions, especially colleges and universities. During modernity, commencing in the 1600s and gaining dominance in the following centuries, university systems gradually moved away from religion as their pedagogical foundation and toward science and rationality, so that by the twentieth century, science and rationality dominated as the favored mode of knowledge in most secular universities.[20] As most modern universities increased their focus upon research and development, they also became more diverse in population and ideologies. In addition, in most colleges and universities, attempts have been made to increase diversity both in the actual student body and in its curricular content. Therefore, courses and majors have been added that relate to women, non-western populations and religions, and other multicultural issues.[21] The fundamentalist wish for certainty and one "right" model no longer exists at most US universities: many modes of thought are extant. People who claim a "certain" way of thinking and of living are often suspicious of universities. For example, concerned parents often instruct entering first-year, college students to be careful of the "fanciful"

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[18] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 240.

[19] Ibid., 246.

[20] Numerous histories of educational thought and universities could be cited here; readers may consult George F. Kneller, ed., *Foundations of Education* (New York: Wiley, 1967).

[21] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 293–301.

ideas they encounter there. Actually, such parents are caught between the dominant, corporate, social command everyone must go to college in order to succeed in life (usually meaning obtaining a job) and their fear of what the institution might do to their daughter's or son's belief system.[22]

This same concern about types of materials and values taught extends to P–12 schools. Certainly the "culture wars" in the later part of the twentieth century bear witness to attempts to broaden the curriculum so underrepresented populations could have their literature and life experiences represented.[23] The emerging diversity focus led to criticism of schooling by those I call fundamentalists; they complained and worried about the content of the social studies curriculum, errant literature, indecent art, multiculturalism, and diversity inclusion. Their complaints and worries appear to be based upon the idea or fear that if these items are placed in the curriculum, their own set of values will be eroded and the skills and information their particular children need emphasized will not be "covered."[24] Perhaps one of the most direct ways to observe how such concerns have been treated in curricular contexts is to note the ways in which numerous states' agencies struggle with the theory of evolution. Many states still do not use the term in their materials, calling it instead "change over time" or some other euphemism.[25]

Also, the retreat to measuring student progress on "basic skills" as the main line of defense against "poorly performing schools" provides another example. When worries or fears increase, fundamentalist tendencies also strengthen, often moving toward the most basic observable behavior so performance can be monitored. The connection, then, between conservative fear and current corporate policies that dominate P–12 public schools is strong, especially as schools are now viewed as *the* source of the nation's problems,[26] with the solution appearing to be to standardize, test, and institute massive oversight of schools and their teachers. This solution, advocated for and funded by corporate think tanks, brings together two unlikely groups: conservative parents/citizens and corporate millionaires.

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[22] As a faculty member who works with incoming first-year students and their parents, I have had this fear verbalized to me on numerous occasions, usually by students talking to me about their parents' concerns.

[23] Joel Spring, *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), chap. 6.

[24] For one account, which explores how skills are now used to assuage this fear, see Kathy Emery and Susan Ohanian, *Why Is Corporate America Bashing Our Public Schools?* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004), 189.

[25] The Commonwealth of Kentucky serves as an example of the use of "change over time" rather than evolution in its schooling documents.

[26] Gerald Bracey, *Setting the Record Straight* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004), introduction.

Locating the exact date US schooling becomes problematized is difficult. Definitely periodic, negative criticism has been directed toward public schools since their inception, but in the past, negative criticism usually was offered against basic conceptual notions of public schools as a sound idea and a public good. However, when the USSR launched Sputnik into space before the US had done so, alarming government officials who, in turn, alarmed citizens, a thought formed that perhaps US schools were inferior to Russian ones.[27] Gerald Bracey notes this particular watershed in schooling criticism in the following way: "When in 1957, the Russians launched *Sputnik*, the first manmade satellite to orbit Earth, the school bashers felt vindicated. . . . The schools never really recovered from Sputnik."[28] Even so, critics of that time seemed to think that with work, the curriculum could be changed and US schools would improve, as evidenced by massive federal dollars expended to improve public schools' math and science instruction.[29] That infusion of federal funding certainly agitated against any notion public schools were inherently bad enough to be punished and ultimately dismantled. The germ of that idea must have been incubating, however, because by the 1980s the thought schools were failing was often noted and ultimately became commonplace. *A Nation At Risk* (1983), hailed as a landmark study,[30] set the tone for many future criticisms of US schools. The steady publication of negative books and reports from think tanks and government entities during the last half of the twentieth century continues today to feed the notion public schools are a failed venture in need of strict recovery measures.[31] With the notion that schools were failing the economic and global needs of the nation, corporate interests combined with political interests to usher in a media blitz that situated US schools as in crisis and cast severe doubt about the future of public education.

Reports and book titles such as *A Nation at Risk*[32] illustrate the power of language in forming the crisis. The criticism became not only were US schools bad, but they also actively were harming the future of the entire nation. With the charge that schools were now damaging the nation's economy and prestige, the last straw seemed to have broken, with schools and their teachers becoming "bad"—the problem rather than the answer. The ground was

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[27] Many sources for this idea could be cited; readers may consult William J. Reese, *America's Public Schools* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 295.

[28] Bracey, *Setting the Record Straight*, 2.

[29] S. Alexander Rippa, *Education in a Free Society* (New York: Longman, 1997), 349–351.

[30] Bracey, *Setting the Record Straight*, 3.

[31] Bracey notes this criticism as a call to restructure or do away with public schools, and states: "The years following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* have witnessed an unprecedented outpouring of anti-public school sentiments" (4).

[32] National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation At Risk: The Full Account* (Portland, OR: USA Research, Inc., 1994).

prepared for a spate of films masquerading as documentaries, such as *Waiting for Superman*,[33] used to continue to convince the general public that public schools have failed and are in need of having stringent measures applied to them. The corporatized solution of a performance system featuring school choice, vouchers, sanctions, and punishments has taken firm hold, and this system is now supported by many politicians, state agencies, and parents as the solution to redesign and redeem public schools, often into charter schools, in order to become an economic fuel pump and to make teachers teach the "way they are supposed to."[34]

The problematizing of US schools then ushers in an accountability agenda built upon a set of rigid principles. Responding to the perceived crisis— a fundamentalist characteristic—now becomes a vital aspect of current policymakers' rhetoric. Policymakers (in what I call a fundamentalism in education) believe they have the absolute right answer for "fixing" schools. Their answer, often called performance or accountability, involves standardization through common-core standards and accountability through standardized tests and other student data: data that is to be collected and evaluated constantly. Performance-based school systems also feature a penchant for outcomes-based instruction and a system of rewards and punishments.[35] The policymakers' answer fits the other descriptors of fundamentalism: a strict set of principles—those previously enumerated as a part of accountability; a belief in the inerrancy of their proposed methods; a refusal to listen to or "hear" alternative suggestions; a simple view of knowledge—one in which knowledge consists of what easily can be observed and tested; a love of and reliance on data and its use; and a truncated schooling discourse that shapes policy.[36]

Because educational, fundamentalist rhetoric attracts adherents, especially conservative citizens and parents of underrepresented populations, I turn to the second broad fundamentalist characteristic that fits and works in concert with the crisis characteristic, *discourse*. The importance of discourse in the ways individuals structure, think about, and imagine their lives, individually and with others, cannot be overstated. The shape, form, and quality of discourse in many ways control thinking, setting the parameters of what can

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[33] *Waiting for Superman,* directed by Davis Guggenheim (2010; Los Angeles, CA: Warner Brothers, 2011), DVD.

[34] Diane Ravitch, "Schools We Can Envy," *The New York Review of Books*, March 8, 2012, 3.

[35] Numerous authors have described this performance system. Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (New York: Basic Books, 2010) offers perhaps the most focused description and criticism of the system, owing especially to her original support of the performance model.

[36] Ibid. Ravitch criticizes these aspects of the performance model.

"legitimately" be said and questioned.[37] James Paul Gee claims discourses inherently are ideological and invoke "a set of values and viewpoints in terms of which one must speak and act."[38] Additionally, he claims "discourses are resistant to internal criticism and self-scrutiny. …the discourse itself defines what counts as acceptable criticism."[39] Most importantly, Gee claims "discourse-defined positions from which to speak and behave are not, however, just defined internal to a discourse, but also as standpoints taken up by the discourse in its relation to other, ultimately opposing, discourses."[40]

Gee's attributes of discourse illustrate the power a particular and accepted way of speaking has upon the actions of those who ascribe to it. Therefore, as in religious fundamentalism where the shape and extent of discourse shapes what can be said and done, the language used to talk about schooling policies likewise hectors and fashions those designing and implementing current schooling directives, as I show in the next section.

Discourse

With the acceptance of the corporate model in education, the language used to describe the field was altered. Now, corporate terms such as *outcomes, targets, merit pay, bottom line, product, performance*, and *data* dominate educational discourse. These corporate terms render many traditional ways of describing and talking about educational processes nearly silent. For example, conversations about tradition, citizenship, morality and values, educational controversies, ambiguities, big-life questions, agency, and so forth— historically the content of educational philosophers' work, such as that of John Locke, John Dewey, Nel Noddings, Maxine Greene, and many others—is now neglected or relegated to non-important status. If a goal or teaching practice cannot be stated in observable outcomes and quantified, it cannot be a part of the current schooling discourse or curriculum. The "I-want-results-now" discourse of educational practice now relegates thoughtful and longitudinal learning to the outdated "junk heap" of educational ideas.[41]

Kathy Emery and Susan Ohanian claim corporate interests/politicians who designed the *No Child Left Behind Act* (*NCLB*) deliberately focused the language or discourse they would use to sell their idea to the public.

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[37] Vijay K. Bhatia, John Flowerdew, and Rodney H. Jones, eds., *Advances in Discourse Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2008). This volume features a collection of essays on the power of discourse, especially noting the work of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.

[38] James Paul Gee, "What is Literacy?," in *Becoming Political: Readings and Writings in the Politics of Literacy Education*, ed. Patrick Shannon (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992), 22.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Alfie Kohn, *What Does it Mean to Be Well Educated? and Other Essays on Standards, Grading, and Other Follies* (Boston: Beacon, 2004).

Purposefully, these leaders selected loaded, yet simple, words designed to transmit a climate of fear and crisis. As Emery and Ohanian argue:

> The phrase *failing public schools* has a lot in common with *war on terror*: get the media to parrot these phrases often enough so that you can't hear *terrorism* without thinking there's a need for war, and you can't hear *public schools* without thinking they are failing and need to be fixed.[42]

The brilliance of this discourse, the authors claim, is that ordinary citizens not connected with schools hear media accounts and easily concur because through language used, the corporate elite and politicians have "already defined both the problem and the solution."[43]

Current educational leaders who now control schooling discourse use the fundamentalist tactic of closing ranks and making alternate ways of thinking and speaking suspect and unacceptable. In so doing, current corporate educational leaders make their outcomes (ends) also the means to those ends. A discourse that focuses exclusively on what can be seen and measured (with collected data being used as criteria for success) subverts the process of learning, pulling pedagogy toward the set-of-skills side of a longstanding debate and away from the thoughtful, arduous task of mediating between the experiences of learners and the historical conversation of those who "consider" ideas and alternatives to those ideas. In essence, current educational fundamentalists have exchanged *measured* in its classical meaning for *measured* in the corporate sense. That is, current educational strategists have made a new meaning for the term *measured*, moving it away from the notion of being a careful deliberation to an active verb of constantly "checking" or measuring to make sure skills have been learned, with teachers evaluated on the basis of their students' success at taking tests measuring those skills. Teachers and students are under constant surveillance from school supervisors[44] and the public, submitting to constant measurement as school test scores are compared across the district or state, and punitive measures applied to those with low scores.

Other than the prevalence of testing and data in fundamentalist/ corporate discourse, current ways of speaking of schooling have virtually stopped educational conversations related to multiculturalism and changed the ways immigrant children are brought into US schools and validated. Joel

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[42] Emery and Ohanian, *Corporate America,* 6.
[43] Ibid.
[44] I make this claim based on conversations with current P–12 teachers who describe how supervisors look into their classrooms from hallways, logging data into their Palm Pilots about what they observe. Also, P–12 teachers report having to administer several "learning checks" per day and week in preparation for exams; this data is stored in each school's "data room" and must be consulted when planning further instruction.

Spring notes *NCLB* ends the culture wars (previously alluded to) that previously dominated curricular arguments.[45] Rather than leaving no child behind, *NCLB* actually set the stage for leaving many students behind by changing the ways native languages and cultures are treated in public schools, making arguments about the best way to serve the needs of non-English-speaking children moot. The term English as a Second Language (ESL) is now outdated—students are English Language Learners (ELLs). The acronyms say it all in this clever sematic shift. Arguments about how to integrate immigrant and regional cultures of students into the curriculum effectively have all but disappeared. With the penchant for observable outcomes, targets, and results, no time is available to explore regional or world cultures; besides, those require the learning objective to read, "children will gain an appreciation for…," and such a goal is not easily observed or measured. Therefore, it cannot be used.

These strategic omissions and others point to the bitter irony of fundamentalist educational discourse with its claim of "leaving no child behind." Actually, *NCLB* does the opposite when its policies are put into action.[46] For example, while claiming equality through sameness for all, the policies of *NCLB* remove multicultural content and English as a Second Language programs from the curriculum, which, as Joel Spring notes, is a form of racism.[47] Though the discourse claiming equality of educational opportunity rests with uniformity of standards, curriculum, and testing, current educational policymakers use *NCLB*'s tenets to remove programs that provide educational opportunity for diverse and low-socioeconomic-status students.[48] Spring ends his argument with the following conclusion:

> Today, [US] educational policy allows for separate but equal. Disappearing from the rhetoric about equality are discussions of language and culture. *No Child Left Behind* makes English the dominant language of schools and forces schools to teach a common culture that is embedded in the common core standards. Low-income minority students are effectively segregated from high-income students, particularly whites. Equality now means equal treatment where all students are taught the same curriculum and evaluated on the same tests. *No Child Left Behind* spawned a new era of separate but equal and inequality of cultures and languages.[49]

Educational policymakers have long argued about the goals, content, delivery, and evaluation of what occurs in classrooms. However, corporate/fundamentalist educational leadership shifts the conversation,

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[45] Joel Spring, *Deculturalization*, 140–141.
[46] Emery and Ohanian, *Corporate America,* 6.
[47] Spring, *Deculturalization,* 161.
[48] Ibid., see particularly Chapter 7.
[49] Ibid., 161.

through engineered discourse, mainly to educational delivery and evaluation, and those two aspects truncate educational content. Also, with their belief that education's purpose—raising test scores—is both inerrant and the "saving" message for schools, educational fundamentalists effectively block opponents from raising criticism of their methods and goals.[50] Therefore, just as in religious fundamentalism, the current dominance of the corporate model and its discourse leads both to a schooling orthodoxy (belief in accountability through measurement and sanctions as the only way to "save" schools) and orthopraxy (day-to-day testing, standardization, and limited and often scripted pedagogical experiences). As previously noted, discourse possesses power not only through its language but in the actions that language inspires. It seems important, then, further to note how discourse-inspired actions are sanctioned and enforced.

Part of the popularity of the corporate/fundamentalist agenda and resulting actions may be attributed to US culture's strong fundamentalist bent and its penchant for security and certainty, with a political system that currently combines corporate interests with large, fundamentalist, religious groups' interests.[51] In the same way, the current educational agenda is embraced both by the corporate/political group and socially conservative-leaning parents and citizens. The alliance between these two disparate groups occurs in the same way the two groups now combine within the political system: there are parts to each group's agenda that appeal to each faction. For conservative parents, it may be the removal of multicultural and other diverse content from curricula through implementation of the common-core standards and standardized tests that appeal to advocates. In any account, the "soil" was and remains fertile for an education system that mirrors a societal predilection for seeking certainty.[52] Hearing the words of contemporary educational reformers whose discourse insists all schools should "measure up" in order to avert a national economic crisis, and schools should standardize educational practices so all children will have an equal chance of succeeding sounds "good" to parental ears. Telling parents charter schools offer choice in their children's education, much as private schools do for rich people, also resonates with lower- and some middle-income families constantly told by current schooling critics their children are being ignored in public school classrooms and not being treated fairly. Being treated fairly is a mantra of US society, so the importance of including "fairness" in the corporate/fundamentalist educational discourse is vital and resonates with many. However, the use of this word is deceptive, as previously noted, because those policies now pursued relegate many minority and

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[50] Giroux, *Crisis of Public Values*, 113.

[51] Mike Lofgren, *The Party Is Over* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

[52] Angela Hurley, "A Perfect Host for Accountability," *Philosophical Studies in Education* 35 (2004): 141–153.

culturally diverse students to classes and schools inferior to those utilized by white, middle-class children.[53]

Even with approval of certain parent groups for the corporate/fundamentalist dominance of schooling policies, an enforcing arm is necessary to move the policies forward or, in other words, to put the policies of fundamentalist educational discourse into action. Accrediting agencies and state-level, educational policy boards fulfill that role. Seeking to please their public and to locate a "simple" way to assure quality, governmental agencies adopt the corporate/fundamentalist line of argument and discourse, mandating outcomes-based policies, common-core standards, and accountability measures. Many states have changed certification regulations so a new kind of educator and "manager" (the principal) can be prepared in higher education graduate programs.[54] Teacher education programs must have the correct accountability policies in order to receive accreditation, written in the language in which programs conceptualize their curriculum aligned to a corporate model. Extensive assessment measures must be utilized and shown to the public. Accrediting agencies, a major enforcement arm of these policies, have their guidelines and regulations written in corporate discourse, with standards, rubrics, observable behaviors and outcomes, and numerical data playing the major and defining role in teacher education programs preparing for visits and for favorable accrediting decisions. The policies of NCATE,[55] now CAEP[56], enforce the corporate message.

These policies, undergirded by a well-defined discourse, provide an orthodoxy, which leads to an orthopraxy not only in teacher education programs but also in P–12 classrooms. That is, reactionary mentality combined with truncated corporate discourse constitutes a "belief system" built on a system of regulations and practices, which is now a bureaucracy, buttressed by the power of accrediting agencies. Such a system is difficult to dismantle and equally difficult within which to function. This strong and truncated educational discourse, however, structures actions and policies of educational fundamentalism.

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[53] Joseph Entin, Robert C. Rosen, and Leonard Vogt, eds., *Controversies in the Classroom: A Radical Teacher Reader* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 146.

[54] For example, after the enactment of *NCLB*, the Commonwealth of Kentucky mandated graduate schools redesign their programs leading to principal certification so new principals would know how to deal with *NCLB* requirements, especially tests and data.

[55] National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, *Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Preparation Institutions* (Washington, DC: NCATE, 2008).

[56] See http://www.ncate.org/.

Realizing the connection between the tenets of fundamentalism and current educational policy provides a description of the nature of the system now in place and holding dominance throughout the United States. In recognizing current policies as fundamentalist in nature, opponents can perhaps imagine and implement ways to dismantle them. Even though labels, by their nature, can pose danger in and of themselves, using a label can be justified in this case because it provides a focus for understanding why the current schooling movement is powerful and successful. For, arguing against the corporate/fundamentalist movement without knowing both how it is constituted and gathers its power achieves very little. Just as belittling religious fundamentalists actually solidifies their fervor, the same appears to be true in criticizing educational fundamentalism. Also, unfairly perhaps, fundamentalists are often dismissed as being unintelligent. As Richard W. Bulliet notes, religious fundamentalists are often branded as "irrational religious zealots, enemies of freedom, violators of human rights, or, at the furthest extreme, terrorist fanatics."[57] Assuming and classifying fundamentalists as somehow ignorant and ill-informed is counter-productive in that such thinking underestimates them, and to take such a stance is to be dismissive of a powerful, well-resourced group. Somehow, true dialogue must be established between current administrators, state agencies, and parents and those who oppose their policies. That dialogue cannot be fruitful if the conversation's agents do not fully understand one another. An important aspect of these groups' interactions hinges on critics of the current system having an understanding of who and what groups compose support for the current system and why. Understanding the sources and level of fear system advocates hold provides useful information for the current system's opponents.

Educational philosophers opposing the current system must expend extra effort to operate within the public realm to have their voices heard. Perhaps the time has arisen for educational philosophers to step into the "mouth of the beast," that is, to ask for time to talk in state agency, NCATE, and school board meetings in order to remind those agencies of more expansive philosophies and enriching practices for educating the US' children and youth.[58] Educational philosophers and teachers who place value on and nurture the public intellectual aspect of their identity can articulate the counterview to present schooling policy, especially pointing out the necessity of children and youth locating their agency and understanding how to contribute to democracy.

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[57] Richard W. Bulliet, "The Fundamentalists," *The National Interest*, March/April 2011, 33.
[58] Such tactics were used by the corporate proponents of *NCLB*. See Emery and Ohanian, *Corporate America,* chap. 5.

John Dewey described democracy as a "mode of associated living."[59] The point must be made that in order to participate in such a democracy, schooling must embrace a fuller notion of what it means to be educated than that of amassing skills and pieces of information. Democracy, in the Deweyan sense, requires individuals not be confined to a truncated curriculum that operates from a narrow set of common standards and relies on standardized tests as the measure of learning. As Henry Giroux asserts, "schools as democratic public spheres are constructed around forms of critical inquiry that dignify meaningful dialogue and human agency."[60] However, owing to the dominance of current policies on public educational space, the task is not easy. Perhaps collectively, though, educational philosophers and teachers will come to have more clout than they now can muster.

In addition, after listening to and analyzing fundamentalist rationales, critics can offer ways in which fundamentalist concerns and fears could be placated within a more thoughtful and robust model than the current one. That is, positive aspects of the fundamentalist model, or at least responses to their concerns, could become a minute part of a wider, more thoughtful system. The Finnish system perhaps serves as a model. As Pasi Sahlburg writes, "as a countervailing force against the global educational reform movement driving school systems around the world, the Finnish Way reveals courageous leadership and high performance go together."[61] The Finnish model, while not testing-oriented nonetheless prepares students who score in the top percentiles on exams. If exam scores are to be taken as a serious measure of success, as US corporate/fundamentalists insist, then their attention need be directed toward the Finnish system, where test scores are not seen as both end and mean. In fact, Finnish officials eschew the US' (and other western countries') fixation with preparing students for exams and the competitive grounding the system currently exemplifies. The Finnish system, in which students are "high performing" by corporate/fundamentalist standards but are not educated using corporate ideals, provides a model of transformation that could guide conversation between educational fundamentalists and their opponents who advocate for a more philosophically grounded system.

Therefore, through true dialogue and in an attempt to understand the rationale grounding the current corporate/fundamentalist system of US education, perhaps educational critics of that model can bring about change. Even though opponents of fundamentalism cannot actually say, as the title of

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[59] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1916), 101.

[60] Henry Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1988), xxxii.

[61] Pasi Sahlburg, *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010), 145.

this paper suggests, "Let them eat data," perhaps, with much effort, current educational fundamentalists can be placed on a restricted, low-calorie diet.