Introduction

Capitalism and education have been intertwined for a long time. Mass schooling developed within a capitalist world system. While the dominant discourse saw mass schooling mainly as a force for progress and development, revisionist historians pointed to how education served capitalist ends by maintaining stratification and inequality (Katz, 2001; Spring, 1973). The 1970s saw a slew of studies that elaborated and documented how education was too often reproductive of a very unequal social order (Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Carnoy, 1974). With the onset of neoliberal capitalism in the 1980s and subsequent years, many studies have examined the problematic nature of associated educational reforms (Apple, 2006; Bale & Knopp, 2012; Hill & Kumar, 2009).

In the modern post-World War II era with increasing forces of globalization, educational reforms have traveled around the world. There is a large research literature on policy borrowing in education (Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012). In the 1960s and 1970s, the flow of reforms was characterized by considerable diversity and idiosyncratic and local differences. Starting in the 1980s, however, global education reform has become much more uniform. The Global Education Reform Movement, or GERM, as Pasi Sahlberg has called it, has given us a one-size-fits-all set of education policies for the world – narrow versions of accountability, excessive testing, an ideology of competition and choice, and increased reliance on business and the private sector (Sahlberg, 2015; Verger, Novelli, & Altinyelken, 2012).

This chapter reflects on some aspects of this history, focusing mainly on the neoliberal era. It begins by looking at an earlier period which established two underlying refrains of the neoliberal era: schools are failures and it is the fault of the teachers. This is followed by looking at the dominant discourses used to support these and other capitalist themes. Next, it examines two of the chief
purveyors of these discourses and reforms: US foundations and the World Bank. Then, one of the main neoliberal reforms posed is considered: the privatization of education and other social services. This leads to the fundamental issue of what is wrong with capitalism. To conclude, we look briefly at what might be done, both about capitalism and about education.

**Schools Are Failures and Teachers Are to Blame**

Immediately following World War II, in the US and elsewhere, there was often a sense of optimism about modernization and development in general and about the role of schools in particular. War-torn countries could recover and newly independent nations could progress without having to repeat the long, slow transformation of the industrialized world. Education would be a great contributor to rapid progress everywhere.

As early as the 1960s, there was already disillusionment with the lack of rapid progress in both developed and developing nations. In education, in the US this was reinforced by the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966), which collected and analyzed nationwide data, concluding that student achievement was primarily determined by family background, not school resources. In the 1970s, this was seconded by another major study by Jencks et al. (1975), which reported the lack of impact of education on income and employment as well as on student achievement. Despite significant criticisms of both studies and their conclusions, they have been used to this day to support a more tempered and pessimistic view of the potential of schooling to effect change.

This tempered view of the impact of schooling has co-existed with a call for sweeping reform of education as a way to improve both the achievement and life chances of children. This was very much evident in the 1983 US federal government-sponsored report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report ushered in the attack on teachers and schools that has characterized the neoliberal era, and not just in the US. *A Nation at Risk* argued that the US was lagging behind other economies in the early 1980s, most notably Japan, and that the culprit was our educational system. The opening lines of the report said:

> Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world ... If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. (1983, p. 9)

As one wag said at the time, it was a repeat of Sputnik’s instigation of educational reform in the 1950s to compete with the Soviet Union – but, instead, it was as if Japan had launched a Toyota into orbit and the US schools once again were blamed for falling short. Of course, if the US educational system was in any way to blame for poor economic performance, perhaps the focus should have been on
the nation’s business schools where short-run profits were emphasized over long-run performance.

This mixture of critique of public schools and attack on teachers has been characteristic of the neoliberal era, not just in the US, but worldwide. I do not mean to single out the Coleman Report and A Nation at Risk as the cause of this critique and attack, although they were influential. More accurately, I see them as harbingers of changing times. Globally, they were reflections of a number of underlying dominant discourses.

Dominant Discourses

Even in today’s neoliberal era, it is recognized that capitalism is faced with significant problems, what some have called the “triple challenge”: job creation, poverty elimination, and inequality reduction (Motala & Vally, 2014). The dominant response to these problems has given us one principal answer to all three problems: the lack of individual skills. This response has been embedded in a number of intersecting and overlapping global discourses.

The mismatch discourse goes back at least to the 1950s, and probably long before that. In it, education has been blamed for not supplying the skills business needs, that is, education is blamed for the mismatch between what education produces and what business wants. Unemployment, in general, is put at education’s door, more broadly arguing that education is not teaching what the economy needs. It is, unfortunately, true that many children and youth around the world leave school without the basic skills necessary for life and work. But the mismatch discourse is usually less about basic skills and more about vocational skills. The argument, while superficially plausible, is not true for at least two reasons. First, vocational skills, which are often context-specific, are generally best taught on the job. Second and, fundamentally, unemployment is not a worker supply problem but a structural problem of capitalism. There are three or more billion un- or under-employed people on this planet, not because they don’t have the right skills but because full employment is neither a feature nor a goal of capitalism.

Underlying this mismatch/skills discourse is the human capital discourse (Klees, 2016a). In the 1950s and earlier, the neoclassical economics framework that underpins capitalist ideology and practice could not explain labor. While the overall neoclassical framework was embodied in mathematical models of a fictitious story of supply and demand by small producers and consumers, it was not clear how to apply that to issues of labor, work, and employment. Instead, in that era, labor economics was more sociological and based on the real world, trying to understand institutions like unions and large companies, and phenomena like strikes, collective bargaining, and public policy. The advent of human capital theory in the 1960s offered a way to deal with labor in terms of supply and demand (mostly supply), as a commodity like any other. This took the sociology out of labor economics. Education was seen as investment in individual skills that made one more productive and employable. While this supply-side focus is sometimes true, it is very partial, at best. That is, abilities such as literacy,
numeracy, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, etc., can have a payoff in the job market, but only in a context where such skills are valued. The more useful and important question is the demand-side one, usually ignored by human capital theorists, regarding how we can create good jobs that require valuable skills. The human capital discourse also ignores the value of education outside of work. In fact, contrary to the hype, the human capital discourse, and offshoots of it, like the "Knowledge Economy," have been, at least in one way, some of the most destructive ideas of the modern era. Solving the triple challenge of poverty, inequality, and jobs has been unproductively directed to lack of individual skills and education instead of to capitalist and other world system structures whose very logic makes poverty, inequality, and lack of employment commonplace.

Underlying the human capital discourse, most directly since the 1980s, has been the neoliberal discourse. This is tied to neoclassical economics. From the 1930s to the 1970s, in various countries, a liberal neoclassical economics discourse predominated which recognized some of the inefficiencies and inequalities inherent in capitalism and argued the need for substantial government interventions as a corrective. With political shifts exemplified by Reagan in the US, Thatcher in the UK, and Kohl in Germany, a neoliberal neoclassical economics discourse took over, which argued that capitalism was both efficient and equitable, that problems were generally minor, and that the culprit of any problems was too much government interference. In fact, government failure was seen as fundamental, so that even if there were significant problems, government would not be able to remedy them. Neoliberal economics has led to "structural adjustment programs" that promote cuts in government spending and taxes, the privatization of public services, the deregulation of business, the liberalization of markets, and the lessening of protection for workers. This discourse has gone beyond economics and has political, social, and cultural dimensions (Harvey, 2005).

In education, neoliberalism has led to a sea change in discourse and policy. During the 1960s and 1970s, attention was focused on the inequities and inequalities of education, the marginalization of many people around the world, and the need for substantially more resources to be devoted to all levels of education. Starting in the 1980s, the emphasis was on narrow views of efficiency more than equity, implemented through narrow versions of accountability focused on testing and measurement. Basic problems of public schools have been ignored; instead, policies promoted market solutions through private schools, vouchers, charters, and the like (Klees, 2008a, 2008b).

When attention was paid to public schools, almost every reform was focused on governance – reorganization, restructuring, re-engineering, knowledge management, merit pay, reform civil service laws, community involvement, decentralization, increase testing, vouchers, privatization, output-based aid, results-based finance, etc. For decades, there was almost never an educational reform recommended that would cost much money. Often, the explicit objective of the reform was to cut costs – cut teacher salaries, cut back on teacher pre-service education, substitute distance education, privatize, charge user fees. Occasionally, there was a recommendation to spend a little more money – for textbooks, for girls’ education – but resource shortfalls remained enormous.
While the left is often criticized, falsely, for an economic determinism, the right, in the discourses above, practices its own version of economic determinism: education leads to skills, skills lead to employment, employment leads to economic growth, economic growth creates jobs and is the way out of poverty and inequality. Decades of unsuccessful neoliberal reforms have shown this to be untrue.

Who Are the Purveyors?

Who translates these discourses into education policy? There are a lot of players – governments, multilateral and bilateral donors, foundations, universities, think tanks, NGOs, the private sector, and others. We live in a world system that increasingly sings one tune: neoliberalism. So it is difficult to separate who has the power to significantly influence policy. Moreover, neoliberal discourses have become the new common sense; they pervade the policy air we breathe and so dominate the policy agenda worldwide. Here, I wish to highlight the work of private foundations in the US and the World Bank in developing countries.

Billionaire Boys Club

Private foundations like Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller have long been influential in education in the US and elsewhere (Arnove, 2007). In recent years, in education in the U.S. a different group of foundations seems to be actually setting policy, as what Ravitch (2010) called the Billionaire Boys Club – the troika of three foundations – Broad, Gates, and Walton – developed and followed a neoliberal education policy agenda (also see Barkan, 2011; Saltman, 2010).

The three foundations come from very successful private enterprises: Broad from homebuilding and insurance, Gates from Microsoft, and Walton from Walmart. These venture philanthropists or philanthrocapitalists, as they are sometimes called, favored competition, choice, charters, incentive pay for teachers, measurable outcomes, etc. All three were extraordinarily influential in the Obama administration, and many people associated with these foundations received high-level policy positions, including Arne Duncan as US Secretary of Education. They also have influenced many school districts by offering a little sorely needed discretionary money to the districts’ over-stretched budgets.

Broad’s philosophy is that “schools should be redesigned to function like corporate enterprises” and that “neither school superintendents nor principals need be educators” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 217). Barkan (2011) concludes: “Certainly, ideology – in this case, faith in the superiority of the private business model – drives [all three] … But so does the blinding hubris that comes from power.”

These foundations are rarely challenged or criticized. Frederick Hess (2005, pp. 9–11), of the right-wing American Enterprise Institute argues that “academics, activists, and the policy community live in a world where philanthropists are royalty,” leading to a “conspiracy of silence” about their faults. Ravitch (2013, pp. 317–318) concludes that these and other foundations have essentially “hijacked” US education policy.
The World Bank

To the extent that the GERM (Global Education Reform Movement) is today’s policy reality, no one has been more responsible for spreading it to developing countries than the World Bank (Klees, Samoff, & Stromquist, 2012). The Bank, as they call themselves, began lending for education in the 1960s, becoming the single largest international aid agency funder for education by the 1980s. While the vast bulk of educational costs are borne by country governments themselves, the Bank provides countries with some of the little discretionary finance they have and so has become enormously influential.

The World Bank is a monopoly. There is no other institution like it. UNESCO used to have a more dominant role in education, but the withdrawal of the US and UK contributions for a number of years forced it to play a much more minor role, and the World Bank became the true director of the Education for All (EFA) processes and more (Jones, 2007; Mundy, 2002). While the World Bank pretends everyone – countries, bilaterals, multilaterals, civil society, and more – is in partnership with it, it is the World Bank which takes the lead on education policy. With its periodic strategy reports and a virtual juggernaut of research done internal to the World Bank or financed by it, it decides on the global directions for education policy, backed by conditional grant and loan money that ensures countries follow those directions (Klees et al, 2012).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Bank took a more liberal view of education policy. It routinely argued that there were vast inequalities in education and that public education needed substantial additional resources which should be provided through expanded progressive taxes. Starting in the 1980s, the Bank ideology was rapidly transformed to a neoliberal perspective. While the lack of sufficient resources was occasionally mentioned as an issue, it was always with a “yes, but” – where the “but” was that the main issue was seen as inefficient use of existing resources and neoliberal remedies would make resource use more efficient.

For decades, the Bank has downplayed its role in lending money, trying to position itself as the “Knowledge Bank,” the repository of best practice. This is arrogant and frightening. The Bank basically only looks at its own research and that of its adherents, basing its one-size-fits-all recommendations on ideology, not evidence (Klees et al., 2012). Even the idea of a central repository of “best practice” is frightening in a world where best practice is always contested. The World Bank as that repository is more frightening still.

The World Bank selects and interprets the research that fits with its ideology. In this sense, it resembles right-wing ideological think tank institutions like the Cato Institute or the Heritage Foundation in the US. However, it differs in two important ways. First, everyone realizes Cato and Heritage are partisan. The World Bank, on the other hand, makes a pretense of objectivity and inclusiveness.

Second, Cato and Heritage are private institutions with limited influence. The World Bank is a public institution, financed by taxes, which gives grants, loans, and advice around the world, yielding a vast global influence.

There is no “Knowledge Bank,” only an “Opinion Bank,” and, worse still, an opinion bank with monopoly power. This Monopoly Opinion Bank (I cannot resist – it should be known as The MOB) may not be the only source of knowledge
in education in developing countries, but it is the predominant producer and arbiter of what counts as knowledge. If there were applicable anti-trust legislation, The MOB’s research enterprise would be broken up. The MOB’s defense is that they try to incorporate all knowledge from all their partners, including countries, other aid agencies, NGOs, other civil society organizations, indigenous people, the poor of the world, etc. This is neither possible nor sensible, nor true in a world where knowledge is contested within and among all these groups. The MOB distills and disseminates the knowledge it wants to promulgate.

While loan officers in the Bank are more pragmatic than the policy and research staff, internally and externally Bank ideology pervades practice. Even some Bank staff complain of the (neoliberal) “thought police” in the Bank that force ideological conformity (Broad, 2006). And like the philanthropists in the US, Bank staff in the world of international aid agencies are royalty. They rarely have to face serious criticism or challenges. Again, I do not see the Bank as responsible for neoliberalism, but they have taken it as gospel and have become its chief purveyor in education in developing countries.

**What Is Being Sold: Privatization**

As above, there are a number of education reform features to the neoliberal GERM. Here I want to focus on one of the most significant and disturbing: the privatization of education (Verger, Fontdevila, & Zancajo, 2016). We have seen more than three decades of a continually increasing effort to promote the privatization of education. By privatization, I mean efforts to diminish public control and finance of education, thus including user fees, charters, vouchers, private schooling, public-private partnerships (PPPs), reliance on business know-how, and the like (Klees, 2008a).

Privatization is based on two things: (1) ideology, not evidence; and (2) greed. What is behind this ideology and greed? The answer for me is neoliberal capitalism – or perhaps capitalism in any form.

Let me start with a story. Some years ago, I attended a meeting about health policy at the World Bank. The World Bank presenter pointed out how, in many poor countries, poor people chose to be treated at private health clinics for a fee instead of going to free public clinics. This “voting with their feet” – as economists like to call it – was touted as evidence of the success and value of privatization. To the contrary, I pointed out that this is simply evidence of the success of 30+ years of neoliberal ideology in which public health clinics had been systematically decimated, ending up without doctors, nurses, or medicine. The same has happened in education, most especially in developing countries. Thirty + years of neoliberal policies have often left public schools over-crowded, with poorly trained teachers, few learning materials, dilapidated facilities, and often not close by. It is no wonder that some parents opt out. However, while it is rational for disadvantaged individuals to sometimes send their children to private schools, it is poor public policy – it serves only a few, it increases inequality, it ignores the public interest, and it devalues teachers. Privatization is said to meet the growing education gap (which resulted from years of attack on the public sector), but all
it does is replace an attempt to develop good public policy with the vagaries of charity or the narrow-mindedness of profit-making.

Let me turn to greed.

Privatization, and especially PPPs, represent a huge business opportunity. Globally, private education is perhaps a $50–$100 billion business right now. Education as a whole, public and private, is a $4+ trillion industry. Business’ eyes light up with these dollar signs. Even the market for the poorest people in the world is seen as a huge business opportunity – referred to as the “bottom billions” market (Ball, 2012).

In the latest phase of neoliberal capitalism, the world is being turned into one big PPP, and this is especially evident in the plans for infrastructure megaprojects (Alexander, 2015; Bretton Woods Project, 2016). The biggest expense for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be infrastructure megaprojects for pipelines, dams, water and electricity systems, and roads. It is estimated that an additional $70 trillion in infrastructure will be needed by 2030 – what has been called the “biggest investment boom in human history.” The modus operandi, according to the United Nations, for these megaprojects will be PPPs. The SDGs can easily turn into a welfare program for business “privatizing gains and socializing losses on a massive scale” – as critics of these PPPs point out.

The long-run goals of business are sobering. The grandiose Global Redesign Initiative proposed by the World Economic Forum (2010) at Davos in 2010 essentially wants to turn the UN itself into a giant PPP, with business being formal partners in global governance along with states and other stakeholders (Hickel, 2015; see also Olmedo, 2016). This is the frightening context in which PPPs in education are being promoted.

This broader context of privatization is important for our struggles in education:

- This broader ideology and reality of PPPs legitimize their spread in education.
- PPPs in infrastructure megaprojects will likely absorb funds that should be destined to social services like education and health.
- The struggle against PPPs in other sectors offers an opportunity for those of us in education to join with others in common cause.

In a past life, I went to Stanford Business School. There, I had a professor who wrote a paper entitled, “The Social Responsibility of Business and Other Pollutants of the Air.” He was very pro-business; his point was that the business of business was business, and we shouldn’t want or expect them to help solve problems that are fundamentally government’s. Business should not be a partner, should not be at the advice or governance table, should not be a part of the Global Partnership for Education, for instance. There is also a moral bottom line – the provision of education (and health) should not be oriented toward making money.

Privatization used to be a hard sell in education since everyone knew that private schooling catered to the well-to-do. Nowadays, the neoliberal education establishment is touting so-called “low-fee private schools” (LFPS) for the poor (Tooley, 2009, 2016). Given the decimation of public schooling under neoliberalism, as above, LFPS have sprung up to take advantage of parents’ dissatisfaction. While some of these are started by parents, teachers, and communities, more
What’s Wrong with Capitalism?

While the answer to this question could fill and has filled many books, I wish to make a few points here. Capitalism diverts attention from structural issues by casting the blame for education and development problems elsewhere. Mismatch, human capital, and neoliberal discourses first and foremost blame individuals for their lack of “investment” in human capital, for their not attending school, for their dropping out of school, for their not studying the “right” fields, for their lack of entrepreneurship (Klees, 2016a). Educational policymakers in developing countries are likewise often blamed for their “poor” decisions, meaning decisions that run counter to neoliberal dogma, such as investing in higher education. Often policymakers in developing countries who make economic and social policy are also blamed for either being corrupt or not following neoliberal prescriptions: labor is seen as receiving too much protection, government interferes too much in the market, and business does not receive the support it needs. Education itself is also a wonderful scapegoat for politicians, researchers, World Bank staff, and others because education can’t be expected to fix the problem for many years, so they will never be held accountable for their advice.

Nowhere, of course, does the right see the inherent problems in the nature of capitalism, nor does it even recognize neoliberalism. After the fall of the Soviet Union, right-wing books proclaimed the end of history, the end of ideology (Fukuyama, 2006): Margaret Thatcher’s famous TINA answer – There Is No Alternative to capitalism! We now have the one best system, and we just have to tinker with it and wait for prosperity to sweep the globe. Well, how long are we willing to wait? While millions are suffering and dying and the rich get obscenely rich at the expense of the rest of us (Klees, 2016b; Piketty, 2014)? In my view, there’s reason to believe that even if we wait 100 years, we will still be facing the same problems because the “one best system” is turning out to be the one worst system. It has become commonplace to recognize that capitalism has increased material production and wealth, even Marx did, but production for whom? Wealth for whom? The most obscene statistic I’ve heard is that the 62 richest individuals on the planet have the same total wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion people on the planet (Oxfam, 2016).

Has capitalism been useful? For whom? At what cost? Ecological insanity? Pervasive inhumanity? As the late South African activist and intellectual, Neville Alexander, said: “Once the commodity value of people displaces their intrinsic
human worth or dignity, we are well on the way to a state of barbarism” (quoted in Motala & Vally, 2014, p. 1). Motala and Vally (2014, p. 16) talk of the “searing tribulations … of extreme inhumanity” – such as slavery, colonialism, Nazism, Apartheid. Will capitalism be seen as another example? If things do not change radically, I think so. I think that one day the capitalist system of wage labor will be seen as evil, only one step removed from slavery.³ The severely unequal distribution, the fact that the most difficult labor on earth, for example, cutting sugar cane, is paid only $2–$3 a day while others get millions, will be seen as criminal, a labor market system for which no one takes responsibility and which is disguised by the rhetoric of freedom.⁴

We need to be very cognizant of the forces arrayed against progressive change. The left has long been criticized by the right as conspiracy theorists. The response of the left has been there is no need to posit a conspiracy; neoliberalism and capitalism are promoted and enforced by structures that operate at the world-system level (Wallerstein, 2004). This is quite true, and I don’t see these structures as the result of some secret cabal. Nevertheless, while reference to the “ruling class” may be anachronistic, many of today’s global business and political elite know each other well and meet regularly through organizations like the World Economic Forum and the Trilateral Commission. How many have even heard of the latter? In it are the most influential politicians and industrialists in the world, and it has been meeting in secret for decades. Neoliberal capitalist policies are promoted and even coordinated by an elite class of like-minded individuals who think that governments are overvalued and business solutions undervalued, and they act in concert. We must not underestimate our opponents. As Warren Buffet has said: “It’s class warfare” and “My class is winning.” I don’t think of all this as a conspiracy to do harm. I believe that most of these people are well-intentioned. They are simply wrong, believing in a neoliberal economics that makes them better off but leaves the majority of humanity in dire straits.

Can capitalism be improved, be fair and just? I am not clairvoyant, I can’t see the future. I have some progressive colleagues who believe that capitalism can be tamed in the broader social interest, like, some would say, in some places, it began to be tamed in the 1960s and 1970s. I wish it were so, but I don’t think so. The greed, inequality, and environmental destruction promoted by capitalism, the racism and sexism that capitalism takes advantage of, are all extraordinarily resistant to change. Governments today, captured by elites and by the unequal logic inherent in our world system, can only with great difficulty offer significant challenges. So taming and humanizing capitalism, in my view, is not likely. Therefore, I see transforming capitalism as the name of the game. Nothing will be easy, but I see very real possibilities.

What to Do?

The future of income and wealth inequality, indeed, the future of capitalism, will be determined by on-going struggles.⁵ I am optimistic because I see those struggles everywhere. I see scholars and activists who write convincingly
What to Do?

of alternatives to capitalism (e.g., Alperovitz, 2013; Daly, 1996; Hahnel, 2005; MacEwan, 1999). I see others who recognize the need to tackle the intersection of capitalism with other oppressive structures like patriarchy, racism, heterosexism, and ableism (Adams et al., 2013; Andersen & Hill Collins, 2012; hooks, 2000; Saunders, 2002). I see past and current very active social movements that challenge world-system structures: the anti/alter-globalization movement, the women’s movement around the world, the landless movement in Brazil, the Dalit movement in India, labor movements, the Arab Spring, Occupy around the globe, the Indignados in Spain, anti-austerity in Europe, and the civil rights movement in the US. I see struggle in electoral politics that has brought a progressive left to power in half-a-dozen or more Latin American countries. I am also optimistic because I was fortunate enough to twice attend the World Social Forum (WSF) in Brazil and march with 100,000 activists from all over the world and meet some of them who were struggling to change the world in areas like education, health, food, water, environment, or development generally. They go home from the Forum and interact with millions, building a global network. I am also optimistic because I have been fortunate to work in dozens of countries, and everywhere I found people who believed what is the slogan of the WSF – another world is possible – and who were struggling for it.6

To conclude, I don’t mean to romanticize any of this. This is a struggle over the long haul and the outcome is uncertain. However, education has an important role to play. Education is not only reproductive – it can definitely be a force for progressive social change, and there are countless examples from around the world. In Brazil, for example, where I have spent much time, the Citizen School movement has built a sizeable democratic, participatory, Freirean-based education system (Fischman & Gandin, 2007). In Brazil also, there are the Landless Movement schools, founded by some of the poorest people in all the world, often living off agricultural labor, now organized and politically influential, with a large system of very participatory, democratic, Freirean-based schools (McCowan, 2003; Tarlau, 2015). These schools teach – and exemplify by their very structure – the role of education in preparing people for a much more participatory and democratic economy and society (Edwards & Klees, 2012). So do countless examples of alternative education practices from the United States and other countries (Apple & Beane, 2007; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007; Picower, 2012).

While we can and should focus on education, we have to be attuned to the broader battles – find allies cross-sector (e.g., in health, environment), go after PPPs more generally, confront neoliberalism and capitalism. I know we don’t all agree on capitalism as THE problem, but many of us do and we need to ally ourselves with others who do (e.g., check out http://thenextsystem.org/). And the fight against capitalism needs to join with those confronting other structures like patriarchy, racism, heterosexism, ableism. As I said, this is a struggle for the long haul, and it has to be fought on multiple fronts. This doesn’t mean you have to lose a focus on education, but we have to join in these broader struggles.
Finally, I want to close by mentioning some of what critical scholars/analysts need to do based on Michael Apple’s tasks (2013, pp. 41–44), set out in his recent book, *Can Education Change Society?*

- Document exploitation, marginalization, reproduction.
- Document progressive struggles.
- Help identify spaces and possibilities for counter-hegemonic action.
- Speak to non-academic audiences.
- Work in concert with critical activists and social movements in education and cross-sectors.
- Confront the intersection of oppressive structures, as above.

Despite current hegemony, I believe we may be able to avoid making the planet uninhabitable and that we can create a fairer world.

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**Notes**

1. The terms “developed” and “developing” are very problematic. I still use them for a lack of good alternatives.
2. These three challenges, of course, do not exhaust the significant problems faced around the globe which include environmental destruction, widespread conflict, and appeal to greed as a motivating force, all of which have significant connections to all forms of capitalism that so dominate our world system, as I consider below.
3. Ellerman (2015) argues that the capitalist system of wage labor, embodied in the employer-employee contract, is, like slavery, based on coercion, and calls for a neo-abolitionist movement.
4. While markets are a convenience that future, saner, societies may continue to rely on for some purposes, they have at least two fundamental flaws that render them problematic. First, they contribute to an abrogation of social responsibility, as today, when market outcomes of horrendous income inequality, spiraling food prices and hunger, or environmental destruction are seen as natural, not anyone’s fault. Second, markets are fragile. For example, millions of small decisions can contribute to economic or environmental crises. Albritton adds:

   Markets are often thought to be highly efficient, but in the future they will be seen as highly inefficient and costly. Markets not only fail to take account of social and environmental costs, but they also generate instability, insecurity, inequality, anti-social egotism, frenetic lifestyles, cultural impoverishment, beggar-thy-neighbor greed and oppression of difference. (quoted in Wall, 2015, p. 1)

See Hahnel (2005) for a discussion of alternatives to competitive markets.
For an extended discussion of alternatives to capitalism and education, see Klees (forthcoming).

While dismaying, I am still optimistic despite the election of Donald Trump and other global advances by the far right and populist fringe. I am not a Pollyanna, but I do believe that their successes bring systemic contradictions into even sharper relief and I hope that will generate even greater resistance and search for alternatives. And, let us remember that Bernie Sanders, a self-avowed Democratic socialist, actually got 13 million votes in the US primaries and polls showed him neck and neck with Trump if he had been the Democratic nominee.

References


