Re-politicizing Higher Education and Research within Neoliberal Globalization

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Introduction

Universities, like education and social services in general, are increasingly pressured to adopt neoliberal principles that encourage privatization, entrepreneurship, standardization, assessment, and accountability. In this paper, we examine recent efforts in the U.S. to develop measurement and accountability systems that commodify higher education and show how they reflect a neoliberal rationale and undermine the historical purposes of higher education, reduce faculty autonomy, and harm the common good. However, because assessment and accountability have a role not only in higher education but all education, we propose how assessment and accountability might be implemented in higher education to promote teaching and learning responsive to the interests of students, faculty, the university and wider communities.

We begin, therefore, with a general description of neoliberalism and its influence on education policy and practices. We then turn to showing how some of the recent higher education initiatives embody neoliberal rationales. These reforms include the Charting The Future Report that calls for quantitative assessments promoting institutional comparisons and market competitiveness; proposals by higher education groups to create self-reported and “voluntary” forms of assessment that are quantitative, technical and formulaic (i.e. institutional report cards); the press for apriori definitions of student learning and success; individual tracking of students; and the push for ranking schemes popularized by the American media.

We then turn to suggesting how assessment and accountability might be conceptualized within a context of a revitalized conception of social democracy, in which markets and profits are secondary to creating knowledge and serving the wider public good. We acknowledge the need for application of scholarship, but prefer to engage in a view of the university articulated by
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Ramaley (2005) that embraces knowledge development and application for the public good. We build on Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ suggestions for a democratic process for university assessment and accountability. In particular, we propose that universities are accountable not only to students but also their academic disciplines and the wider community. Furthermore, rather than rely almost exclusively on quantifiable assessments, universities should engage in qualitative evaluations that include democratic deliberations over the purposes and process and higher education. Universities can utilize participatory collaborative action research that serves the needs of members of both the university and wider community. Lastly, we reaffirm that contrary to the neoliberal view that educational goals and practices necessarily respond to the demands of the neoliberal state, we assert that neoliberalism is not inevitable and that education is inherently political and ethical and, therefore, requires that we examine our societal and educational goals and practices. Consequently, we argue against implementing neoliberal market rationalities and processes in education because they undermine education as a reflective process, and argue for developing assessment processes that promote democratic deliberation and community involvement.

*The Rise of Neoliberal Rationalities in Education*

Extensive histories and critiques of neoliberal policies (Harvey, 2005; Faux, 2006; Klein, 2007) and their affect on education are increasingly available (Hursh, 2008); we offer a brief overview of the rise of neoliberalism and its salient features. Over the last quarter century neoliberal political and social theory have become dominant throughout much of the world. While the first neoliberal government was implemented by Augusto Pinochet in Chile after a
successful military coup removing the elected government of Salvador Allende, neoliberalism began its rise to dominance under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher in England and Ronald Reagan in the U.S. Neoliberals aim to increase the rate of corporate profits by deregulating the economy, liberalizing trade, and dismantling the public sector including education, health, and social welfare through privatization. Thatcher implemented neoliberal polices in England by attacking unions, dismantling or rolling back commitments to the welfare state, privatizing public enterprises such as housing and the railroads, reducing taxes, encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives, and creating a favorable business climate through reduced taxes and regulations.

Similarly, Ronald Reagan reduced public spending, attacked and dismantled unions (such as the air traffic controllers union PATCO), and deregulated numerous industries including airlines and communication (Harvey, 2005, pp. 23-27).

Neoliberals, then, aims to roll back the social democratic state developed after World War II in which governments shared responsibility for the general welfare by funding and organizing public education, health, transportation, and other services. But neoliberalism not only transforms the purpose of society from providing for the welfare of individuals to supporting the pursuit of profit; neoliberalism changes the relations between the individual and society and changes the nature of the individual. Neoliberalism conceptualizes the individual as pursuing his or her own interests in the market place, as an autonomous entrepreneur responsible for his or her own self, progress, position, and success or failure. Olssen, Codd, and McNeil (2004) write that under neoliberalism:

Every social transaction is conceptualized as entrepreneurial, to be carried out purely for personal gain. The market introduces competition as the structuring mechanism through which resources and status are allocated efficiently and fairly. The “invisible hand” of the
market is thought to be the most efficient way of sorting out which competing individuals get what. (p. 137-138)

Neoliberalism has gained its ascendancy, in part, because it is often conflated with globalization, which is presented as an inevitable process. While aspects of globalization seem inexorable, such as the increasing speed at which we can communicate across long distances, other aspects result from governmental or corporate decisions that benefit some groups and not others. For example, the increasing competition between low-wage laborers across the globe benefits corporations that can move production to whichever county has workers willing to work for the lowest wage. However, while workers in low-wage countries may benefit from the new opportunities, workers in high-wage countries face the loss of jobs and decreased wages.

That neoliberalism is neither inevitable nor necessarily beneficial for most people is often invisible or ignored by promoters of neoliberalism. For example, neoliberal pundit Thomas Friedman, in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999), asserts that globalization requires free market capitalism:

> The driving force behind globalization is free market capitalism—the more you let market forces rule and the more you open your economy to free trade and competition, the more efficient your economy will be. Globalization means the spread of free-market capitalism to virtually every country in the world. Therefore, globalization also has its own set of economic rules—rules that revolve around opening, deregulating and privatizing your economy, in order to make it more competitive and attractive to foreign investment. (p. 9)

Because neoliberalism is described as inevitable, as if we have no choice, neoliberal education reforms are also assumed to be “natural” and inevitable. President Bush’s statements
supporting the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) exemplify how neoliberals connect globalization with neoliberal education reforms.

NCLB is an important way to make sure America remains competitive in the 21st century. We’re living in a global world. See, the education system must compete with education systems in China and India. If we fail to give our students the skills necessary to compete in the world in the 21st century, the jobs will go elsewhere. (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 2)

Whitty, Power, and Halpin (1998), Robertson (2000), and (Hatcher, 2003) have described how the United States, England, and other countries have embraced markets and choice as the means of improving education. Whitty, Power, and Halpin (1998) analyzed the changing educational systems in five countries and conclude, “within the range of political rationales, it is the neoliberal alternative which dominates, as does a particular emphasis on market mechanisms” (p. 35). They describe how proponents of market reforms argue that they will lead to more efficient and effective schools. Similarly, Robertson (2000) notes, “Much of the choice/markets agenda has been shaped by the criticism of schools as inefficient bureaucracies that are unresponsive either to community or individual interests.” Schools, and particularly teachers, are unresponsive, write the critics, because they know parents cannot take their children elsewhere. Therefore, proponents of choice and markets argue, “efficiency and equity in education could only be addressed through ‘choice’ and where family or individuals were constructed as the customers of educational services” (p. 174). Increasing the range of parents’ choices over their children’s schools and funding schools based on the number of students that they attract introduces a competitive market approach to the allocation of resources.
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Thrupp and Willmott (2003) note that by “the mid-1990s, Gewirtz and colleagues wrote that the ‘market solution (to just about everything) currently holds politicians around the world in its thrall…. Schools in England are now set within the whole paraphernalia of a market system’” (p. 13). Market promoters decry “state intervention because it is held that administrative and bureaucratic structures are inherently inferior to markets as a means of allocating resources.” Instead, resources are allocated through “spontaneous exchanges between individuals” (p. 18). Markets, they assume, permit individuals’ choice based on the available data and to choose well.

However, neoliberalism is neither inevitable or necessarily positive. David Harvey, in A Brief History of Neoliberalism (2005), reveals how neoliberalism is neither inevitable nor neutral, but instead is “the restoration…of naked class power” through “a benevolent mask full of wonderful-sounding words like freedom, liberty, choice, and rights” (p. 119). Neoliberalism promises that individuals pursuing their own economic self interests will result in greater economic benefits for the whole society. But Stiglitz (2002), Harvey (2005), Faux (2006), and Jomo and Baudot (2007) detail how neoliberal policies instituted in both the United States and, through the pressure from international financial organizations such as the World Trade Organization, the world have resulted in decreased economic growth and increased inequality.

Neoliberal education policies have been implemented to various degrees in much of the world, but particularly in Europe and the West, as market systems have been implemented, educational services privatized, and standardized testing introduced as a means of holding teachers and students accountable and to make comparisons between schools in an educational market (CITATIONS). In the US, first states and then the federal government have legislated that students take standardized exams and that the test scores be aggregated so that classes, schools, and communities can be compared with one another. Furthermore, the tests are
increasingly high stakes as students are required to pass the exams in order to proceed to the subsequent grade or to graduate. Furthermore, the tests become high stakes for teachers and schools, as teachers are evaluated and sometimes financially compensated based on their students’ grades, and schools face punitive measures, including privatization, if their test scores fail to meet a particular standard.

In some school districts, such as New York City, students are assessed every six weeks and the tests are used to determine instruction, and end of grade tests are used to determine whether students should be promoted to the next grade. In New York State, secondary students must pass five standardized tests, one each in English, math, science, global history, and U.S. history, in order to graduate for high school. In higher education, ranking schemes based largely in input characteristics derived largely from pre-matriculation student metrics of high-stakes high school environments have become high-stakes mechanisms that fuel institutions to seek market prestige. The stakes are such that Bowen (1980) indicates that higher education institutions have no limit to what they will spend in the pursuit of prestige determined by largely through rankings such as U.S. News and World Report.

Such high-stakes assessments have the consequence of shifting curricular and instructional decision-making away from faculty and towards administrators be they on campus, or residing as officials at the state and federal levels. Furthermore, faculty and institutions are increasingly assessed based on their students’ test scores, not on their progress or knowledge, skills, and attitudes not assessed via the standardized tests.

The pressure to do well on standardized tests have distorted the curriculum so that those subjects not tested, typically art, music, social studies, and sometimes science, are marginalized
or eliminated. Furthermore, the importance place on test scores leads, write Nichols and Berliner (2005), to the inevitable corruption of both indicators and educators.

Lastly, the movement toward markets, testing, and accountability has not resulted in either of the claims of its proponents: that students would learn more and that the achievement gap between White students and students of color would decrease. Instead, as many have documented (Hursh 2007, 2008; Haney, 2000, 2003; McNeil, 2000, and McNeil & Valenzuela, 2003), gains in student achievement have at best remained the same or decreased and the rate at which the achievement gap has narrowed has either remained the same or slowed (Orfield, 2007).

Neoliberalism in Higher Education

Similarly, over the last few decades, neoliberal rationalities have been infused in post-secondary education. The university is increasingly conceived “as an enterprise,” with knowledge as a commodity to be invested in, bought and sold, and academics as entrepreneurs, who have evaluated based on the income they generate (Seguerski, p. 304).

Traditional notions of the purpose of the university, fraught with ambiguous aims including knowledge generation, service to society and liberal education, have been scrutinized and transformed into neoliberal objectives more easily articulated for policymakers (Cohen & March, 1986; Fallis, 2008; Pfeffer, 1977; Weick, 1976). Universities are increasing defining themselves through their ability to develop knowledge that can be monetized and their role in the development of human capital that fuels economic development (Fallis, 2008; Shapiro, 2005: Zemsky, Wegner & Massy, 2006).

Universities are conceived less as a place that generates knowledge that is important in itself or for society in general. Instead, universities look to how they can partner with
foundations, government grant-makers and corporations to create knowledge that has an economic benefit. Moreover, universities themselves have become corporatized, seeking to minimize their costs while maximizing their revenue (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Zemsky, Wegner, & Massy (2006) describes American Higher Education as increasingly market smart and mission driven, suggesting the reconciliation of the corporization of the university with traditional university purposes. The effort to reconcile the corporitization of the university points to just how far neoliberal ideology has pressed into the management of higher education.

The examples of the tensions within the university caused by the push toward the corporatization of the university are abundant and illuminating. Slaughter and Rhoades (2005) and Slaughter and Leslie (1997) describe the emergence of academic capitalism with vivid examples of how fiscal resource tensions and declining state support for higher education have led to a push toward entrepreneurialism, commodification of knowledge and seeing students as consumers whose tuition revenue must be maximized.

The press toward entrepreneurialism is a push to generate a diversification of revenue streams for an institution. New knowledge, existing expertise, and instructional capacity are all commodities to be operationized to generate revenue and institutional profit. An “academic capitalist knowledge and learning regime” has emerged, replacing an ideology of a “public good knowledge and learning regime” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2005). Faculty in the new academic capitalist environment are pressured to develop research that attracts funding, increasingly in the form of corporate sponsorship, and that generates patents that might be utilized by the office of technology transfer to be transformed into profitable lines of business. The danger inherent in the push toward entrepreneurialism in research includes narrowing academic freedom and
advancing research toward what is fundable and permissible to be published under funding agreements (Mendoza, 2007). The knowledge production is distorted to conform to the market.

Similarly, students become valued not as learners and individuals who will become a part of the fabric of society, but as little economic engines whose knowledge will fuel an economy and whose tuition becomes essential for institutional economic vitality (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2005). The sea change in US policy away from a low tuition and low aid to a high tuition and high aid approach to access and funding of higher education has moved students closer and closer to being pure consumers (Alexander, 1998). Increasing institutional reliance on tuition revenue means that institutions work to maximize tuition revenue, through escalating tuition, higher enrollment and decreased costs.

Furthermore, the goal of decreasing costs so as to increase the university’s net assets results in universities increasingly seeking to hire part-time or non tenure track faculty—the “casualization of labor” —and cutting back wherever possible (Alexander, 2001, p. 306). The corporatization of the university as a “market smart, mission driven” institution is well underway in keeping with neoliberal practices. And yet, the organized anarchy that is the organizational structure of higher education is exceedingly difficult to change, to the dismay of politicians, policymakers and entrepreneurial leaders. Efforts to alter tenure and promotion practices, change curriculum and shift research foci are filtered through the shared governance of higher education at a pace that works in semester and years, making the organization and governance structure a common focus of critique among those outside of higher education (Carey, 2004: Shapiro, 2005).

Assessment and Accountability as An Emerging Neo-Liberal Lever In Higher Education
Given the nature of change in higher education, often poorly described as plodding, but less often illuminated as a component of a loosely coupled system where professional and disciplinary discretion are highly valued, external entities are increasing their intensity of ever-present calls for accountability and assessment in higher education (Clark, 1972; Etzioni, 1964; Maslund, 1985; Mintzberg, 1979; Tierney, 2004; US Department of Education, 2006). This push for assessment and accountability are not aimed to assist higher education in meeting its own goals or indirectly stated objectives associated with the public good, but rather a push to use assessment to hold higher education accountable to neoliberal goals.

In the U.S., the current Bush administration’s Department of Education report, “Charting the Future of Higher Education,” exemplifies in the direction neoliberal ideology is pushing higher education. In the same way that the federal government has intervened to an unprecedented degree in the education of children and adolescents through the No Child Left Behind Act, it has attempted to chart a national direction for higher education. This effort is unparalleled given the US federal government’s history of intentionally not engaging in higher education national policy (Cohen, 1998). In fact, the call for assessment by the federal commission on the future of higher education is particularly important given the limited and weak federal legislative authority related to higher education. The federal impact on higher education has been indirect and diffused through federal financial aid policy, multiple grant making departments, and influence, but not direct power, to the US Department of Education. The press for assessment, specifically through the rule making administrative capacity of the Department of Education is being used as a policy lever to push quantification of a defined set of higher education outcomes.
“Charting the Future of Higher Education” specifically calls for higher education to develop quantitative assessments of student learning, thus quantifying educational production and allowing for consumers to compare institutions based on student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Education in this view of assessment is a commodity to be measured as a production function, with a primary efficiency rationale toward ensuring a well-prepared workforce. The public is reconceptualized as individual entrepreneurial consumers of higher education who need comparable information to ensure they are “informed consumers” maximizing their investment.

Moreover, ”Charting the Future of Higher Education” equates higher education with the industrial assembly line, producing educated individuals who are little economic engines filled with knowledge, i.e. human capital, that contributes to the modern economy (Fallis, 2008). Of course, education historically has participated in developing human capital and contributing to economic growth; however, this technical and instrumental view of learning fails to connect to a view of the well-documented research on learning as an organic and complex process that appreciates both the learner and the institution (Bok, 2003; Keeling, 2004).

Assessment efforts that become formulaic, subscribed and focused on particular apriori defined outcomes, however well intentioned, risk becoming the tools of a neoliberal push toward the commodification of education more generally. The voluntary reporting system of accountability currently being implemented by the American Association of State College (AASCU) and Universities and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) suggests a “College Portrait” made up for three components: (1) Consumer information; (2) Student experiences and perceptions; (3) Student learning outcomes (Voluntary System of Accountability, 2008). The format of the portrait is strikingly similar in
appearance to the K-12 School Report Cards available throughout the United States that aim to provide the public access to basic quantitative data about schools. An in depth examination of the type of information called for in the “College Portrait” points toward a menu approach to determining appropriate assessment methodology. Consumer information is defined as measures of retention, graduation, employment and a cost calculator. Student experience and perception information is gathered through one of four approved surveys measuring the student experience. Finally, student learning outcomes are described as being appropriately measured by three testing organizations, with the aim of describing student learning as well above expected, above expected, as expected and below expected.

An analysis of the approved instruments that are a part of the voluntary system of accountability points toward both the limited content measured and a limited set of evidence as to the utility of the instruments for improving student learning (Wall & Keeling, 2007). The desire to utilize a limited set of tools reducing the teaching and learning process to apriori set of content defined by a few instrument creators, rather than as a diverse curriculum defined by faculty as part of a shared governance process. The press to quantify, with tools that capture only a fraction of the possible student learning and development of a college experience, inappropriately reduces the college experience to what fits neatly in a consumer report card, in this case identified as a “College Portrait”.

This approach to assessment is presented as if it is merely a voluntary means of presenting information to the “consumers” of education: students and their families, and the businesses that employ the graduates. However, Judith Eaton (2008) a leader of the independent higher education accreditation agencies that sanction degrees in the United States has called the press toward voluntary accountability an effort to ward off federalization of accreditation,
accountability, and assessment in the United States. An analysis of the process is that the US Department of Education, through its rule making capability, is making a limited set of quantitative assessments no more voluntary that No Child Left Behind. Moreover, the assessment process itself distorts university teaching and learning and shifts decision-making away from those in the university, particularly faculty, and toward corporate and political leaders at the national level.

A second example of national intrusion for the purpose of increased assessment of higher education is in the form of the proposed individual unit reporting of data to the Integrated Postsecondary Data System. Again using the rule making function of the US Department of Education, there has been a push for federal higher education reporting guidelines that would require institutions to uniquely identify all enrolled students, rather than report information to the federal government in aggregate. A strong component of the rationale for this proposal has been the ability of the federally reported data to track individual student success. In this proposal, student success is implied to be graduation for the purpose of developing human capital for economic development. Unit tracking proponents aim to be able to “accurately” compare institution retention and graduation rates for the purpose of consumer awareness. This quantification of student success in terms of tracking students grossly simplifies student success, what Rendon (2006) has pointed to as complex, multiple and evolving in a world where non-traditional students are typical, and diversity is normative.

The press to create simplistic metrics to define the outputs of higher education through the rule making capabilities of the USDE point toward how neoliberalism is utilizing assessment as a lever to reduce college education to simplistic data. Thus, transforming higher education into an easily understood commodity where institutions can be easily compared to one another,
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and subversively avoiding more nuanced discussions of the diversity of higher education institutions in the United States. Similarly, major media ranking publications have become de facto measures of institutional quality, in spite of their acknowledged lack of speaking in any substantive way to the learning or development of students in college (Ehrenberg, 2000). Publications of ranking schemes in U.S. higher education stress resource inputs, student test scores and perceptions of quality in ranking institutions in a high-stakes arms race, towards institutional prestige that stresses “objective” information for the purpose of providing consumer information.

With significant public attention focused on institutional ranking placement, institutions drive toward prestige and higher rankings as defined by rankings developed for the purpose of (1) providing comparative consumer information and in turn (2) generating publication sales for media conglomerates. Rankings see their role in providing the public with comparable information that fashions higher education as a “product” to be purchased. The university is pushed toward behavior that conforms to ill-defined measures of institutional quality for the purpose of ensuring better market placement in the competition for students and prestige.

Federal encroachment into higher education policy, voluntary systems of accountability, individual unit reporting and media ranking schemes all point toward how higher education is being pushed toward simplistic quantification, corporatization and being defined primarily as a commodity to be purchased. The push to assess for the purpose of accountability, then, is a press toward a view of assessment as quantification, comparison, and simplistic reduction, where accountability is seen as quantifying the production of higher education relative to human capital contributions to economic growth.

_An Alternative View of Assessment and Accountability_
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Under neoliberalism, universities face two challenges. First, they are competing with one another over increasingly dwindling sources of funding, particularly as the state reduces its commitment to spending on social services, such as education, and as the number of high school graduates, and state and federal grants declines. Consequently, universities are devoting greater effort, including adding on additional staff, what Schugurensky (2005) describes as “the growth of the administrative class” (p. 308), to fund-raising, marketing, and public relations. Second, the neoliberal effort to reduce public spending is coupled with an effort to reshape education to efficiently meet corporate requirements for trained employees.

Consequently, the push for quantitative assessments and entrepreneurialism, and the increasing corporatization of the university marginalizes as an educational goal the contribution universities make to society or the overall social good. Therefore, in the last part of this paper we want to argue for a more thoughtful approach to assessment that balances the need for assessment of learning with assessment for learning, and the internal need for accountability (and we acknowledge there is some need) and the press for external accountability. In our revised version, assessment has a role in rebuilding the eroded “public compact” between higher education and society, and focusing on the public rather than corporate good (Trow, 1996; Tierney, 2006). We agree with Morrow (2005) who suggests that we need forms of assessment and accountability that will make the university more accountable to the larger community, and a university that serves a democratically negotiated public good and acts as an agent of transformation for social inequality (p. 4).

Assessment, in our view, should incorporate some of the features described by Santos in “The University in the 21st Century: Toward a Democratic and Emancipatory University Reform” (2005). Building on Santos, we agree that faculty should create “a counter hegemonic
globalization of the university-as-public-good,” (p. 80) by incorporating into assessment the following:

1. Faculty should be accountable to several constituencies that include their academic discipline and the wider community.
2. Faculty and students can join with the community in collaborative, participatory action research aimed to solve local and regional problems.
3. Faculty should forge connections with communities from the local to global levels so that they can analyze and resist the infusion of neoliberal rationalities into society.
4. Faculty should work to create institutional structures and processes that promote what Iris Young (2000) describes as deliberative rather than aggregative democracy. Time and space need to be provided so that different groups can deliberate on their own and across groups over their values, goals, problems, and solutions.
5. Faculty should focus on developing methods of research and training that promotes dialogues between, on the one hand, scientific and humanistic knowledge produced “by the university and, on the other hand, the lay or popular knowledge that circulates in society and that is produced by common people, both in urban and rural settings, originating in Western and non-Western cultures (indigenous, African, Asian, etc.)” (p. 87).
6. Finally, faculty should work to develop different assessments that are “congruent with the aforementioned goals of the reform and should be applied through techno democratic or participative tools rather than through technocratic tools” (p. 96).

In thinking about how these apply to our own situation as faculty in a Graduate School of Education, we envision the following possibilities.
First, in the US schools of education are increasingly required to be assessed by national teacher education organizations, such as the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), that develop the criteria by which programs are to be assessed and primarily use quantitative assessments so programs within a school can be compared with one another, and schools can be compared with other schools. Consequently, criteria by which education programs and schools are assessed and whether they achieve accreditation are determined elsewhere, minimizing the role of university faculty and largely eliminating input from local communities. For example, NCATE recently dropped as one of the goals of teacher education programs “social justice” for the ostensible reason that there was no consensus over how to define social justice.

However, our view is that universities should engage in the process of defining their values and determining how one would know whether progress towards those values is being achieved. It is precisely because there is no one agreed upon definition of social justice that it should remain as one of the criteria for success. Further, by eliminating social justice as a criterion because educators differ over the meaning implies that there is agreement over NCATE’s other goals and processes. However, it is precisely in the on-going discussion over what is meant by literacy, what should be the purpose of social studies, how do we reform schooling to respond to increased immigration that we clarify and improve our ability to educate.

Moreover, deliberation over the purposes and processes of education should include not only the faculty but also students, and educators and other members of the wider community. Such processes can be improved as schools of education join the community in working for social change and in collaborative participatory action research, our second and third
characteristics of developing an emancipatory, counter hegemonic university, which we turn to next.

Second, the school of education should develop collaborative relations with the wider community, including parents, teachers, teacher unions, and school district administrators. This relationship needs to extend beyond the present focus on professional development and teacher education to include in depth deliberation over education policy, the purposes of education, and the larger social conditions that impact education.

The university also needs to engage the larger community, including community organizations such as the media and grassroots organizations ranging from the local to global levels. One of the authors of this paper founded a grassroots organization, The Coalition for Common Sense in Education, that works to affect educational policy, particularly regarding the rise of standardized testing in educational assessment at the elementary and secondary levels. The group also collaborates with other national organizations, such as the Fairtest, to affect national education policy. Collaborative efforts with community groups should be part of the criteria for evaluating faculty for promotion.

Third, schools of education can use participatory action research to examine social and educational issues. Action research can be undertaken by anyone: faculty, university students, K-12 students and teachers, and members of the community. Action research, write Herr and Anderson, is

inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them. It is a reflective process, but is different from isolated, spontaneous reflection in that it is deliberately and systematically undertaken and generally requires that some form of evidence be presented to support assertion…. Action research is oriented to some
action or cycle of actions that organizational or community members have take, are
taking, or which to take to address a particular problematic situation. (Herr & Anderson,
2005, p. 2-3)

What counts as data in action research differs from traditional research in that it is likely to be
qualitative and specific to the local problem. Moreover, what counts as knowledge expands
beyond the “scientific and humanistic knowledge produced,” as Santos writes, “by the university
and, on the other hand, the lay or popular knowledge that circulates in society and that is
produced by common people, both in urban and rural settings, originating in Western and non-
Western cultures (indigenous, African, Asian, etc.).” (p. 87).

We acknowledge that action research is but one approach to assessment that fits a view of
assessment as a transformative tool in a deliberative democratic process. Other forms of
assessment might be less tied to methodology, but more connected to conceptualizations of
inquiry. One conceptualization would modeled after House and Howe’s (2003) view of
democratic deliberative evaluation, where the evaluation specifically attends to hearing the
voices of those from marginalized perspectives. Another suggestion might be to view evaluation
as engaging a dialogue concerned with how programs are responding to questions of the public
good as described by Schwandt (1996). Assessment as action, deliberation and dialogue all
position assessment more appropriately as a political and ethical activity, where the purpose of
assessment is to engage the university community, faculty, staff, students and the wider
community in a dialogue that is reflective of the how the university is addressing questions of
common interest; be they about student learning, community health and well-being or questions
of economic vitality.
Assessment is a valuable tool for institutional self-reflection and transformation, but only if it is transparent and is respectful of the values upon which higher education is based, including shared governance, academic freedom and service to a broad set of objectives that must include addressing questions of the public good. We propose then a set of categories for consideration in seeking rigorous assessment practice that strives toward credibility with internal and external stakeholders.

A first dimension of assessment should be ensuring that the process of assessment is transparent, that is the purpose, value, stance and use of assessment should be shared openly in the planning, implementation, analysis, reporting and use of results. The purpose of a given assessment effort should be made clear. Whether an effort is intended to develop information to improve an institution, judge its quality or effectiveness or to develop new knowledge, the purpose of an assessment should be openly shared. Those conducting an assessment should strive to make clear the values underpinning the inquiry. Making values transparent would include valuing diverse voices in the assessment process, or valuing the input of those traditionally marginalized, valuing a process that ensures equal voice in the assessment for those at different levels of organizational power and influence, or valuing detached neutrality. The position or stance of which an inquirer approaches the assessment should be articulated. Whether an inquirer is friendly, critical, detached or striving for an unbiased approach to an assessment context, this should be discussed and illuminated.

Second, how an assessment effort is intended to be utilized should be articulated from the outset, so as to allow stakeholders to understand the context in which information is being gathered and toward what end it will be employed. Additionally, there should be an articulated
commitment to utilize information, given the time and energy exerted by those who participate in the assessment process; be it students or university employees.

Third, assessment should engage stakeholders. Assessment is a process that is done with students, staff, administrators and faculty, not to them. Assessment should intentionally engage stakeholders in the process of inquiry.

Fourth, methodology should respond to question and context. Assessment as applied inquiry should be driven by questions and context, not apriori methodology orientation. It is important to note that methodology orientation (bias) of stakeholder should inform the assessment context, as they are central to what type of evidence will be seen as credible, but it is the context and questions to be answered that should drive method selection.

Assessment should attend to questions of the public good. Assessment has an important role of not simply responding to the information needs of an institution, a leader or a legislative body, but should also respond to questions of practical philosophy, i.e. is what higher education doing good for society. Assessment must be more than an instrumental and technical tool used as a lever of accountability, the form of accountability that adheres to the political winds of the day. Rather assessment has an important role in helping to take stock of the direction of the enterprise of higher education to serve the broad and abstract public good of society. The public good may not be simply seen in economic terms, but must always consider and embrace the social elements of society.

Conclusion
Neoliberal rationalities have become dominant in determining the goals and assessment processes of higher education. However, we argue that neoliberalism is neither inevitable nor preferable either for society as a whole or for universities in particular. We have described how neoliberalism distorts the university mission away the common good and toward developing entrepreneurial faculty and students within a market society. Furthermore, neoliberal assessments, building on market rationalities, are externally determined and rely on quantitative assessments that undermine more thoughtful and complex assessments of university research and teaching.

In response we have suggested that universities rethink assessments to include the communities in which they are situated and those at the state, national, and global levels. Where possible, processes promoting democratic deliberation should be developed that include assessing both teaching and research. Finally, universities need to challenge the rise of neoliberalism itself, the attack on public sector funding, and the hijacking of evaluation to serve corporate interests. How we respond may well determine the future of higher education.
References


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