



Backing in to the Foundations

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What we really need to do is to abolish education. Just get rid of it. Understand I am not saying that we should get rid of teacher education or schools of education, as many rightwing critics desire, but schools themselves. Just abolish them. And further understand that I am not making a case for Ivan Illich's deschooling either; we ought not seek to replace formal schools with informal educational networks.¹ No, I am suggesting that what we really need to do is to abandon education altogether. The worst problems of our times result from education, or, at least, what passes for education. The contemporary world's most intractable, most destructive, most dangerous problems have been made possible by education, not the lack of it. Our problems do not arise from the failures of our education system, but its successes. Educators, look around, we are the cause of this mess.

Take, for example, our recent economic meltdown brought about by the dramatic increase in private securitization of sub-prime mortgages during the 1990s and 2000s. Consider the imaginative new financial strategies such as over-collateralization and disintermediation, and the brilliantly intricate "bundling" of sub-prime mortgages with AAA-rated prime mortgages which used the "law of averages" to spread the risk of these mortgages to "near zero" and, therefore, attracted investors from all over the world from the smallest to largest banks, from the individual IRAs and to large institutional pension funds, and resulted in the worst world economy since the 1930s.² Without extremely well-educated people to develop the ideas and to create the necessary algorithms, these illusions of security could never have been built.

Or, for another example, take the growth of inequality that results from the new overlord class, the titans of the new transnational corporations, which has arisen to hover over the economic fields well fertilized with the destruction of the world's communities.³ Consider the vulnerabilities in agricultural production due to the neoliberal policies that encourage the abandonment of traditional crops for local consumption to the attractive cash crops for the world markets, or the decrease in biodiversity that has resulted from the increase in genetically modified organisms (GMOs) for agriculture. Or consider the rapid and continued loss of the mom and pop stores that are being replaced by the large corporate chains such as Wal-Mart. Or consider the decrease in the power of labor unions due to the ability of corporations to shut down production and move the jobs elsewhere to a growing population of educated workers in other lands capable

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1. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1971).

2. Ryan Barnes, "The Fuel That Fed The Subprime Meltdown," *Investopedia.com*, September 4, 2007, <http://www.investopedia.com/articles/07/subprime-overview.asp#axzz2Gv0yN53u>; Benjamin J. Keys et al., "Mortgage Financing in the Housing Boom and Bust," 2012, <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c12624.pdf>.

3. Leslie Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

of doing the job and willing to do it for less and that is made possible by new rapid and inexpensive modes of communication and means of transportation developed by the highly educated amongst us. Or even more destructive to working people, consider the contemporary robots that are capable of doing those same jobs better and for less and without the messy problem of having to manage people.⁴

Or take, the destruction of our planet from the hottest decade on record, to the increased severity of our storms, to the near complete meltdown of Greenland this summer. Consider how chlorofluorocarbons actually got into our skies to bring about global warming. (CFCs do not occur in nature, but were created for industrial use, particularly for air conditioning and refrigeration and other industrial needs such as packaging and foams and in spray cans for consumer products such as deodorant.) Or consider the many and multiple human-causes for the continuing destruction of the coral reefs or the near extinction of the fish in the sea.⁵

None of these things could have happened without well-educated people. These unprecedented problems were all made possible by education. Without such smart, well-educated people, we'd still be stuck in the misery of colonial power backed by the gun and the gunboat, perhaps, but a world where the problems and the enemy could be identified, named, and struggled against. Not a great world, perhaps, but one in which we could see whom to blame and plot a way out.

In 1994, David Orr wrote,

The truth is that without significant precautions, education can equip people merely to be more effective vandals of the earth. If one listens carefully, it may be possible to hear the Creation groan every year in late May when another batch of smart, degree-holding, but ecologically illiterate, *Homo sapiens* who are eager to succeed are launched into the biosphere.⁶

Orr argues today's education promulgates six myths. First amongst them is the myth that ignorance is a solvable problem rather than an "inescapable part of the human condition." A second myth is that the solutions to our problems lie in more knowledge and technology. A third myth is that the increase of knowledge corresponds with an increase in wisdom. Worse yet is the confused idea that information is equivalent to knowledge. After completing a specialist curriculum that fragments our world into disciplines, a fourth myth creates the illusion that graduates will then be able to integrate the fragments into an cohesive whole. The fifth myth is the belief that a

4. For an African example of the effect of cash crops see William G. Moseley, Judith Carney, & Laurence Becker, "Neoliberal Policy, Rural Livelihoods, and Urban Food Security in West Africa: A Comparative Study of The Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali," *Proceedings of the National Academy of the Sciences of The United States of America* 107, no. 13 (March 30, 2010): 5774–5779; for the effects of GMOs on biodiversity see Deniza Gertsberg, "Loss of Biodiversity and Genetically Modified Crops," *GMO Journal: Food Safety Politics*, June 17, 2011, <http://www.gmo-journal.com/2011/06/17/loss-of-biodiversity-and-genetically-modified-crops/>; for the effects of Wal-mart on local economies see Emek Basker, "Job Creation or Destruction? Labor Market Effects of Wal-Mart Expansion," *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 87, no. 1 (February 2005): 174–183; Elena G. Irwin & Jill Clark, "Wall Street Vs. Main Street: What Are the Benefits and Costs of Wal-Mart to Local Communities?" *Choices* 21, no. 2 (2006): 117–122; for the effects of robots on human labor see Jason Borenstein, "Robots and the Changing Workforce," *AI & Society* 26, no. 1 (February 2011): 87–93.

5. John M. Broder, "Past Decade Warmest on Record, NASA Data Shows," *The New York Times*, January 21, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/22/science/earth/22warming.html?_r=0; Maria-José Viñas, "Satellites See Unprecedented Greenland Ice Sheet Surface Melt," *NASA: Looking at Earth*, <http://www.nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/greenland-melt.html>; J. E. N. Veron et al., "The Coral Reef Crisis: The Critical Importance of <350 Ppm CO₂," *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 58 (2009): 1428–1436; Eric Stokstad, "Global Loss of Biodiversity Harming Ocean Bounty," *Science* 314, no. 5800, New Series (November 3, 2006): 745.

6. David W. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington: Island Press, 2004): 5.

central purpose of education is to provide economic mobility and success. And Orr's final myth is the belief that "our culture represents the pinnacle of human achievement." As long as education assumes and promotes these six myths, Orr argues, education will be more destructive than ameliorative.⁷

I agree with Orr, though I would argue that today's "batch of smart, degree-holding *Homo sapiens*" are not just ecologically illiterate, they are fundamentally illiterate of the world. As Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo help us understand, today's graduates may be able to read the word, but they seem completely unable to read the world.⁸ In a truly perilous moment of earth history, we have turned over the teaching of the world to Disney, Viacom, and Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. Public education has become little more than training grounds for corporate technicians and consumers. Henry Giroux has suggested public school teachers have become "clerks of the empire."⁹ What some of us have witnessed in our lifetime is the near complete transference of public institutions to the service of private interests. Public space has been so completely erased that shopping centers are built as if they are public squares and given names such as Liberty Commons and The Greene Town Center though they are not "commons" or "towns" at all. All of this is to suggest that the problem with education lies in its accomplishments, more so than in its failures.

Teacher education is not immune to the mythologizing processes of education, particularly as universities become more and more dominated by the neoliberal logic that is turning education into a consumer product and professors into entrepreneurs. Make no mistake about it, the moment education becomes a consumer product, it stops being education. This is not unique to education. As soon as anything with intrinsic value becomes valued for little more than its exchange value, it is transformed from one thing into another. Its intrinsic value is lost. When people tell me that the market will improve education, I ask them if they think it will improve education the same way as the market improved nutrition and the news. When the market gets finished with education, our children will ingest the educational equivalent of Hardee's Monster Thickburger (1420 calories) chased down with a White Castle Chocolate Shake (1680 calories) while watching Fox News.¹⁰ When teacher education becomes a consumer product, look for teacher educators to become Gretchen Carlson, Steve Doocy, and Brian Kilmeade mimics and for teachers to be little more than your local McDonald's server, or, when really "good," your Disney World "cast member." Not a situation I'm looking forward to.

Rethinking Educational Reform: Ritual and Nonrationality in Schooling

Here's a question to consider: Which university has the most students in educational leadership programs in the state of Ohio? In fact, this university not only has the most students, it has more students than all of the other school leadership programs in Ohio combined.

7. David W. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington: Island Press, 2004): 5-12.

8. Paulo Freire & Donaldo Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the Word & the World* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1987).

9. Henry A. Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* (Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1988); Henry A. Giroux, "On the Significance of the Chicago Teachers Strike: Challenging Democracy's Demise," *Truthout*, September 13, 2012, <http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/11530-on-the-significance-of-the-chicago-teachers-strike-bearing-witness-to-and-challenging-democracys-demise>.

10. "The 272 Fast Food Items Highest In Calories," *a Calorie Counter*, n.d., <http://www.acaloriecounter.com/fast-food-calories.php>.

If you guessed Grand Canyon University you may be correct.¹¹ What is a small college in Phoenix, Arizona doing with the largest student population in educational leadership in a state halfway across the country? Good question. Here is something else to ponder.

In Fall 2011, Stanford professor Sebastian Thrun taught a course on artificial intelligence that enrolled 160,000 students. In Spring 2012, Stanford professors Andrew Ng and Daphne Kollar announced that they had secured \$16 million in venture capital and had created an educational partnership, Coursera, with 4 universities (Stanford, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Princeton) to offer online courses for free.¹² On May 2 of that year, Harvard and M.I.T. announced their own nonprofit partnership, edX, which was also to offer online courses for free. While neither Coursera nor edX, as of now, offer degrees, they do offer “certificates” and some universities are already accepting these courses for transfer credit. Welcome to the future of higher education. A future that is the logical result of the educational reform movement that began in the 1970s, took over in the 1980s, expanded in the 90s and the 20-naughts, and, today, is stronger than ever. And, in fact, may now be irreversible.

To explain why free online courses are the logical conclusion of the educational reform movement and why, if you are interested in education, it is such a big mistake, I need to clarify for you some theoretical ideas and concepts.

Rationality

The concept of rationality is central to our self-congratulatory identity as members of the academy. Academicians not only privilege rationality, but they assume that the *sapiens* in *Homo sapiens* refers to the use of rationality in conducting our affairs. To be human requires rationality. And rationality, it is assumed, requires linear logic. Today, we might recognize this as means-ends reasoning or technical rationality. Given a particular end, how do we get from here to there. Max Weber referred to this as formal rationality and suggested that one of the hallmarks of bureaucracies was their privileging of formal rationality. Given the purposes of the bureaucracy, its goals, its ends, the functionaries make choice to maximize those ends based on and determined by quantitative calculation.¹³ In our capitalist society, for-profit organizations have long referred to this as the bottom line.

And rational individuals, like bureaucracies, are assumed to act in a manner to maximize their bottom line. It is assumed that to fail to act to maximize ones bottom line is to act irrationally. In other words, according to neoliberalism and the new American commonsense, to act ra-

11. It is difficult to state exactly how many students have actually graduated from Grand Canyon University's educational leadership program, but between 2007-2010 GCU's leadership program had between 1,400 and 1,700 students enrolled while, based on Ohio Board of Regents figures, from 2008- 2011, the state of Ohio gave out around 2000 principal licenses. Ted Zigler, Personal communication.

12. At the time I am writing this, Coursera has expanded to 33 schools including Berklee College of Music, Brown University, California Institute of Technology, Columbia University, Duke University, École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Emory University, Georgia Institute of Technology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Johns Hopkins University, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, Ohio State University, Princeton University, Rice University, Stanford University, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, The University of British Columbia, University of California—Irvine, University of California, San Francisco, University of Edinburgh, University of Florida, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of London International Programmes, University of Maryland—College Park, University of Melbourne, University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, University of Toronto, University of Virginia, University of Washington, Vanderbilt University, Wesleyan University

13. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978).

tionally means to use logic in a manner that works in our own self-interest.¹⁴ Let's look at an example.

The Social Contract

Why do people form societies? According to what most American high schools teach, people form societies because it is rational to do so. Why is it rational? Because it is more efficient and effective: the group makes the individual stronger and more successful. Imagine a world where all individuals are acting in their own self-interest as individuals, if I can persuade 20 others or 50 others or 100 others to join together with me, we will be able to protect ourselves from others and be able to take from others who are weaker than we. We actually give this assumption a name: we call it The Social Contract, and it is taught in nearly all American high schools as the explanation for why we form societies and nations. But this idea of a rational social contract is patently false.

Nonrationality

Let me try to show you why forming societies as it is promoted in the idea of the social contract is false.

First, imagine a community decides to buy a bus and hire a couple of drivers to provide transportation from the neighborhood to the downtown shopping and business area. This would be an example of the rationality of the social contract. By coming together as a community, everyone pitching in a small amount of money to purchase, maintain, and drive the bus, each individual gains strength that provides greater opportunities for good paying jobs and greater buying power at the lower-priced stores downtown.

So, let us apply "rationality" to this problem. It is in my interest to have a bus system that I can take advantage of. And to have a bus system, we have to have enough people contribute to its purchase and maintenance to keep it running. So, I do have an incentive to contribute to serve my own interest. So far the logic supports the idea of The Social Contract. But, wouldn't it actually be more in my own interest, if I were to cheat? Wouldn't I be acting more rationally, if I could persuade enough others to pay for the bus, while I rode for free? In fact, it would be irrational for me to pay for it, if I could get away without doing so. In sociology, this is called the problem of the free rider. If you think this is a farfetched example, consider why we have sent our military into battle in foreign lands at least 127 times at a cost to the American taxpayer of trillions of dollars and then consider who actually does the fighting and who actually benefits from these wars.¹⁵

Or consider all of those adults in my generation who, having gained a good education through public schools that provided them the qualifications for gaining a job with a good income, are now so ready to dismantle those same public schools for the next generation.

It appears that the rational thing to do--as long as we define rationality in this linear, self-interested way--is to convince everyone else to contribute to the good of the whole and for us to contribute as little as possible. In other words, using rationality as traditionally conceived and

14. For a discussion of some important assumptions of neoliberalism, see Rob Karaba, "Making Sense of Freedom in Education: Three Elements of Neoliberal and Pragmatic Philosophical Frameworks." (Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 2007).

15. Zoltan Grossman, "From Wounded Knee to Libya: A Century of U. S. Military Interventions," n.d., <http://academic.evergreen.edu/g/grossmaz/interventions.html>.

ideologically popular today, it is irrational for individuals to bind themselves to a social contract *and* live up to their obligations. Far from being rational, according to this neoliberal understanding of rationality, The Social Contract is irrational.

If the problem of the free rider cannot convince you of the falseness of idea of The Social Contract, consider when humans start to actually use rationality. Marvin Klein has shown that reasoning, at least in the sense that is assumed by scholars, is something that has to be learned (it does not develop naturally) and occurs throughout the elementary school years. Now, some of my colleagues in the academy might believe that humans only begin to think rationally about the time they become seniors in college or, perhaps, not even until they are about to finish a doctoral program; but let us be a bit more sympathetic to the human condition and suggest that children start to show evidence of reasoning about the same time they begin to master language—let’s say, about age five, on average—or, at least, when they start school. So, according to the social contract, somewhere around five to seven years of age, children, all around the world and throughout history, rationally calculate whether their best interest would be served by forming bonds with a human community or whether they should go it alone. Did you do that? Do you know anyone who did? Of course not. Such an idea is an absurdity. Children are well bound to social groups long before they learn to use reason. In fact, as Klein shows us, it is the other way around; we must first be part of a social group *before* we can learn to develop keen reasoning.¹⁶

So, our question has to be: If people don’t form and remain connected to human communities for rational reasons, how do we explain the fact that we are all—some more, some less, but all—members of some group. The answer to that, simply put, is because we are pack animals. That is to say, humans form groups through nonrational mechanisms. By nonrational, I refer to all of those motivators and causes of action that work outside of reason. Nonrationality should not be confused with irrationality. Irrationality goes against reason; nonrationality simply acts without reason. The results of nonrational action can, on reflection, be found to be rational or irrational, but the action itself does not occur because we reasoned it out and found what we are to do to be rational. Much more likely is that we feel it is the appropriate thing to do and then figure out a reason to *rationalize* what we just did or are about to do. The Social Contract is a good example of academic rationalization: first humans form groups and then we come up with a reason for why we do.

Rationality & School Reform

The school reform movement of the last 35 years has assumed that humans act rationally. The result is that the school reform movement has been a dismal failure. Let me use another bus example to help shed light on why this is so.

Imagine you are riding on a bus down Route 66 headed west to Los Angeles and in Topeka, Kansas, your bus pulls off into a roadside stop and changes drivers. The new driver pulls out onto the highway and heads east. The other riders and you yell out to the driver that he is headed in the wrong direction, but he tells you that you don’t know what you are talking about and continues headed east. As you move further and further away from L.A., you become more frustrated. In fact, your GPS tells you what you already know, which is that you are moving further and further away from L.A., but every time anyone on the bus tells the driver that he is headed in the wrong direction, he tells you that he has checked with the dispatcher and the dis-

16. Marvin L. Klein, “How Well Do Children Reason? Some Suggestions for Language Arts Programs,” *The Elementary School Journal* 79, no. 3 (January 1979): 147-155.

patcher has checked with management and they have told him the riders on the bus don't know what they are talking about and to keep going as he is.

I don't know about you, but for me, that is an apt metaphor for the educational reform movement. The more we do the things that we do in the name of reform—such as measurable objectives, high-stakes tests, school report cards, merit pay, teacher evaluation based on student tests—the further away we get from education. We have pointed out again and again that these reforms are not working, but their only response is to blame the teachers and administrators and, especially, professors of education, and tell you to keep on doing what you know is wrong. You know it is wrong because you see it not working right in front of your face. But, you should know these measures wouldn't work even if you weren't working in the schools. Diane Ravitch, while Undersecretary of Education under George H. W. Bush, was one of the architects of the school reform movement. As we all know, Ravitch has reversed herself and has become an opponent of what she was once a proponent. When explaining why she changed her position, she explained, “The big thing that changed me was seeing the results.”¹⁷

In fact, the truth is that there is no mystery to good teaching. We really do not need any more empirical research to show us what works. We have known since the 1930s what makes for good education. And we know why the present reform cannot work. At least, not work if we mean help the public schools provide a meaningful education for students to develop personally and civically. And why doesn't it work? Because the reformers assume that people act rationally and that what is central to education is the rationally constructed ends that are to be served by rationally constructed means.

According to the school reform movement, here is how schooling is supposed to work. First, determine the desired end of the students' learning. Second, determine where the students are now. Third, figure out how to get the student from here to there. The teacher's job is almost entirely limited to the third step. Policy makers and test makers have determined the desired ends and, through testing and other sorting mechanisms, policy makers and administrators have determined where students are now. What is left for the teacher to do is to plot a path and provide the motivation for the student to move from the here to the there. This is a very technical activity with a bit of motivational psychology thrown in. It really isn't teaching, its more like educational engineering.

Nonrationality & School Reform

As stated above, we do not form groups for rational reasons, but through nonrational mechanisms. Now, unlike those who assume that to be human is to act rationally, and to act without rationality is to act irrationally, I would like to point out again that to act without rationality is not necessarily to act irrationally. It only means that we act without rationality. The infant who cries to be fed is not acting irrationally, she is just not acting with rationality. The seventh-grade boy who asks the person of his affection to the school dance despite not ever expressing fondness for the object of that affection is not acting irrationally, just not rationally. We call this kind of action “nonrational” and, I argue, it is the primary aspect of nearly all human action—even in schools, even in the academy.

There are many causes for and influences on our nonrational action. As the two examples above suggest hunger and romantic desires are two important ones. But those motivations

17. “Diane Ravitch Debates James Merrimam On Charter Schools, 5/7/10,” *Inside City Hall* (NY1, May 7, 2010), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaZ7CUH6as>.

are located in the individual; I am more interested in those located in the social. One such nonrational social mechanism that influences how we act in schools is ritual. I have written at length on ritual, its characteristics and its effects, so I will not develop fully the concept here.¹⁸ But, let me at least clarify what I mean when I use the term.

As I use it, ritual is that aspect of action that is a formalized, symbolic performance. There are four important terms in this definition. First of all, ritual is a performance. It is acted out for others to observe and, therefore, uses the body and other material artifacts to make the performance. (One can, of course, always perform for oneself as the audience.) Second, ritual is not every performance, but only those performances that either are themselves symbolic or utilize symbols. Symbols have meaning, but their meaning is obscure, not typically obvious, and usually ambiguous, which permits a wide-range of differing interpretations as to their meaning. Third, ritual has a recognized form. The participants in the ritual performance, as well as the intended audience, expect certain forms to be followed. Failure to perform the ritual utilizing the proper forms will cause some disturbance. Next time you participate in our typical introduction ritual, try sticking your left hand out when you shake hands. Lastly, ritual is not a type of action, but an aspect of nearly all action. Rather than trying to determine if a particular act is a ritual or not, our job is to determine which aspects of any act is ritual (and, therefore, nonrational) and which parts are instrumental (and, therefore, rationally aimed at accomplishing a particular end).¹⁹

For an example of how the school reform movement utilizes the effects of ritual to advance its technical interests consider its focus on measurable objectives. For me, the oldest, the most pervasive, and the most pernicious element of the reform movement is the focus on building curriculum and utilizing pedagogy around measurable objectives. Perhaps I feel this way because the idea that measurable objectives are desirable is so accepted that we can easily consider it commonsense—even those who are able to see through things such as high stakes testing and merit pay often accept measurable objectives as appropriate. But measurable objectives are not desirable; they are, in fact, inherently destructive of education.

When we advocate for measurable objectives, we promote turning education into a technical problem. Teaching is limited to designing and implementing the means between the here and the there. With such an approach, teaching is reduced to little more than engineering. But, even more importantly, turning education into a technical engineering exercise lends it to commodification. And as long as education is just another consumer good, it inevitably leads to the corporatization of education. And that leads me back to Coursera and edX.

Now, according to the sacred icons of neoliberal ideology, Coursera and edX will improve education. It will maximize the availability of the best education for anyone, anywhere in the world. How do we know that it is the best? Because it is Stanford and Michigan and Penn and Princeton and Harvard and MIT. It is a mad competition between Coursera and edX and competition is inherently good. Which one will win? My guess it is the one that first also joins up with Disney or DreamWorks.

Do you really think McDonalds produces the best food for human consumption? Do you really think consumers are acting in their own rational best interest by supporting Pizza Hut? Food is actually a good comparison. Humans must eat in order to build and maintain healthy

18. Those who desire further development of this approach to ritual see Richard A. Quantz, *Rituals and Student Identity in Education: Ritual Critique for a New Pedagogy. Education, Politics, and Public Life* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

19. See *ibid.*

bodies. Look how well the marketplace has sorted that out based on our own rational choices. According to a study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, by 2030, 42% of Americans will be obese.²⁰ Why do we think when we turn education into a consumer product, we will choose any wiser? Why don't we think that the consumers of education we will choose nonsubstantive sweeteners and intellectual fats in the same way that we have chosen Coca-Cola and Pringles?

Another apt comparison would be to compare the commodification of education to the commodification of the performative arts through television. Look how well the market has managed that. We now have over a thousand TV channels to pick from and how many of them actually work to challenge us in the way that art has the capacity to do. No, television, even the news, has become no more than an entertainment product. There is no reason to think that education is likely to be any different once the market has had its way with it.

No, what was once understood to be a public good has been turned into a consumer good for private consumption. The free (with advertising) consumer product will end up nothing more than entertainment that provides the illusion of education in the same way that FoxNews and MSNBC provide the illusion of news. No one needs to have their biases challenged. No one need challenge their brains tired from their 60 hour week at minimum wage job or their 80 hour week, if you are lucky enough to get a professional job in a law firm or on Wall Street, or the 100 hour week you'll spend trying to find ways to make ends meet, if you are unemployed.

As we see the Amazonification of higher education through companies such as Coursera and edX, we will see the displacement of education with the illusion of education. I suspect Coursera and edX will make up for the deficiencies of the present system of higher education in the same way that Amazon made up for the deficiencies of local book stores and Wal-Mart made up for the deficiencies of locally-owned hardware stores, clothing stores, grocery stores, stationary stores, and sports shops. When education becomes a commodity, it stops being education, in the same way that when news became a commodity, it stopped being news; and when food became a commodity, it stopped being food.

I'm not worried about Grand Canyon University in Ohio. Its days are numbered. It will make a profit for a while and then fade away as the big boys from Disney, Fox, and Paramount partner with the sold-souls of Stanford, Harvard, and Princeton and, like Amazon, wipe out the competition and, while they are at it, wipe out the "education" in "higher education."

Teacher Education

Just one century ago, there were two routes to becoming a teacher. One could attend a Normal School where they would study the texts they would actually be teaching along with some courses in teaching methods (the first year) and then participate in cadet teaching under the guidance of an experienced teacher (the second year). Or, one could attend a university and study education as an academic study including several courses in the history of education, philosophy of education, and psychology of education and, perhaps, though not necessarily, a course in teaching methods on top of a full four-year liberal arts education.²¹ Today, Normal Schools no longer exist, but their approach to teacher education centered on methods courses,

20. Eric A. Finkelstein et al., "Obesity and Severe Obesity Forecasts Through 2030," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 42, no. 6 (2012): 563–570.

21. Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr. & Richard Quantz, "Public Education, The University of Virginia and the Curry School of Education: The Beginnings of a Tradition," in *Three More Schools of Education* ed. Erwin V. Johanningmeier. SPE Monograph Series (Society of Professors of Education, 1986).

introductions to the curriculum to be taught, and practice teaching has replaced the largely intellectual approach that was the university model. The complete curriculum for teacher education at early 20th century universities has been reduced to one or two social foundations courses (if that) and a couple of courses in educational psychology. At universities the *education* of teachers has been replaced by the *training* of teachers. Today, teachers are trained to take their place as educational engineers to monitor and modulate the progress of students from their given start to their given end. Is it any wonder that we find little emphasis in elementary and secondary schools on educating students to read their world, when their teachers have been trained as little more than technicians? Is there an alternative? Yes. That alternative lies in the foundations of education. An approach to teacher education that understands education as other than a technical exercise of means-ends reasoning capable of being packaged as a consumer product.

Let me provide two examples of courses that place nonrationality at the center of the study of education. Don't be confused. These courses do not focus on irrationality, but on the nonrational aspects of education that teacher education methods courses rarely address and, in doing so, help future and present teachers learn how to read their world to better understand the world within which they act as teachers.

Example #1: Sociocultural Studies in Education

EDL 204: Sociocultural Studies in Education is an undergraduate social foundations of education course required of all teacher licensure students, but it serves as a humanities distribution course in Miami's liberal education plan. While most interdisciplinary social foundations of education courses integrate traditional humanities approaches (philosophy, some history courses) with traditional social sciences approaches (sociology, and anthropology, and most history), EDL 204 has opted to approach the topic as a humanities by focusing on helping students learn to read texts in education found in popular culture such as newspapers, television, movies, and the internet. This extremely complex course requires that students consider the relationship between education and democracy through a consideration of the appropriate places of the public and the private in a democracy.

To accomplish this, EDL 204 spends about half a semester helping students develop the ability to distinguish between the attempt of texts to convince a reader through a traditional sense of argument (claims supported by premises and a warrant) and their attempt to persuade readers through rhetorical devices (tropes, ideographs, and, especially, narratives). In this (admittedly oversimplified) duality, argument relies heavily (though not exclusively) on reason, while rhetoric relies heavily (though not exclusively) on nonrationality. Much of this first half of the course is spent on introducing students to the basic arguments and rhetoric of economic-political ideologies in order to be able to understand more clearly what politicians, policy makers, columnists, and bloggers actually mean when they use terms such as freedom, education, and democracy. The effect of this is to bring awareness to students of how the nonrational actual works in the construction of educational policy and on their own assumptions of what it means to be educated in a democracy.

The second half of the course develops these nonrational aspects more fully in an exploration of topics typical to social foundations courses such as social class, race and racism, gender, and sexuality. Focusing most heavily on cultural narratives, students are introduced to common narratives found in popular discourse and how these narratives are utilized by particular economic-political ideologies. While undoubtedly a difficult and unattractive subject matter to

most of our students (nearly two-thirds of students regularly express that they “hate” politics), by the end of the course, a large number of students have begun to understand the confusing debate around education in the United States. True, some students will still think Michele Rhee is a progressive, but most will have started to see that despite the rhetorical fog surrounding education, real differences can be found and recognized when one shifts away from the focus on evidence in argument and focuses instead on the nonrational persuasiveness of rhetoric.

While not every student grasps all of the implications at the end of a 15-week semester (especially since most students take it during their first or second year), many have had seeds planted that continue to grow. I had one student several years ago who took the course in the second semester of her first year. Amy (a pseudonym) was a smart student who worked hard despite the fact that she regularly let me know that she hated the course and could not see what relevance it had for her as a future high school math teacher. Last Spring a teacher in the school where Amy student taught told me that part way through the semester Amy started referring to things that she learned in EDL 204 and by the end of the course, she had stated that EDL 204 was the *only* course in her teacher education program that helped her understand what was happening in her classroom. While certainly not all students eventually move as far as Amy did, given the fact that the one course that focused directly on the nonrational aspects of education was, in her mind, the only course to explain what was actually happening in school, does provide at least anecdotal evidence that such an approach could be even more valuable if it were picked up and reinforced and developed further in more teacher education courses.

Example #2: EDL 621: Social Foundations of Multicultural Education

While EDL 204 approaches the study of education as a humanities, EDL 621 is a social theory course which develops a way (ritual critique) to understand and critique the nonrational aspects of education.²² Students in EDL 621 come from a wide-range of places and have a variety of interests. Many are practicing classroom teachers or Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) future teachers, but many students are in educational administration, higher education, sport, or any other part of the graduate school interested in things multicultural, such as English and Religion. EDL 621 spends the first third of the course developing the theory of ritual critique supplemented through the next third exploring more familiar social theories of education (such as Bourdieu and Foucault) and spends the last third applying these theories to consideration of the relationship between culture and schooling and multiculturalism and the appropriate curriculum and methods that the theories might suggest for a culturally diverse society. This course focuses entirely on the nonrational aspects of schooling and I’ve had almost no student who has not left the class with a completely different understanding of how schooling works. This is especially true for the practicing teachers in the class who nearly always act as if the scales have been re-

22. For further development of the theory and practice of ritual critique see Quantz, 2011.

moved from their eyes. Many of these teachers arrive in my class skeptical, even hardened in their opposition to theory and graduate courses in education. After all, they have had thirty, forty, fifty or more hours of education courses and they have found them “irrelevant” to the “real world” they think they inhabit. “Why hasn’t anyone ever told us about this before,” is a typical comment. Both disheartened by their former complicity in the hegemonic regime and hesitantly hopeful about possibilities given their new way of thinking about their classrooms, EDL 621’s focus on the nonrationality of education, in one short course, changes how they think. It dismantles the mystified notion of education that the fog machines of the reform movement have promulgated for 35 years. One might be tempted to ask how a 15-week semester or a 4-week summer term could possibly clear the mist so easily. On the other hand, given the absurdity of the assumptions of the hegemony, such as the assumption that people act rationally, one might equally wonder how such absurdities are maintained in commonsense.

I began this essay by stating that what we really need to do is to abolish education. Given that unlikely event, the next best strategy is to revisit what it means to be educated in a way that clarifies the possibilities and the limits of rationality as it explores the impact of nonrationality. For the education of teachers that is most likely to occur in social foundations of education courses, so I can only argue that we diminish the focus on any teacher education course that takes the measurable standards of the state or the accrediting agency as the basis for organizing their curriculum and increase the experience future teachers will gain in courses with instructors who understand that education must be constructed by students with their instructors in ways that help them come to grips with the nonrational aspects of education.

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