

## **Who's in Charge Here? Teacher Education and 2042**

**By Ann Berlak**

In January of 2002, the Department of Elementary Education at San Francisco State University began revising our entire teacher education program to bring it into compliance with four sets of criteria: the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP), the Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Professional Teacher Preparation Programs (known as the Program Standards), Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs) and Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) procedures as mandated by SB 2042 passed by the California State Legislature and signed into law by the governor in 1998.

Our courses at San Francisco State had already been designed to conform to a set of state standards approved by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) and thoroughly documented in a thick compliance document. However, passing our courses was no longer deemed a satisfactory indication of credential students' competency.

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The Teacher Performance Expectations now mandate that teacher educators prepare credential candidates to teach the K-12 Academic Content Standards in every subject area. Christine Sleeter's trenchant critique of these Standards appears elsewhere in this issue. Therefore, I will mention only one of the more insidious Teacher Performance Expectations: TPE 3. TPE 3 requires that, in order to receive their credentials, candidates must demonstrate they "know about

### *Who's In Charge Here?*

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and [can] appropriately implement the state adopted student assessment system.”<sup>1</sup> In effect, this TPE mandates that teacher educators teach their students to accept without question the State mandated assessment system. There is no TPE for critical reflection on the TPEs themselves, the context in which they were created, and the purposes they serve.

The Academic Content Standards, Standards for the Teaching Profession, Teacher Preparation Program Standards, and Teacher Performance Expectations were written under the auspices of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). Fourteen of the 15 voting members of the CTC are teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and members of the public who are appointed by the governor. The fact that the governor appoints members of the Commission is not inconsequential. At a statewide meeting of the California Teachers’ Association (CTA), I learned first hand of the contempt Governor Gray Davis has for teachers when I heard him tell 800 CTA representatives that he was well aware of their opposition to the high stakes accountability system the state had imposed upon teachers, but that he knew better than they did what was best for children and schools. Davis recently appointed Alan Bersin, superintendent of schools in San Diego, as Chair of the CTC. Wayne Johnson, President of CTA, refers to Bersin as an anti-teacher superintendent who has wasted millions on a bloated bureaucracy, and has never taught a day of his life. Davis failed to appoint a single California Teacher Association teacher to the Commission.<sup>1</sup> Not unlike most politicians, Davis is, of course, beholden to those who make the greatest contributions to his campaign (though not to California teachers whose financial and political support through the CTA was clearly not as persuasive as that of his other more politically powerful corporate contributors).

The Governor also appoints members of the State Board of Education to whom the CTC reports. The coveted positions on the Board often go to the biggest campaign contributors. Three CEOs, Robert Abernathy, Reed Hastings, and Donald Fischer (CEO of Gap) each contributed between \$70,000 and \$241,450 to Davis’ campaign.

Teachers and teacher educators are appointed to task forces that are charged with the task of writing the various sets of standards. At the October, 2002, meeting of the California Council on the Education of Teachers one staff member at the Commission on Teacher Credentialing claimed that it was teacher educators themselves who wrote the standards. This claim is disingenuous at best. In the late 1980s, the state of California adopted the State Framework for History-Social Science (the precursor to the State Content Standards for History-Social Science) and the Houghton-Mifflin elementary level social studies textbook series. In a book titled *The Great Speckled Bird*, Dexter Waugh, a reporter for the *San Francisco Examiner*, detailed how appointments to the Curriculum Commission and to the State Board of Education charged with overseeing the writing of the framework and the selection of the texts were influenced by corporate and Euro-centric perspectives and interests.<sup>2</sup>

Waugh also showed how those same interests shaped the conclusions reached by the Commission and the advisory panels of teachers and teacher educators by influencing appointments to the panels, the selection of the “experts” who trained the panelists and Commissioners, the way issues were framed and the drafting of the Commission’s reports. Views of members of the Commission and advisory panels of teachers and teacher educators that diverged from the dominant perspective left little trace upon the Commission’s final reports. Waugh also reported that several members of the Commission resigned or chose to remove their names from the final documents because they did not want to be associated with the conclusions the Commission reached.

The history of how particular interests and perspectives shaped the Teacher Preparation Program Standards, TPEs, and TPAs, and thus the direction education in California will take in the new millennium has yet to be written. However, informal interviews with teachers and teacher educators who were appointed to advisory panels to review the Standards for the Teaching Profession, the Program Standards, the TPEs, and the TPAs suggest that there were significant parallels to each of the processes Waugh documented.

The CTC representative at the October CCTE meeting cited above named, among others, Andrea Whittaker as one of the teacher educators who wrote the standards. Several teacher educators who participated in drafting the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (the CSTPs), including Andrea Whittaker, have written a history of their origins, development, and revision (Whittaker, Snyder & Freeman, 2001).

Whittaker, Snyder, and Freeman document processes that resemble those identified by Waugh. They show that, between 1991 and 1997, many of the goals and intentions of the teacher- and teacher educator-dominated statewide Framework Task Force and a Validity Study Research Team appointed by the Commission that drafted what would eventually become the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CTSPs), were gradually and then abruptly reversed by the Commission staff, the State Department of Education, and Educational Testing Service that was hired by the Commission. In their view, the CSTPs morphed from standards designed to promote teacher reflection to mechanisms for facilitating standardization, accountability, and summative evaluations, and what had originally been a holistic and multi-dimensional conception of teaching was reformulated as a linear and atomistic set of behaviors. Though teachers were invited to give “input,” perspectives counter to the agenda do not appear to have significantly influenced the final document. The Teacher Performance Expectations were to be derived from the Standards for the Teaching Profession.

According to Whittaker, Snyder, and Freeman, these standards, the product of an eight-year struggle between teacher and teacher educator panelists on the one hand and the Commission on the other, had failed to deal squarely with the need to prepare teachers to teach California’s culturally and linguistically diverse school populations.

### *Who's In Charge Here?*

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Teachers and teacher educators convened to advise the Commission on drafting the Teacher Performance Expectations expressed concern about the low priority given to cultural and linguistic diversity (Whittaker, Snyder, & Freeman, 2001). There are reports that the staff of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing instructed the panelists to avoid “red flag language,” that is, references to race and social justice. Sleeter’s article in this issue confirms that the CTC succeeded in excising references to race and social justice from the content standards.

While the elementary education faculty at San Francisco State continue to revise the curriculum to bring it into compliance, the State is trying to figure out how the Teacher Performance Assessments will actually be carried out. The TPAs, including scales to define levels of competency, are being developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) “in consultation with California educators.” Many of these educators have discovered that they are in reality expected to function not as consultants but as conduits for carrying the TPAs to teacher education programs.

Others writing in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* have documented the destructive effects upon children in schools, their teachers, and teacher education of applying the high-stakes/accountability system to teacher education in California and across the nation. Yet writing compliance documents continues to devour teacher educators’ time, attention, and resources that could be better spent using our expertise to address the problems we as professionals know are most pressing, including the alarming and growing shortage of certified teachers.

Teacher educators, both tenured and non-tenured, have experienced tremendous pressure to comply with SB 2042. As a result many, in one way or another, have made curricular decisions that were contrary to their better judgments. Others simply fall into line with little awareness of the consequences. Those who voice concerns or objections are often considered obstructionist and urged to put aside objections and simply get the job done.

There must be powerful forces behind a movement that is being foisted with such intensity upon teachers and teacher educators and that has occupied so much of teacher educators’ already severely limited time and energy. What are these forces?

### **The Forces behind the Standards/Accountability System**

SB 2042, which lays out the standards and accountability system for teacher education, is the missing piece in the Master Plan for reforming the entire K-university education system in California. The Master Plan is central to the process of consolidating and intensifying corporate control over the political/economic system. Consolidation of corporations’ political and economic power has accelerated during the past 30 years, accompanied by an unprecedented polarization of wealth. Consider, for example, that today the wealthiest 1 percent own 40 percent of the wealth of the country. This is up from 19 percent in 1976 (See Sleeter’s paper, this issue).

Kathy Emery, in a recent doctoral dissertation, documents the central role the

Business Roundtable (BRT) plays as the major force driving the educational “reforms.”<sup>3</sup> The BRT is a national organization with branches in every state. On the governing board sit the CEOs of the nation’s 219 largest corporations. The avowed purpose of the BRT is to allow corporations to speak with one voice on a wide variety of policy issues. The Business Roundtable, its subsidiary, the Business Coalition for Educational Reform (BCER), and state organizations organized as part of the BRT’s “50-state initiative” (Emery, 2001, p. 325), have deliberately orchestrated and promoted the standards and accountability system at both national and state levels. Its goal is “not just to improve individual schools, but to reform the entire system of public education” (BRT, 1995).

The BRT plan includes what it calls nine “essential components” of systematic educational reform (BRT, 1995). It is well on its way to implementing the first three: state content standards, state-mandated tests, and sanctions/rewards — in over a dozen states, including California. It is now working on number four — transforming pre- and in-service teacher training so that teachers are socialized to support the first three. It is, of course, achieving great success at the national level as well.

### **What the BRT Has Done**

The Business Roundtable has set the agenda for what now passes for school reform. It is a central player in the construction of a movement to standardize knowledge, and to legitimate corporate control over what the content of that knowledge should be. It plays a major role in determining what students should learn and what teachers and teacher educators should both know and teach. It has seized the rhetorical high ground with the language of accountability, the New Standards movement, and the proclamation of “high standards for all.” All of this has been accomplished by leading a movement to align the standards set by corporate interests to “high stakes testing.” It has, in effect, silenced debate over the goals of education by excluding teacher educators, parents and other communities from participating in the development of educational policy. This is not a conspiracy, for the BRT makes no secret that the standards it supports are intended to “drive curriculum, teacher training, and assessment” (BRT, 1996, p.8).

### **How the BRT Gained Control over “School Reform”**

In 1989, the BRT devoted its entire annual meeting to synthesizing business-led reforms of the 1980s into a high-stakes testing agenda. It established the Business Coalition for Educational Reform (BCER) to enable corporate interests to develop “a Common Agenda for reform endorsed by the business community.” BCER’s stated goal is to be “at the forefront of a national effort by businesses to stimulate academic progress by aligning their hiring, philanthropic and site location practices with our educational agenda” (Rust, 1999, quoted in Emery, 2001, p. 44). Edward Rust, Chair of the BRT Education Task Force, put it bluntly: “The Business

### *Who's In Charge Here?*

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Roundtable CEOs have successfully applied the heat on state policy makers . . . (W)e cannot — and will not — leave the job to others” (Rust, 1999).

The BCER influenced state and national government officials through campaign contributions and lobbying efforts. Its members sit on state and national “advisory” committees. The blueprint for “reform” outlined by the BRT during the 1989 meeting was immediately adopted by the nation’s governors the following fall (Emery, 2001, p. 45).

The BRT systematically created educator, school boards, superintendent, and community “buy in” to the system. Rust put it bluntly: “Large organizations don’t change because they see the light; they change because they feel the heat.” Business Roundtable CEOs have successfully applied the heat on state policy makers, while state (business) coalitions are helping the public and educators see the light about the need for change” (Rust, 1999).

Working in tandem with middle of the road and right wing think tanks, corporate sponsored nonprofit organizations, and state and federal government officials, the BRT has engaged in a public relations campaign aimed at convincing the public that the solution to schooling as well as societal problems is the high-stakes standards/accountability system many states (including California) and the national government have mandated. It published several handbooks detailing effective strategies to deal with backlash to the high stakes accountability system [“Don’t tell parents they are wrong . . . (Instead) lead them to information sources (like toll free numbers for local BRT coalitions)” (Quoted in Emery, 2001, p. 49).] When one state’s BRT-sponsored focus groups of parents, teachers, and principals discovered widespread concern about the tests, the BRT used funds from the Annie Casey Foundation to create a 45-member speakers’ bureau to counter public opposition to the test (Emery, 2001, p. 50). Most recently in California, ETS, the contractor for developing the K-12 testing program as well as the TPE/TPA assessments launched a \$700,000 advertising campaign to garner public and teacher support for the testing system.

The BRT promotes its agenda through financial contributions, including awards and grants to individual teachers, principals, schools and entire districts. Members of the network include The Institute for Educational Leadership funded by 44 corporations and 16 major foundations, Public Agenda that offers web sites and public opinion polls, The Education Commission of the States that provides state governors with resources, The Annenberg Institute and many other organizations [including Achieve, the national AFT, the Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform, and the Bay Area Schools Reform Collaborative (BASRC)]. An Annenberg Report (1998) stated, “We must do what is “necessary to sustain political and popular support for standards over time.”

The foregoing brings a whole new meaning to the concept “manufacturing consent.” The BRT and its corporate partners have done such a thorough job of manufacturing consent that most parents and teachers and even teacher educators can not imagine any other way to promote equity and excellence in schools than

through a highly centralized system of standards, high stakes testing, and rewards and sanctions.

### **Why It Is in the Interest of Corporations To Install This Form of “Accountability”**

The BRT portrays itself as motivated by the following high minded concerns:

(I)n a global economy built upon knowledge and technical skills employees must be able to do more now than they did a generation ago. (Rust, 1999, p.1)

American students are failing to leave high school with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college, at work and in their communities. (BRT,2001)

Its actual intentions are clearly otherwise. The avowed goal of U.S. corporations, speaking through the BRT, is to make the U.S. more globally competitive. It has stated that its “single objective (is) to promote policies that will lead to . . . long term growth in the U.S. economy (since) it is only through such growth that American companies will be able to remain competitive around the world”(BRT, 1998). This is also the avowed goal of the Standards Movement (Metcalf, 2002). Secretary of Education Rod Paige puts it this way: “Unfortunately we are average across the board compared to other industrialized nations. In the global economy these countries are our competitors. Average is not good enough.” Incidentally, Paige is wrong about the international comparisons: white students in the U.S. actually rank second in international comparisons on standardized tests of reading, while Blacks and Hispanics, depending upon who is included in the comparison group, rank 26th or 29th (Bracy, 2002).

Norman Augustine, past chair of the Education Task Force of the BRT, and a member of President Bush’s education advisory committee, justifies corporate America’s influence in education reform on the grounds that “the business community is the principal customer of the products of the education system” (Altwerger, 2002). Evidently he sees the purpose of public schooling as manufacturing employable workers. The BRT’s *A Business Leader’s Guide to Setting Academic Standards* (1996) provides examples of how business leaders can write the standards by analyzing the skills that are needed at particular locations in the workforce (Emery, 2001, p. 48).

But, from a corporate perspective, to be globally competitive a nation must not only have skilled workers; it must have a pool of skilled workers overqualified for the jobs available. Corporations are well aware that corporate profits increase when there is an excess supply of educated workers. An over-abundance of qualified workers keeps wages down and profits up.

It is incontestable that the new economy is creating more unskilled than skilled jobs — answering customer service 800 numbers is the fastest growing job category. Such workers are equal in number to public school teachers. Most jobs do



### *Who's In Charge Here?*

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not even require a high school diploma. Only 23 percent of jobs require a college degree — and the percent is not rising significantly (Emery, 2002). Never mind that there already aren't enough jobs for the well educated to go around. Yet, when speaking about how to counter any opposition to BRT's agenda, one CEO "urged other employers to remind their communities that U.S. based companies can find skilled workers for everything from manufacturing to software development overseas, and that companies increasingly decide where to locate their operations on the basis of...the performance of local school systems" (BRT, 1996, pp.26-7, quoted in Emery, 2001, p. 49).

A country that is "globally competitive" also requires a compliant work force. Appreciating the historic role of labor unions and other forms of social activism, awareness of how money buys power, thinking critically, formulating one's own questions rather than responding to questions posed by others, and questioning authority do not therefore contribute to global competitiveness. Actually, very few workers in a corporate system need to think critically. Though some few may need to solve problems set by others, there is not a great need for workers to be problem setters. What profitable corporations need is workers who have a "work ethic", i.e., do not think critically about nor question the conditions of work, the effects of globalization, or the control corporations have over the political system, including education.

Finally, the call for standards and accountability in order to produce more highly skilled workers deflects attention from rising unemployment and underemployment, the de-funding of public education and other human services, and at the present moment impending war. Instead of promoting the testing/assessment system, corporate leaders might have funded an effort to mandate that schools, districts and states promote "opportunity to learn standards." They might have used their clout to set standards of adequate funding for schools attended by those children who have been left behind, school cleanliness and safety, access to medical and mental health services, or class size reduction.

However, meeting such standards would be costly, and require investments of public money for schools and for teacher education. Thus, meeting those standards would not contribute to corporate profit. Meanwhile, what *does* contribute to corporate profits are testing mandates that could cost anywhere from \$2.7 billion to \$7 billion, and the sales of scripted curricula and text books aligned to the tests. The Big Three publishing companies — Mc Graw Hill, Houghton-Mifflin, and Harcourt Brace, among the chief beneficiaries — were identified as "Bush Stocks" by Wall Street analysts in the wake of the 2000 election (Metcalf, 2002).

### **What's Ahead**

It is essential that teacher educators see the big picture if we are to understand what is at the heart of the standards/accountability process built into 2042. Understanding these dynamics will help us think more critically about the enormous forces



behind the Standards Movement and become more realistic about what it will take for citizens in a democracy to regain some control over decisions that are rightfully theirs. The controversy is not about standards nor about the need for accountability. The question is who sets the standards and to whom schools and teachers are accountable. The question is not, therefore, whether presently existing standards and tests should be replaced by better standards or more “authentic” tests. It is whether corporations whose mission is to maximize profit should be calling the shots.

It’s no surprise that those who devised the plan and legislate what students and teachers should know do not put a high priority on critical and creative thinking, and the skills, attitudes, and knowledge students and teachers need to participate in democratic decision making. What *is* new is how closely the tentacles of the corporate order are controlling teacher education programs, robbing teacher educators, their students, and the public of the power to make decisions. The ripple effect is already discernable: many committed, creative, and intelligent people who want a career where they can exercise their creativity and intelligence at a time in history where a teacher shortage of epic proportions is just around the bend are becoming discouraged from entering or completing teacher education programs.

In the early part of the century skilled craftsmen who had formerly combined conception and execution, thought and action, in the building of automobiles became cogs in Ford’s assembly line, as alternative forms of production were destroyed. They became the executors of movements prescribed by others. This is what classroom teachers and teacher educators in California and other states have increasingly been experiencing during the past decade. It took only a generation or two for assembly line workers to accept being cogs in a wheel, unable to imagine it could be any other way. What will happen when those who are teaching can no longer recall a time when teachers and teacher educators were encouraged to construct a curriculum that is appropriate for their students and for the historical moment in which they find themselves?

Children, their teachers, and teacher educators are now being subjected to an onerous, cumbersome, time-devouring anti-intellectual accountability system that would be laughable if its consequences were not so dire. As is often the case for workers, most teachers and teacher educators lack the time and energy to fight back. Many of us are capitulating to what appears to be an increasingly consolidated and irresistible force. We are becoming part of the problem.

Across the country there are virtual and actual communities of resistance. As the contradictions become deeper and the consequences more onerous, resistance will continue to grow. Although there may not be cause for optimism there are always grounds for hope. It will, however, be a long haul.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Wayne Johnson. (2002). Speech to CTA State Council, June 8.

### *Who's In Charge Here?*

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine Cornbluth & Dexter Waugh, *The Great Speckled Bird: Multicultural Politics and Education Policymaking*. St Martin's Press, 1995. Waugh wrote the portion of the book that documented the California experience.

<sup>3</sup> Kathy Emery, *The Business Roundtable and Systemic Reform: How Corporate-Engineered High-Stakes Testing Has Eliminated Community Participation in Developing Educational Goals and Policies*. University of California, Davis, 2002. What follows draws heavily upon Emery's analysis. See also Altwerger & Strauss, 2002 and Kohn (2002).

<sup>4</sup> I want to thank Harold Berlak for his substantive and editorial assistance.

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