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Is democratic and just schooling possible? An essay review of *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality* and *The New Democratic Professional in Education*

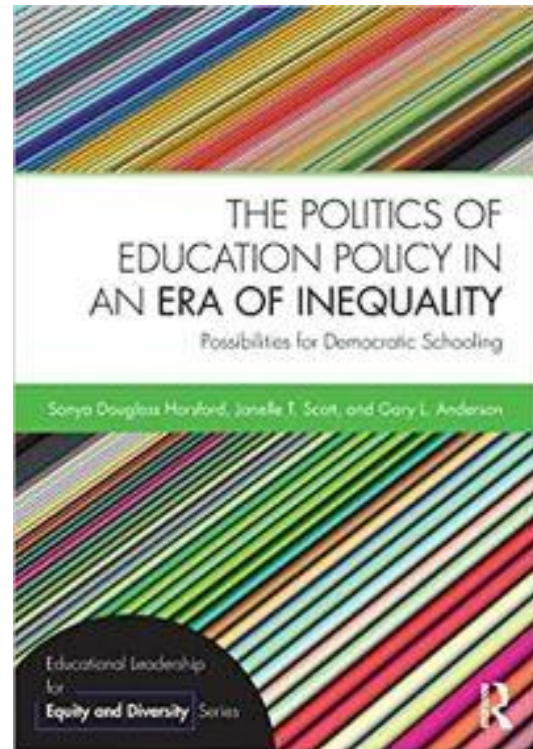
Citizens today live in a time of market supremacy. Market logics and principles not only guide the practices of private and corporate entities, but they also touch nearly every aspect of our lives. They are codified in policy. They govern how work is done and shape how success is measured in public sector agencies. The impact of marketization is also felt in daily life. The supremacy of the market adversely affects the material conditions of middle- and working-class families, particularly along racial lines. It alters how individuals democratically engage with fellow citizens and changes how professional

and political identities are molded. None of this has been by accident. Rather, it has resulted from a successful multi-decade and multipronged effort to restructure economic, political, social, and all public life in ways that favor the growth of the market and undermine democracy.

Two books – *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality: Possibilities for Democratic Schooling* and *The New Democratic Professional in Education: Confronting Markets, Metrics, and Managerialism* – illustrate how these ideological and structural shifts affect U.S. schools, laying

bare how powerful interests have affected the innerworkings of schools and denigrated the democratic character of educational governance, policy, and practice. Their analyses provide a long overdue contribution to the research on education leadership, teacher education, and the politics of education. In a rare feat, these books not only advance a critical assessment of the historical and current role of economic elites in U.S. schools, but also point to promising practices and solutions that practitioners can implement to cultivate a more just and democratic educational system and society.

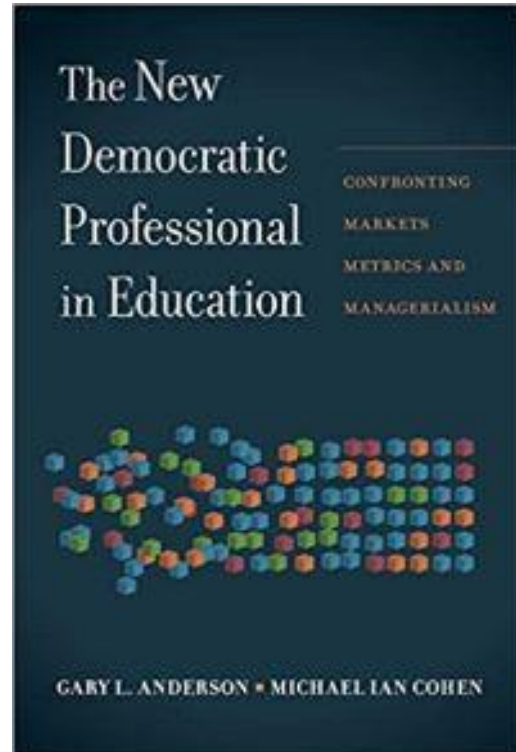
In *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality*, Horsford, Scott, and Anderson begin their book by describing the rise of marketization and the questionable record that market reforms and entrepreneurial leadership have had in redressing patterns of inequity that are deeply felt along race, gender, and class lines. They further set the stage for their volume by illustrating the inherent tensions between a market and a democracy, noting how democratic educational leaders will have to combat the competitive logics at the core of market-based reform and embrace social movements and policies that support the collective good. With this contextual grounding, they turn to a targeted discussion of Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) in Chapter 2, where they present a compelling argument for CPA as a guiding frame for an examination of market ideology, its impact on schooling systems, and the democratic solutions that need be pursued. Horsford et al. draw important, clear distinctions between CPA and traditional policy analysis, articulating how the former more comprehensively examines how power and ideology inform all facets of policy development and implementation. In Chapters 3-7, the authors artfully use CPA to guide their discussion of historical and current reform in U.S. schooling, and in doing so, interrogate the power players and coalitions that have deployed their resources to restructure



schools through market logics and practices. Here, the authors take great care to expose the efforts of nongovernmental actors, including philanthropies and think tanks, who have leveraged their networks to influence policy and governance, fundamentally altering the democratic character of schools and how practitioners function within them. While early chapters reveal the grim reality schools and communities face, Horsford et al. conclude their book by reminding practitioners and researchers that building counterforces and coalitions grounded in “principled resistance” (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006) is possible. In Chapters 8-10, they demonstrate how leaders can help reclaim public schools for the collective good, build power by building student agency and community-based coalitions, and engage in a “critical policy praxis” that can help shift power relations and hold those in power accountable.

Anderson and Cohen advance a similarly compelling analysis in *The New Democratic Professional in Education*, which investigates how

marketization has affected practitioners' day-to-day behaviors in schools and what might be done to forge a new way forward. Central to Anderson and Cohen's investigation is the idea of professional identity and how new managerialism – a philosophy that diminishes the role of professional expertise and instead relies on the discipline of the market and high stakes outcome measures to guide school operations – has reshaped how practitioners understand, enact, and value their work. In Chapter 1, the authors broadly explore how the application of market logics and practices in the private and public sectors has created a new professional – one who is constantly exposed to an “audit culture” that has altered how professionals engage in the workplace and ultimately holds ramifications for productivity and internal accountability. In Chapter 2, Anderson and Cohen shift to a more focused discussion of market reform in education, providing their readers with the answer to a critical question: How did we get here? Here, the authors show how the early 20th century, business-inspired reform of bureaucratization shaped school operations and laid the groundwork for today's new professionalism and the idea that business should serve as a model for school systems. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the second wave of market-reforms in education, which began in the 1980s, and is followed a chapter that examines the political actors who have successfully promoted these reforms and why these reforms, despite their lackluster evidence to support their effectiveness, remain so appealing for broad audiences. Chapters 5 and 6 explore the challenges and opportunities that practitioners face in grappling with new managerialism and its impact on their professional lives. Using Foucault's theory of power and identity, Anderson and Cohen first discuss why educators and school leaders themselves find managerialist reforms and practices so difficult to resist. Then, to conclude, they propose a vision for a democratic professional



– practitioners who hold particular values and practices at the center of their work and can ultimately advocate for promising practices that advance a renewed commitment to and vision for democratic schooling.

How the Macro Becomes Micro

Growing social movements, including the recent slew of teacher strikes, have elevated public attention to neoliberalism – the decades long project that has propelled the marketization of public schools and the broader societal shifts that advance the free market at the expenses of social safety nets and welfare policies. These books provide a critical take on the neoliberal project in schools and unequivocally show how these macrolevel forces manifest themselves in tangible ways at every level of the educational system.

Horsford et al. illustrate this through numerous examples, ranging from the state-level efforts by business-leaning organizations like American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) to pass legislation that support

increased privatization and deregulation to billionaire-backed campaigns to influence the election of local school board members who endorse market-friendly platforms. The authors also expose the significant role of venture philanthropy in propelling the growth of charter schools across the country, drawing attention to the precariousness of schools that are sustained by private funding and the lack of transparency and accountability many of these institutions have to local communities.

Anderson and Cohen similarly trace how neoliberalism shapes the innerworkings and behaviors in school settings, demonstrating how the ideology is “‘out there’ in the sense that it is promoted by new policy entrepreneurs who are changing laws and economic policy, but it is also ‘in here’ in the sense that it changes our relationships to ourselves and others” (p. 91). The authors cement this assertion by identifying the business and policy actors who propagated earlier and current market-based reforms while providing a rich description of how the managerialist focus on outcomes and mathematical models for decision making has altered practitioner collaboration, collegiality, and identity. Of particular note is the authors’ discussion of how and why managerialist practices are widely supported by policymakers and ultimately internalized by practitioners. Anderson and Cohen call attention to reformer discourse – a critically important yet often underexamined dimension of policy processes (Hernández, 2017) – and draw upon Lakoff’s (2006) concept of “deep frames” to demonstrate how the use and repetition of particular phrases and imagery influences the favorable assessment of market practices in schools and makes it appear as a commonsensical and apolitical reality.

Few volumes in the teacher education, educational leadership, or politics of education fields have provided such comprehensive and multifaceted depictions of the spread and scope of market ideology in

the educational sector, thus allowing many to minimize their attention to the effects of neoliberalism on school practitioners’ daily lives. These books manage the feat of illustrating how market ideology and power flow from seemingly distant and influential individuals and coalitions into the structures, souls, and psyches of the school system and its practitioners. In connecting these dots, the scholars expose practitioners and researchers to the intricate web that market reformers have woven in U.S. schools and the growing need to for those dedicated to equity and democracy to generate a formidable counterforce.

The Intersecting Sources of Power Fueling Marketization

At their core, *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality* and *The New Democratic Professional in Education* interrogate marketization and the economic interests that bolster it. With this focus, the authors inherently provide a classed analysis, wherein they call attention to the vast resources, networks, and political influence that private actors have amassed and exerted to make school systems into marketplaces and question its implications for democracy. At the same time, the scholars do not solely engage in a narrow examination of marketization and class; rather, they refreshingly advance an analysis that consistently shows the intersecting ways race, gender, and class are implicated in the growth of marketization and how its impact is felt at the ground level.

Horsford et al. do this from the outset of their book, noting how race, gender, and class inequities are normalized features of U.S. society that have only been exacerbated by neoliberalism and its intent to restructure the public sector with market principles. With this backdrop, the authors maintain this intersectional lens as they describe the growth of market reform in U.S. schools, illustrating how the powerful economic networks

facilitating the growth of market reforms are imbued with racial and gender ideologies. To do this, the authors consistently note that the economic elites agitating for market reforms are often white and male, putting a spotlight on the demographic homogeneity among the engineers and advocates for market-oriented policies. Yet, the authors do not merely consider multiple lines of power in terms of representation but also demonstrate how this positionality informs their support for specific reforms that can perpetuate race and gender privilege. Here, the authors' discussion of venture philanthropy and charter schools is instructive. Horsford et al. note that philanthropies have tended to fund charter management organizations founded by white men who create schools, primarily for students of color, that utilize harsh discipline practices and emphasize educational basics, among other harmful pedagogical practices. Through this example and others in the book, the authors lay a reality bare: Marketization has created spaces for white men to preserve an elite and privileged space in educational policy and leadership – one that often allows them to perpetuate harmful schooling practices on the communities of color they claim to reach.

Anderson and Cohen surface similar power dynamics in examining managerialism and its impact on professional identity. Like Horsford et al., the authors engage in an intersectional analysis where they highlighted the racial, gender, and classed demographics of the developers and promoters of marketization in the 20th and 21st centuries. Their findings provide further proof that the architects of market-based reform throughout the decades have typically been white men who come from the ranks of business and corporate elites, who have enacted their agendas on school systems with minimal input from and engagement with nondominant groups who are deeply affected by their policies. While similar in the aspect, Anderson and Cohen make a distinct and targeted

contribution through their assessment of how market reforms shaped the work lives of school leaders and educators along gender lines, noting how real and perceived levels of professionalism were typically greater for positions predominantly held by men (i.e., school leaders) than those held by women (i.e., teachers). While the authors are attentive to gendered disparities and experiences, they lend less discussion to how market reforms have distinctly affected the professional lives of practitioners of color over the years, suggesting an opportunity for future research and analysis.

The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality and *The New Democratic Professional in Education* provide similar and distinct takes on the raced, classed, and gendered dimensions of marketization's growth and impact. In doing so, the authors draw much-needed attention to the way ideologies and structural forces work in congress to support the consolidation of resources and power. In this way, the authors push against the tendencies of the teacher education and educational leadership fields, and, to a lesser extent, the politics of education field, which have often avoided explicit discussions of ideological systems and the ways they interlace to maintain oppressive structures (López, 2003; Young & Diem, 2014). With these contributions, the volumes serve as exemplars for the field. They demonstrate how explicit and intersectional examinations of ideology and power can be well undertaken and how race, class, and gender can remain central analytic constructs, rather than periphery topics to be acknowledged but not deeply engaged.

Possibilities for a Democratic Path Forward

Throughout both books, the authors paint a clear picture of the scope and depth of the forces that continue to undermine the democratic character of our schools and society. At the same time, they dispel myths of the apolitical nature of these reforms and

the widely-held perception that the transfer of market logics are common sense efforts to improve school systems rather than the intentional actions of power players to further their agendas, platforms, and capital interests. By revealing how educational marketization has unfolded as a calculated and prolonged effort by private actors and coalitions, *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality* and *The New Democratic Professional in Education* provide their readers with purpose and hope: If marketization has been perpetrated by the actions of individuals, these actions can be undone with the mobilization of equity-oriented actors and coalitions that propose a just and democratic path forward.

Horsford and her colleagues accomplish this feat in many ways. They show how practitioners can enact “principled resistance” in their schools and communities, wherein leaders and educators provide authentic opportunities for inclusive decision-making, cultivate culturally sustaining school environments, and work as active defenders of policies and practices that serve the collective good. The scholars also underscore the importance of building power in and with communities to promote a community responsive approach to improving education and to shift the prevailing notion of accountability from a school-concept to one that is community-centric. While pointing to these promising practices, Horsford et al. also elevate powerful illustrations of practitioners enacting principled resistance throughout their book. These examples range from depictions of the late civil rights leader Marcus Foster and his work as the superintendent of the Oakland Unified School District in the 1970s, to more recent efforts, including those of some New Orleans educators who established the New Teachers’ Roundtable as a space to interrogate their own racism and the white supremacy that has been perpetuated on students in the city’s privatization campaign. These examples, and the numerous others, help readers see what principled resistance looks like in action.

Importantly, they also convey the fact that we have models of resistance – acts that have made tangible and critical changes to teaching and learning – that advocates can draw upon to imagine future possibilities.

In *The New Democratic Professional in Education*, Anderson and Cohen articulate their vision for principled, resistant leaders through the concept they call democratic professionalism – a term briefly explored in the Horsford et al. volume but explained in more detail here. According to Anderson and Cohen’s definition, the democratic professional holds many of the commitments and characteristics described by their colleagues in *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality*. Democratic professionals are inclusive in governance, ensure access to quality and culturally sustaining learning environments, advocate for the public and its collective welfare, and are accountable to their community and their democratic values. While similar in their depictions of equity-oriented, democratic leaders, Anderson and Cohen make a distinct contribution in presenting a typology of resistance acts – critical vigilance, counter-discourse, and counter-conduct – which can stimulate both individual and collective action to disrupt new managerialist practices. They eloquently argue that resistance to marketization and managerialism needs to be more than refusal; it requires the recognition of the ways powerful interests have shaped schooling, the intentional development of new and resonant narratives, and the creation of counter-coalitions that can push forth policies that support whole child education and reinvestments in the public sector. In their discussion, Anderson and Cohen also draw critical attention to the importance and limitations of resistance acts, providing practitioners and researchers with a vision for how the varying levels must work together to form a formidable counterforce to market advocates.

The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality and *The New Democratic Professional in Education* artfully juxtapose evidence of the successful campaign to privatize and marketize public schools with research and counternarratives that illustrate how just and equitable school systems can be created to improve the health of our society. In doing so, the authors achieve an important balance in this scholarship – one that elevates the depth of the obstacles that lay ahead while illuminating a path forward.

Developing Practitioners for Principled Resistance?

In reading *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality* and *The New Democratic Professional in Education*, those committed to preserving democracy and advancing justice will likely leave with a renewed sense of purpose and direction. Some may begin to question norms and to articulate more informed, more comprehensive understandings in light of the books' rich descriptions of how marketization has shaped the education systems and work lives of practitioners around the country. Others may also leave with a set of practices they can enact and commitments they can hold to demonstrate principled resistance and make equity-oriented changes in their practice. While many may feel inspired at the conclusion of these volumes, it is equally likely that some may feel overwhelmed – both by the challenges that lay ahead and by a lack of familiarity with the resistance tactics and strategies put forth by the scholars. That is, to dismantle marketization's hold on schooling norms and practices, some may be craving additional solutions and supports to propel and sustain them on their journeys.

The authors offer guidance for practitioners and advocates seeking resources to support their development as equity-oriented and democratic leaders. Many of these efforts are individualistic in nature. For example, Horsford et al. note how

practitioners can take action, including subscribing to educational news sources and journals and conducting background research on policy initiatives and their funders, as a way to stay knowledgeable of reforms and their surrounding politics. Anderson and Cohen offer their own suite of tactics that educators and leaders might adopt to cultivate their “critical vigilance,” including self-initiated educational activities as well as suggestions to join activist organizations where educators can learn and mobilize in community with like-minded individuals. Indeed, much critical work in the areas of practice and policy begins at the personal level. However, while these suggestions can undoubtedly support some practitioners in becoming more socially conscious, true change will require systematic, prolonged, and job-embedded supports for educators and leaders. Practitioners who engage in resistance will inevitably face backlash as systems and those invested in their maintenance will seek to minimize or crush efforts that go against the grain. Considerable attention will have to be paid to restructuring and re-imagining professional learning structures so that inevitable challenges are buffered and continuous investments in the development of democratic professionals are sustained.

In their defense, the authors rightfully acknowledge this need, particularly as it pertains to university-based preparation programs. Both Horsford et al. and Anderson and Cohen argue that significant effort and investment will have to be made to revamp educator and leadership preparation programs so that democratic commitments and competencies are deeply nurtured. The scholars underscore the importance of this work by demonstrating how the growth and prominence of alternative preparation pathways (i.e., New Leaders for New Schools, Teach for America), which often espouse democratic and equity values while aligning themselves with the reformist agendas and practices, compromises the development of

democratic professionals. Undoubtedly, as the ongoing cries for more democratic and just educational systems grow louder in the face of increasing social and economic inequality, university programs and progressive advocates will have to remain vigilant of how calls for democracy and equity are appropriated and warped in the service of the marketization project. Yet, while both sets of authors acknowledge the imperative of professional learning to enable principled resistance, their recommendations often remain abstract and thus do not provide the same level of direction to preparation program designers that was afforded to individual practitioners engaging with their work. Given the comprehensiveness of their analyses of privatization, its impact, and possibilities for the future, an in-depth discussion of the research's implications for leader and teacher preparation would have likely been a tall order. Yet, their volumes suggest that future scholarship on professional learning for democratic professionalism and principled resistance is a necessary and crucial next step for the fields to ensure the development of the teachers and leaders needed in these tumultuous times.

Conclusion

The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality and *The New Democratic Professional in Education* make long overdue and critically important contributions to the field. On one level, they reveal how sociopolitical and economic factors not only affect aspects of everyday life for practitioners but also acutely influence and govern schooling systems and the behaviors within them. The authors help practitioners understand how we got here, what we are up against, and refreshingly offer answers to the key questions: What are we fighting for? How can we make democratic and just schooling a reality?

The scholars should be celebrated for their contributions to the teacher education

and leadership education fields. Together, these books offer concrete guidance for the front-line workers who are entrusted to enact these ambitious goals for democracy. They deliver to teachers and leaders more than critique; they offer them practical steps that they can take to empower themselves and their schools to forge ahead on more democratic paths amid contrary market forces.

Together, the two works also offer analyses that bridge the socio-political dynamics of the current day with the historical antecedents the precipitated them. In this way, both books help situate educators' and educational policymakers' current challenges within the broader evolution of the institution of public education and the public sector more generally. They reveal key patterns for today's actors so that they can spot them in their daily professional lives, as well as in macro-level political trends, name them, and know how to resist or prevent them.

In doing so, these books serve as resources for policymakers and practitioners who are uniquely situated to craft, interpret, mediate, or implement policies at the local level. School leaders and teachers feel the strong pull of policy mandates and marketized structures, often having to comply with their requirements to maintain their livelihoods even when they undermine their personal well-being and the health of their communities. *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality* and *The New Democratic Professional in Education* deconstruct the depth and breadth of the challenges that practitioners experience on a daily basis while providing research and strategies that hold promise and a path forward. With the emerging social movements calling for schools to be responsive community centers, these books provide key evidence to bolster their advocacy claims and detail a set of policies and investments that can make that happen.

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