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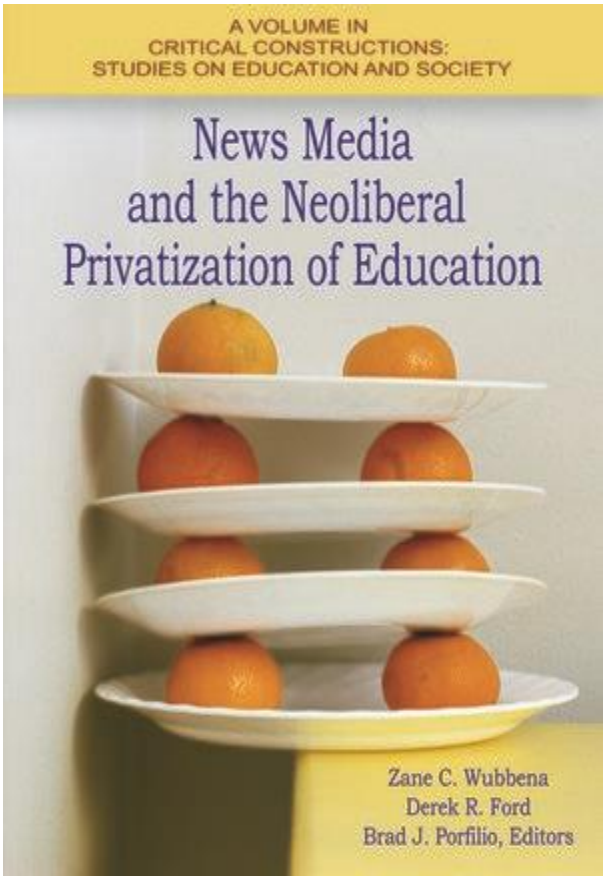

News media and the neoliberal privatization of education is a volume in Information Age Publishing's Critical Constructions: Studies on Education and Society Series, designed to make a contribution "to a burgeoning field of critical scholarship of the news media and education" (p. ix). Editor Zane Wubbena posits that neoliberalism is not just one among many "isms," but "is itself the foreground… through which everything is articulated" (p. xii). Here, the assumption is that if one can understand the articulation between this foreground and institutions such as public education and news media, one may be in a position to resist the reproduction of that foreground. Given the strong support for privatization (for-profit colleges and private schools) by President Donald Trump and Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, an understanding of resistance techniques is increasingly important for opponents of neoliberal policies. Although the critical scholarship in this volume calls for a resistance to the neoliberal outlook, taken as a whole the

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10 essays are more successful in explaining the ways in which media reproduce and support neoliberal reforms than they are in providing techniques of resistance to the privatization of education.

In his introduction, Wubbena scans the history of the concept and theory of neoliberalism. Wubbena reports that, although the term neoliberalism can be traced to the early 1900s, a Google Scholar search for neoliberalism and neoliberal from 1979 to 2015 reveals almost no citations from 1979 to 1990, and a subsequent increase to approximately 35,000 in 2015 (Figure 1; p. xiii). A limitation of these data is that they do not report the content of these citations, however, they do indicate that scholars have paid increasing attention to these terms. If one looks further back in history, the concept of neoliberalism developed between WWI and WWII based on the work of a group of European economists who wanted to provide a moderate alternative to both socialist and laissez-faire economics. However, what we understand currently as neoliberal economic theories closely parallel laissez-faire liberalism. Post-WWII U.S. economists who identified with the neoliberal positions include Friedrich Hayek, Joseph Schumpeter (both migrated from Europe to the United States) and the American Milton Friedman. These economists, together with like-minded scholars, politicians and business entrepreneurs emphasized free-market competition and limited government as a means of supporting democracy against the state-oriented policies of socialism, communism, and fascism. Their views may be contrasted to Keynesian economics, which was influential in the United States from the New Deal to the Great Society (roughly from the 1930s to the 1970s). During that period, government intervention supported programs such as progressive taxation, expanded social welfare, regulation of business and labor. In the late 1970s the "Keynesian Golden Age" was confronted by a "…more ruthless and aggressive phase of free-market, deregulated, neoliberal capitalism" (p. xiv). The pro-business, anti-regulation actions of the Trump administration and the Republican controlled Houses of Congress are prime examples of the continuing implementation of this counterrevolution.

A major theme of Wubbena's introduction is that the evolution or counterrevolution from Keynesian economics to neoliberal economics in the United States was paralleled by changes in federal education policy, and in the role of the news media in conveying those policy changes to the public. As the role of the federal government increased, especially by the creation of an independent cabinet-level U.S. Department of Education by President Carter in 1979, federal intervention in the education system became increasingly open to criticism and the focus of blame for whatever educational crises existed. These crises and the technical, bulky, statistical reports were translated for the public into easy to read and to understand critiques and proposals. As author/editor Wubbena points out, these critiques and proposals, "…coalesced to form the foundation of the current neoliberal educational reform system" (p. xx). The dominant form of this system contains a combination of government (state or federal) generated standards for curriculums and testing, and business market-based reforms stressing vouchers, charter schools, and teacher evaluations.

For readers who wish to further pursue the overview presented by Wubbena, I recommend Patrick Sullivan's (2017) scholarly, in-depth analysis of the history of neoliberal economic policies and their impact on the community college. Sullivan's book titled *Economic Inequality, Neoliberalism, and the American Community College* makes it clear that the influence of neoliberalism extends beyond primary and secondary levels and reaches community colleges and other segments of the higher education system. I hope that *News media and the neoliberal privatization of education*

stimulates researchers to study the role of news media in the framing of the often-cited crises of higher education.

Whether one refers to the editors and authors of this collection or to Sullivan and other authors concerned with neoliberalism, the consensus is that when applied to public education, neoliberalism supports privatization efforts, e. g. , vouchers, charter schools , for-profit services from remediation and testing to professional development, online education, and alternative teacher education and certification programs. At the same time, as Wubbena points out, "privatization of education is neither exclusively public nor private" (p. xxi). For instance, charter schools are primarily funded by public sources, but are administered by individuals and groups who make a profit from them. In theory the proliferation of charter schools provides an opportunity for students and their parents, especially those in areas in which the public schools are failing, to choose among schools. To quote Wubbena, "In essence, educational reforms have not been concerned with education per se, but rather these reforms have served as a means for subjecting public education to the logic of the market" (p. xxiii). Although the term "privatization" appears in the title of the book and throughout various chapters, no chapter is devoted specifically to it. I would like to have seen a comparison between the apparent success of the charter movement and the apparent failure of the voucher movement.

In sum, the book collectively argues that educational reforms "have served as a means for subjecting public education to the logic of the market" (p. xxiii). And, if we are to understand and resist this influence, we must question, "what the public knows about education, how the public is informed, and whose interests are represented and ultimately served through the publication and distribution of information by the news media about public education" (p. xxiii). For example, newspapers and investigative TV programs have often featured stories about apparent successes of charter schools, however, they have not indicated who benefits financially from these schools, how the students are selected, maintained, or dismissed, and what the long terms effects of these schools are in terms of students' academic progress. At the same time, these media outlets often feature stories of crises in the public schools without exploring the social forces contributing to these crises.

Although Wubbena points out that neoliberal economic policies exist in a number of countries worldwide, all 10 papers in this collection focus on countries in North and South America, including the United States, Canada, and Chile. In his contribution on Chile, Cristian Cabalin argues that various media outlets are extremely homogeneous in ideology, with only two influential, national newspapers. Given the right of center orientation of these two papers, it should come as no surprise that their editorials were critical of the student movements in 2006 and 2011, which called for social justice and structural changes. Michelle Stack's contribution involves a discourse analysis of the role of media in a more pluralistic and diverse society, Canada. Stack found that while both the national government and the media reported statistics demonstrating that Canada was well placed on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), their reports offered no contextual analysis of these data. For instance, although scores of students in poorer regions were lower than those for students in wealthier regions, "(t)he dominant framing was that poverty was less important in Canada than other places" (p. 91). Given this type of framing, one should not expect the Canadian debate about education to focus on economic issues or the role of government in addressing educational realities.

The importance of the media in influencing views of public education in the United States is demonstrated by Michael J. Robinson's contribution to this volume. In his

study of the coverage of education on the ABC, CBS, and NBC television networks, Robinson uses the term "user gap" to describe, "…the difference in confidence toward the public school system between those (the users) who have contact with the schools through their children and those who do not" (p. 1). The loss of confidence in the public school system, particularly among those who obtain their understanding of the system exclusively through the media, is understandable when the media stress negative aspects of the system and ignore its achievements. This article was originally published in 1984 (the sole paper published before 2000) and, therefore, does not deal with cable TV stations and the fragmentation of the audience. The "user gap" likely has been exacerbated by these developments. A current replication of Robinson's study comparing audiences of cable or niche TV channels would shed light on the impact of the fragmentation of the audience today.

The remaining chapters are quite straightforward studies of how the mass media (e.g., *The New York Times)* and the more specialized media (e.g*., Education Week*) supported and/or failed to resist neoliberal policies and programs in the United States such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Teach For America, the rise of charter schools and legislation that attacks education job security and tenure. Eric Haas' study, on the role of think tanks and especially the Heritage Foundation, deserves special attention. Think tanks such as Heritage, Cato Institute, Manhattan Institute, American Enterprise Institute, and Hudson Institute play an important role in conducting research on education and are quite successful in getting their scholars and their scholars' work into the media, to the public, to Congress, to the White House, to government agencies, to universities, to businesses and corporations. Haas' original research on Heritage Foundation work revealed that while news items relating to education that referred to Heritage increased from one in 1970 to 159 in 2001, only four news items (2.5%) of the 159 included any criticism of Heritage. An extensive review of the literature leads Haas to the following conclusion: "news media unintentionally present conservative think tank works and spokesperson (sic) in a generous manner by omission of their clear political leanings and their emphasis on advocacy as well as by accepting the scientific descriptions think tank present (sic) of their work and spokespersons without verifying whether this is accurate" (p. 58). It is not clear to me whether the media educational reporters are lazy or not in a position to evaluate the original work of think tank scholars. One recommendation I would make is to ensure that such reporters are better educated in the areas of educational research and policy. A second recommendation is that progressive think tanks and their financial supporters place greater emphasis on educational research. An important note for the reader involves the use of terminology. Haas, as well as a number of other contributors, refers to the broader term "conservative" rather than the narrower term "neoliberal." Not all conservative positions are neoliberal. The most prominent example is the "neoconservative" position that would place greater emphasis the role of government.

The penultimate and the ultimate chapters address the issue of resistance to prevailing education policies. However, those who wish to resist the current social reality may be disappointed if they are searching for a specific program of action. The penultimate chapter explores the role of the radical 1960s and 1970s black grass-roots press *(The Black Panther* and *Muhammed Speaks*) in "…calling into question the white supremacist assumptions that pervaded conservative and liberal press alike" (p. 193). The problem with the inclusion of this interesting historical piece is that the emphasis is on resistance to the narrative presented in mainstream white press and not on resistance to neoliberal education policies. Finally, Kuram Hussain and Mark

Stern do not clearly distinguish among "white supremacist," "conservative," and "neoliberal" press and narratives.

In the second chapter focused on resistance, Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner call for "an approach that is critical of corporate and mainstream forms and uses of technology that advocate reconstruction of technologies to further the prospects of progressive social and political struggle" (p. 214). New media, cyber-information, and technology are changing rapidly, and Kahn and Kellner's discussion, focused on the policies of G. W. Bush, is dated. Furthermore, soon after the publication of this work a President of the United States was elected who would use his Office to disseminate tweets via Twitter—an online news and social networking service that emerged in 2016—on a daily basis. However, the message from this paper is worth remembering: the Internet and cyberspace are "contested terrains" between progressive groups and neoliberal groups. New media, e.g., blog communities, video sites, You Tube and podcasts, have the potential to assist in the resistance to the ideologies supported by former media outlets.

News media and the neoliberal privatization of education is timely in its critical analysis of the role played by the media in the social construction of various publics' conceptions of the condition of education. Collectively, the papers document the support that the media has generally provided for programs and policies that enhance and maintain neoliberal dominance. However, I suggest that the volume suffers from premature publication. For instance, there is no concluding or summarizing chapter, there is repetition among papers in the discussion of the history and meaning of neoliberalism, and there are many distracting errors throughout. The final paper, by Kahn and Kellner, provides the most extreme case. In that chapter, we are informed "… in an accompanying article in this journal Jodi Dean…. " (p. 213). What journal? There is no citation to Dean in the references to the article. In addition, there are 19 citations to notes in the article; however, there are no notes.

Given the lack of a summary chapter, much dated data reporting on old rather than new media, a failure to distinguish always between neoliberal and conservative, I suggest that the primary audiences will comprise knowledgeable researchers interested in studying the impact of media on public education policy, and faculty and students in mass media or education policy. Faculty can provide backgrounds for chapters to be assigned students as supplemental readings. If, as the authors suggest, *News media and the neoliberal privatization of education* is to serve to "enlighten and call to action" (p. ix), its most likely initial audiences will be faculty and their students. The editors indicate that they also view parents, activists, and policymakers as potential audiences, yet missed an opportunity to present action plans to reach these groups.

For excellent integrated, theoretical and empirical analyses of critical views of neoliberal economics and education, readers might turn to Patrick Sullivan's (2017) book (mentioned above) or Michael W. Apple's (2014) *Official knowledge: Democratic education in a conservative age.* Apple is one of the most prolific and influential critical scholars writing about education today (Oromaner, 2015). Consistent with the perspectives and findings in *News media and the neoliberal privatization of education*, Apple demonstrates the impact of various conservative (including neoliberal) orientations on "official knowledge" in contemporary education. A major lesson from all of the authors mentioned, and for all of us who are concerned with the relationship between neoliberal economic policies and education, is that we should study the actions through which neoliberals gained their positions of influence and employ what we can to resist and replace that influence.

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About the Reviewer

Mark Oromaner is an independent scholar (sociology). He spent more than 35 years in higher education as a faculty member, administrator and researcher. His major research interests and publications focus on the sociology and history of higher education, and on the careers of scholars and scholarship in the social sciences. His research has appeared in journals such as *The American Sociologist*, *British Journal of Sociology*, *Research in Higher Education, Philosophy of the Social Sciences, Social Studies of Science*, and *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization.*

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