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Individualism in Education Reform

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

Current education reform in the U.S. is based upon a business model with capitalist market principles. High stakes standardized testing is a tool that the business model reformers use to dismantle democracy while creating an environment where a democratic society will not thrive. One of the reasons that business-minded reformers are so successful in promoting their agenda is that our society is highly individualistic. The individualistic nature of society in the U.S. provides fertile ground for reform that not only harms our present vestiges of democracy but also endangers the possibility of a democratic society for future generations. A critical analysis of individualism in U.S. culture, standardized testing, its history, and the ways in which it is used will show that individualism is a powerful cultural tradition in dominant U.S. culture. As well, the analysis will show that reformers utilizing business-model reforms and legislation desire national institutions nationally that will, to an ever-increasing extent, perpetuate a neoliberal authoritarian structure that threatens democracy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Current education reform in the U.S. is based on a capitalistic business model. The capitalistic business model, with its economic principles, pushes democracy out of public education institutions and, ultimately, prevents democracy from becoming a strong characteristic of U.S. culture. Authoritarianism, with an innate opposition to freedom, steps in to replace democracy in our institutions and ultimately becomes a deep characteristic of our culture. Current educational reforms may not be problematic solely for the reason that they are business model oriented. They are problematic because they annihilate freedom.

There is a difference between freedom in terms of democracy and the economic definition of freedom. Democracy requires a type and amount of freedom for every member of the society. Democracy requires citizens to have a level of freedom regardless of their social context. There are different views of democracy with different ideas of what freedom consists of, but there must be some level of freedom to make choices and decisions. First, however, the choices and possible decisions have to be recognized, which requires a level of freedom; then there must be the freedom to discuss these choices democratically before decisions are made (Mills, 20, 174). All this requires people working together. There must be some kind of community available to the individual, and there must be the freedom to use that community for help in discovering possible choices and decisions. Citizens must be comfortable in their community; they must realize the bonds that connect them to others within the community. Alienation becomes a threat to democracy.

The alienated individual will not have access to the community. The alienated individual is convinced that she or he is alone in the world, and the world is, as it has always been, a source of challenges, danger, and threats –it is a greater power than the alone individual (Fromm, 1994,

p. 29). The individual must grow strong; she or he must have strength of their own to survive in the world alone; but the greater that strength is, the greater their aloneness becomes (Fromm, 1994, p. 28). Community is lost through this process of individuation –the alienation of the individual. As ties are broken with others, as one becomes more individuated, one loses the possibility of knowing one’s self in terms of relationships with others (Fromm, 1994, 30). This individuated person will look only to their idea of an inner-strength for solutions to challenges, threats, and problems. They will not look to the community; they will not look to others for the formation of a community.

The individuated individual will look inside herself for the sense of security she needs in the world but her alienation will only grow, creating an ever-increasing feeling of insecurity. She will find comfort in submitting to authority, because authority—of the type authoritarian states can provide—will allow them to hold onto their individuated self, the illusion that they are standing alone in the world separated completely from others (Fromm, 1994, 29-34). The individual in this condition will accept authoritarian power structures because freedom, when one is that alone, when one is standing alone against the world, is too frightening, causes too great anxiety, and is alien and threatening (Fromm, 1994, pp. 140-177). The society of authoritarianism is the severely individualized society.

The severely individualized society will have no communities –there will be no freedom to discuss problems, possible solutions, and choices. If society is broken up too completely into individual people, then democracy will not be available as a way of making decisions. Those in power, those organizations at the top of the hierarchy, with the most wealth, the most resources, will step in to make decisions because the opportunity will be there and because millions of individuals will not be able to do it.

Those in power can do this through force or coercion. In our present society, both ways have been utilized; however the way of coercion will be examined more closely in this paper. Citizens/individuals are coerced into making decisions that profit the powerful. As well, they are manipulated into believing that they are doing things by their own choice when they really are not. Erich Fromm (1994) stated it well: “We have become automatons who live under the illusion of being self-willed individuals” (p. 252). The highly individuated individual believes that he is the great power in his life, that he is the maker of his decisions and that all of his thoughts are original. The automaton though, is the mechanistic piece in the machine of an authoritarian state. The authority, whoever that may be in the authoritarian state, however, is the real power. They, and not the individual, are the will of the individual. They, not the individual, are the great power –they, and not the individual, are the producer of the individual’s thoughts.

Citizens must have the ability to make choices free from the manipulation of the powerful if there is to be any freedom and any democracy. The powerful must not extend their profit into the minds and behavior of people so that their choices profit not themselves but those in power. A truly democratic society requires that the citizen make his or her own decisions without some external authority interrupting the process (Dewey, 2004, p. 83). If the citizen is controlled or coerced in one way or another into making decisions to further a political agenda that profits only the powerful, then you do not have a democracy but an authoritarian state. An authoritarian state uses public institutions, such as schools, to manipulate the minds of its citizens into believing that they are incapable of making their own decisions and that those in power know what is best for the rest of the citizens (Spring, 2008, p. 24).

Democracy requires a freedom from manipulation by those in power, and it requires public institutions to create and preserve this freedom. However, public institutions, as arms of

the authoritarian state, are organized in such a way as to recreate that authoritarian state and prevent any democratic activity from emerging. Public education in the U.S., for example, does not create and preserve the needed freedom; in fact, it is increasingly dismantling freedom and the chances for future freedom. Education in the U.S., like most other public institutions in the U.S., is organized on the basis of economic principles. These principles come from a philosophy that values a different kind of freedom –paradoxically, a freedom that is not freedom at all.

In economic terms, the idea of freedom can be defined quite differently from the true democratic idea of freedom. If the economic realm defines freedom, it can be restricted to business, goods, and competition in the marketplace. Perhaps that type of freedom will ensure that capitalism is true capitalism –perhaps not. But defining freedom in economic terms will not ensure a democratic society. If freedom is defined solely by what people are allowed to buy and sell, then one type of freedom may be illustrated, but other types of freedom may be sacrificed.

Milton Friedman (1972), an influential economist, argued that economic freedom could not be separated from true democratic freedom, that individuals are denied freedom when they are ordered by law to pay a percentage to their retirement or when they cannot produce a good that they wish to sell because of quotas or fair trade laws (pp. 8-9). Of course, it is some kind of a lack of freedom if one does not want to pay toward a government-managed retirement system because one is going to inherit several billion dollars when members of one's family pass away; as well, it is one type of freedom that is lost when one is not allowed to sell goods at an extremely cheap price so as to maximize profit, in particular if one country would like to bring its super-cheap goods for sale into another country. However, some freedoms may be lost, some greater freedoms, at the higher valuation of economic freedoms.

An important type of freedom is lost when a people are so oppressed by the powerful that they have little hope of ever affording any type of retirement and so have to work until the time they die; as well, another type of freedom is lost when people who have lived off of subsistence agriculture for generations are pushed off their farms so that factories can be filled with employers. There are different types of freedom. As was discussed earlier, there is a fundamental idea of freedom being the right to make decisions. The type of freedom that Friedman discusses deals with the idea that people who are not allowed to make certain decisions regarding their money or their economic livelihood are denied freedom. As well though, if one's decisions cause another to lose their freedom, then a great conflict arises. In particular, one's freedom to make great profits can cause a group of people to become poor and so unable to have access to basic necessities like clean water, nutritional food, and safety. This is certainly what happened in Mexico as a result of NAFTA.

NAFTA allowed a handful of wealthy individuals to profit immensely while inflicting poverty upon populations of people, ultimately working toward the destruction of the indigenous way of life in places like Chiapas (Chomsky, 1999, pp. 122-124). Chiapas of course is an important example because of its population of indigenous people, indigenous meaning "they were there first and are still there and so have rights of prior occupancy to their lands" (Maybury-Lewis, 2002, p. 6). When economic freedom is valued higher than the freedom of the indigenous to exist, then indigenous people become extinct like the Tainos of the world Christopher Columbus is said to have discovered. For gold an entire race of people became extinct. A man's freedom to gain gold for himself, his country, his king, his god, made absolutely no room for the rights of a group of people to live their lives freely. There are of course many other varieties of life being sacrificed for the rights of man to freely make his

profits, like the “. . . extinction of more than ten thousand species a year . . .” (Bowers, 2001, p. 5). This is a type of freedom that is more oppressive than liberating. And is it a person or a corporation whose rights are secured by allowing this kind of economic freedom? Are corporations people? The passing of the Citizens United Bill points to an affirmation of that question. In the end, the point is, if corporations are encouraged by the hand of the government to profit from the oppression of large groups of people, whole populations of people, then a certain type of freedom is allowed a certain type of individual, while another type of freedom for another type of people is denied.

These types of freedom differ in an important way. The main way they differ is their view of the importance of an individual choice versus the importance of people making choices together that benefit all. In our modern industrialized, globalized society, an individual’s right to make decisions, in particular economic decisions, is valued more highly than a group of people’s right to live as a democratic society. This dispute has deep roots in the cultural makeup of the U.S. William Graham Sumner, one of the great pioneers of sociology in the U.S., wrote in 1881: “There is first the struggle of individuals to win the means of subsistence from nature, and secondly there is the competition of man with man in the effort to win a limited supply” (Sumner, 1881, p. 23). Social Darwinism, the survival of the fittest applied to human society, argues that people must allow the successful to succeed and the failing to fail. Sumner (1881) wrote that humans who had met the challenges of the world and came out successful must not be asked to meet the challenges all over again for somebody else (Sumner, 1811, p. 23). This type of society, the socialistic society, would be lacking in freedom and would fall apart by overburdening “good” members and “relieving bad” members (Sumner, 1881, p. 23). Sumner believed that this law, survival of the fittest, was a law from God and that people could never

overturn it (Sumner, 1881, p. 23). Furthermore, Sumner had a particular argument about individualism. Sumner (1881) wrote that before the period in human history where agriculture was developed, people functioned as tribes, and tribes were not individualistic but communal (Sumner, 1811, p. 24). Agriculture, though, allowed humans to unleash their individualistic potential; people could work out their own “ends” by their own “means,” and this brings “liberty” to “civilization” (Sumner, 1881, p. 24). Sumner’s argument compares what he calls a civilized culture with what he believes are non-civilized cultures. As well, he calls these non-civilized societies the “low” societies (Sumner, 1881, p. 24). These are the same societies that came to be called primitive. Individualism becomes a symbol of civilization. It becomes one of the distinct features that the west possesses in their industrializing/industrialized culture. It was a feature that separated the colonizers with the colonized perhaps, and it continues to be seen in that way –though it has evolved. This view of nature and the human being though, back in Sumner’s time, was met with opposition.

Lester Frank Ward (1884), another early sociologist contributing to the roots of U.S. culture wrote, as Sumner did, of society and nature; however, Ward believed that people needed to do better than what was represented in survival of the fittest and Social Darwinist thought (Ward, 1884, p. 34). Society should be what helps people survive in the work of surviving in nature; society should hold people together because the group is stronger and healthier than the individual. Ward saw humans as being uniquely capable of helping the weaker or less-able individuals survive, while nature allowed them to die (38). William Graham Sumner’s perspective could be seen as an example of individual freedom: the freedom of one individual to profit not only from another individual, but that other individual’s demise. Lester Frank Ward’s perspective can be seen as an example of the freedom of people, all people, to live together

socially as a community. The main cultural rope that holds either of these perspectives together is their view of the individual. Is the individual in it for his or herself, or is the individual in it for the group? As well, is the individual who helps others meet the challenges of the world within a group, as opposed to meeting one's own challenges alone, free? This is an extremely important difference because one viewpoint allows democracy to flourish and renew itself, while the other suffocates democracy; one viewpoint feeds the community, while the other starves it. If a person can only be free when she is separated from the community to meet the challenges of the world alone in her own way, then competition becomes a requirement in the "free" society.

The individualist perspective is accompanied by a view of competition as a type of freedom. This is the freedom of individuals to compete for resources. A belief in the value of competition denies the community the right to hold itself together through egalitarian practices while encouraging it to splinter into individual pieces. This is a grave problem for U.S. culture in the new millennium. U.S. culture is splintering into tinier and tinier fragments while vestiges of community life are vanishing as they swirl down city-sized industrial drains. C. A. Bowers (2001), in his book *Educating for Eco-Justice & Community*, goes into great detail about how the industrial revolution needed people to discard their ideas of community so that the modern industrialized culture could overtake all "traditions of community" (p. 1). One tradition of all communities is that individuals work together for survival and health. The idea of democracy is founded on the community's capacity to be a collective group of individuals helping and caring for one another. Decisions are made collectively so that all benefit, not just the powerful, not just the dominant. If it ever knew how, the U.S. is unlearning how to live democratically. A tradition of the highly individualized society is competition. In the U.S., this competition can be illustrated by our tradition of meritocratic schooling.

Schooling in the U.S. is based upon a meritocratic system. The system is old and began in the private colleges of the Eastern states. It came about when the ideas of men like Henry Chauncey and James Bryant Conant, powerful men in the world of the Ivy League colleges, began to solve the great problem they saw in U.S. society after World War II: that the U.S. had become industrialized with cities densely populated by socialist immigrants who believed that “group unity, rather than individual opportunity, was the highest good” (Lemann, 2000, p. 7). Much of this thought came from the fact that the western frontier of the U.S. no longer offered free land to individuals willing to leave home and test their strength and ingenuity against nature (Lemann, 2000, p. 7). As well, the U.S. had seen the birth of an upper class that was populating the institutions, in particular, the Ivy League schools (Lemann, 2000, p. 7). Henry Chauncey and James Bryant Conant feared that the U.S. could be led by these socialist immigrants who would surely abandon the individualist traditions of the country, or it could become ruled by those wealthy elites who had no respect for academics, science, and intellect (Lemann, 2000, pp. 7-8). They wanted to solve this problem by creating a system where the people who had the greatest merit would be given the opportunity to become the nation’s powerful leaders (Lemann, 2000, pp. 3-16). From this idea stems the organization of today’s schools, the system of grades, and, most importantly, test scores. The idea of a meritocratic society, though, comes from individualist traditions, which are the roots of our modern culture.

Zygmunt Bauman (2000), in his book *Liquid Modernity*, discusses how “solid” features of modern life and culture have become “liquid” (p. 2-7). This is similar to what Bowers asserted about the abandoning of certain traditions to pave the way for the modern industrialization of culture. However, Bauman’s change takes place in the context of the modernization of western culture, after western culture was industrialized and modernized. This

is important because we know from Bowers' work that the tradition of community has already been abandoned, but with the addition of Bauman's work, the question of whether we can ever regain that tradition becomes pertinent. Bauman describes modernity as an existence that is "liquid" or "fluid"; he asserts that the forces that drive us, our cultural characteristics, the dominant forces including the powerful "elite," are never in one place long enough for us to define them or recognize them (p. 13). He illustrates a way of life where we do not walk on solid ground long enough to even know what we are doing. There is a loss of identity. There is a loss of connection to others. There is no community. Things like globalization and the erasure of international boundaries evidence this so that capital can come and go without most people seeing it or even hearing about it.

This is important to the discussion of freedom because it is what allows the powerful, the dominant, to oppress anyone they choose under a cloak of invisibility. And if we stray so far from traditions of community that we do not even remember them, then they will never be regained. If living as a society is broken down so severely that the individual is the only piece recognizable to our culture, then communities may never be rebuilt. Furthermore, democracy may become extinct.

Purpose and Objective of Research

The purpose of this research is to critically examine public education in the U.S. and the reforms it has seen recently. The goals of this analysis include discovering how individualism shapes public education in the U.S., the origins of that individualist underpinning, the effects of it, who profits from it and who does not, as well as solutions toward an education that can work for true democracy instead of against it.

In particular, the aspect of public education that will be looked at the closest will be standardization and, from there, standardized and high stakes testing. These are the main facets of the business model reforms in education. The business model reforms in education will be examined to outline an overall characteristic of western industrialized culture and specifically U.S. culture. The extent that consumerism and individualism create a deep-seated affinity for competition will be outlined as these are reflected in education and its recent reforms.

Research Question

Public education could and should be a vestige of hope in a society where the idea of true community is eroding at the hands of an individualist tradition and true democracy is being replaced by an authoritarian power structure. The question I wish to answer has three parts: to what extent is public education in the U.S. affected by individualism, how does individualism affect public education in the U.S., and how can it become a true democratic institution if it is not?

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Public education in the U.S. uses many different practices that destroy freedom and democracy. The practices in use today come from the long history of education in the U.S. and current educational philosophies and reforms. This paper is not meant to be an exhaustive historical analysis; however, some historical studies will be examined in general to create a context for what is happening currently, which is a business-minded approach to educational reform. A review of the literature available on education reform in the U.S. will show that decisions made at present are made so that small groups of wealthy and powerful people can accrue great profits in one way or another. Current research on the economic structure of our global economy will be examined to create the context within which the business-minded reforms are being made—the global economy is the engine behind many of the reforms, if not all of them. But along with these analyses, literature that analyzes culture in the U.S. will be examined to show how these reforms stem from the cultural makeup of the U.S. and how these reforms have caused U.S. culture to evolve, in particular the individualistic nature of our society.

Individualism

The U.S. has a tradition of individualism. This tradition is an integral part of the culture. It is inseparable from the society. It is a perspective; it is a way of framing experiences and it urges certain decisions to be made the way a moral compass may urge one to do some things and to refrain from doing others. Max Weber's piece, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*, traces the early history of the culture that gave birth to a highly capitalistic culture in the U.S. Intertwined in this outline of early culture in the U.S. can be seen the roots of our current individualism. Weber shows that to define the Protestant ethic, capitalism and the culture from where it comes must be examined. It seems that the Protestant ethic is captured by the way

capitalism lives in people. Weber (2002) shows that capitalism lives in people not as a desire for the worker to work hard for a profit, but a desire to work hard for deeper reasons; traditionally, people will work just hard enough to hold onto the quality of life they are used to, they will work no harder than is necessary for keeping their present status; capitalism needed people to work harder (pp. 15-16). The capitalist tried to get people to work harder for more money, but it didn't work; therefore, the capitalist forces people to work harder by reducing their wages (Weber, 2002, p. 16). The problem with this is that when skilled labor was needed for higher qualities and standards, low wages did not help to find qualified workers; an internal need to work hard for the sake of working hard was necessary, and this was implanted in people only through some kind of education (Weber, 2002, p. 17). People had to be taught that working hard was morally right and that working hard just to earn more money was immoral. This is where education stepped in.

In the early years of the American colonies, religion was extremely important and was a dominant educational institution (Fraser, 2001, p. 2). For the Puritans, the early European colonizers of the new world, in particular those in New England, schooling was an important part of the culture (Fraser, 2001, p. 3). Protestantism—Calvinism in particular—holds the key to their culture.

In Protestantism, Luther had a concept of one's "calling," which was the duty before God to do an individual's work as assigned by one's "station in life" (Weber, 2002, pp. 28-29). Religiously, people were led to believe that before God, their job as Christians was to work hard at the job life had given them, so that grace could be earned. This holds immense value for capitalists. Capitalists do not have to worry about workers feeling injustice at the oppression of

receiving too little pay for too much work as long as belief in God is strong and centered around the idea of the individual.

It is the individual who stands before God. Soren Kierkegaard (2009) argued that we can only meet God as an individual; society can only mean so much to us if we see our relationship with God as an individual achievement—that we go to God alone on earth and meet with God individually in eternity (pp. 101-103). For Kierkegaard, society, the community, was immaterial for the Christian who was concerned with the eternal state of the soul; Kierkegaard's wording for the idea that an individual alone could strive for a pure soul: "to will one thing," dealt largely with a person's conscience (p. 101). Kierkegaard (2009) wrote that any third party would only detract or distract from an individual's seeking of God, and that groups of people were places to hide from God (p. 101). This idea of singling one's self out, of isolating oneself from others, has been passed down like any tradition within Western culture and amplified during Western culture's industrialization. As we examine the arguments of Max Weber, we can realize that a capitalist's capability for individualizing stems from this cultural tradition of meeting God alone—of the desire *to will one thing*. Of course, in the sense of capitalism, "to will one thing" becomes "to do one's job." And one must do one's job alone just as one must meet God alone.

This cultural tradition of individualism contains a distrust of others. Max Weber (2002) examined Puritan culture to find many expressions of distrust toward others and that Puritans were suspicious of helping one another; even the idea of friendship held misgivings for them (p. 74). To rely solely upon one's self, even if the goal is to build a bond with God, is to weaken the bonds of community. When the bonds of community are weakened (for at one time they had to be strong; humans could not survive without some society of support and strength), certain inequalities will arise and affect certain people. The idea that the Puritans perfected was that a

man's calling was to completely surrender to God's will—God's will being an order for the individual to work, regardless of money—in spite of money even, only for the honor of the work individually before God (Weber, 2002, p. 108).

With this tendency to deteriorate the bonds of community, the question becomes “What happens to those who cannot work?” What of the disabled, for example? Following this logic, the disabled cannot work to the same capacity as the abled but still must meet work alone in search of God. Does the community turn away from their needs for help? Is the individual too busy finding glory in the search for God through lonely work to reach a hand out to those who are less able? In today's western, now industrialized, society, where this tradition of individualist work is still alive and perhaps even exaggerated, the answer is yes—people have a tendency to refuse community. However, the way it is done is deep and unclear at the surface. This tradition of individualist work, coupled with the capitalists' need for profit, has created a society where competition is strong and the appetite for accumulating wealth is voracious.

Weber (2002) wrote that for the Protestants, the greatest sin was laziness (p. 110). Accumulating riches, for the Puritans, was justified as long as the accumulation of these riches did not detract from the hard work the individual performed to accrue them (Weber, 2002, p. 110). Over time, as Puritanism and capitalism amalgamated into the bedrock of U.S. culture, a great accumulation of wealth showed first and foremost that one was not lazy—logically, that richest, that least lazy individual, was the individual most likely to have been chosen by God as an elect. Of course, the other side of this resulting scenario is that the poor individuals are seen as being lazy, as being those least likely to be elected by God. It makes sense only to the extent to which one believes in the individualist doctrine that says every man must work alone and as long as that man is working as hard as he is able, then God will reward him for his work with

wealth. This tradition does give rise to that meritocratic tradition enthused first in the Ivy League colleges of the Eastern United States, and now an embedded aspect of how education is seen in the U.S. The problem occurs over time, as the bonds of community are broken, as society becomes less and less willing to help out those who are less able, those who do not have the same opportunities to work.

Most importantly, the question becomes, to what extent is today's society, I examine specifically the U.S., still believing this doctrine, still celebrating this tradition of individualism? And furthermore, in what ways is it kept alive, how is it created and recreated, specifically in our public institutions? Because those who are the richest still see themselves as the elect; if it is not God's elect, perhaps they believe that it is society's elect, or some great force of destiny indescribable but completely justified by the laws of nature, capitalism, and some perverted definition of democracy.

Zygmunt Bauman's book *Liquid Modernity* shows that the extent to which contemporary society believes this doctrine of individualism is great, that the individualist tradition has evolved but is strong. About work, Bauman (2006) points out that it is still a "powerful *individualizing* force," but that the difference now is a powerful "uncertainty" (p. 148). Bauman (2006) points out that work is very different today, that it is not there for people to glorify themselves, that work is not for making one a better individual anymore –which is similar to what Weber said of the Protestant ethic, but not identical, but that work is for an individual to find enjoyment in experiences (pp. 139-140). His argument comes from the idea that today things are severely impermanent, incredibly temporary; "liquid" is the term he uses. People's jobs are like their marriages; they come in a series rather than in one lifelong strand. This, he points out, is what causes "uncertainty," which individualizes, because people do not know what state they will be

in from one time to another (Bauman, 2006, p. 148). The negative emotions caused by this uncertainty are felt on one's own; there is no building of commonality here because people are so thoroughly separated (Bauman, 2006, p. 148). One has nothing and no one to count on. There is no solid ground to rely upon as always being there. This uncertainty is individualizing because relationships of the lasting type are never practiced –not in the workplace, and not in the home. In many ways, contemporary society is holding the individualist tradition, but it has evolved. Individualism, a cultural tradition, has put humans in an extremely alienated state.

Bauman shows that contemporary society is different from the society Weber described. He argues that for Weber's society, people knew their job and the problem was to work at it as hard as one could because God's acceptance was extremely difficult to earn, but that today the problem is finding something to put that effort into (Bauman, 2006, p. 62). This, again, is the uncertainty of which he writes. People do not have anything to rely upon in the long run. People are forced to continuously seek out new avenues for their redemptive efforts. It is all up to the individual; he or she alone must find his or her place in a world where the possibilities are extremely numerous (Bauman, 2006, p. 62). Alienation, anxiety, fear—these are the feelings that come along with this state of affairs. A preoccupation with security arises because there is so much insecurity (Bauman, 2006, p. 81). People naturally seek out ways to feel secure in a world where one's work and home life offer less and less security because of their transient, momentary temporality. All of life's endeavors become highly commercialized—shopping becomes an avenue toward security, people become first and foremost, consumers (Bauman, pp. 81-89). One can see the progression from a Christian ideal of meeting God alone to will one thing, coupled with capitalism to meet work alone to strive for acceptance into God's grace through unrelenting efforts in one's vocation, to the breakdown of certainty in finding a vocation

that lasts, ending up as an individual with nowhere to put that redeeming effort. It may not be logical that we choose consumerism as the outlet for our redeeming efforts, unless we examine the depth of our individualism. Consuming is the ultimate individualist act—we make the exchange alone, before the God that is monetary value. Even if we are buying things for others, it is us alone, the individual, who participates in that transaction.

Bauman (2006) points out, though, that we all have vastly different capacities for consuming, and that this separates us, individualizes us even more (p. 90). Since there is so much wealth in the U.S., held by so few people—since there are so many poor in the U.S. regardless of this amount of wealth, all can see the possibility of consuming more, yet few are able—competition becomes a part of life, a part of the redeeming process centered around consuming. A sturdy belief in meritocracy helps people justify this inequality in life, and it celebrates working alone and letting others take care of things on their own. The option of unity becomes highly unlikely (Bauman, 2006, p. 90). The bonds of community, once severed, become harder and harder to recover. Our goals, our institutions, our American dreams, become fulfilling the individual's need for security in a world where solid ground's apparition can only be found in consumption. The economy becomes the framework for everything—all aspirations depend upon the economy. Public institutions become arms of the economy, there only to serve the God that we meet alone—consumption. The answers to all of society's problems; both real and illusory, are found in economic terms. The business model is applied to all situations because it is the child of capitalism and individualism; it is the last and only hope for security. It is the model we apply, thoughtlessly, to all institutions.

Individualism for Beginners: The Emotional Costs of Globalization by Anthony Elliott and Charles C. Lemert discusses many of the ideas that are found in Bauman's book, as well as

many different ideas about contemporary individualism. In particular, the authors demonstrate that an individual is an individual only in relation to other individuals—it is our relationship to others that makes us an individual (Elliott and Lemert, 2005, p. 18). This is important because the types of relationships we have with other people will define our perceptions of ourselves as individuals. The authors note that relationships with others are fluid; they change often and continuously; that being said, our definitions of who we are as individuals are fluid as well (Elliott and Lemert, 2005, p. 18). The connection to education is that in schools a student's view of herself is defined by her view of others. A student perceives herself as an individual in relationship with other students or teachers.

An individualistic framework allows one to separate people from their contextual existence. We are all parts of a larger society. We all have a gender, a socioeconomic status, a racial background of some sort, a culture—we all have some kind of a context through which our experiences are framed. An individualistic framework allows one, though, to separate an individual from that social existence. It is like C. Wright Mills' (2000) "troubles" and "issues"; troubles are problems individuals have with their own person, they are "private matters," while issues are problems which societies have, such as with larger organizational structures and institutions (8-9). When examining problems with an individualistic framework, the individual can be to blame for her station in life, for her successes or failures without regard to the larger societal existence that we all have. It is ineffective to look at a person's problem in relation only to their personal characteristics: their attitudes and outlooks on life. There are social explanations for the situations people find themselves in. If the social explanations are not examined, then problems are not solved because they have been separated from their context. De-contextualizing problems stems from an individualistic framework, but that type of thinking

can occur on the level of institutional analysis. It's the same thinking whether one is looking at a person's successes and failures or an institution's successes and failures. One can still decontextualize the problem.

This idea of decontextualizing social problems is akin to what C. Wright Mills wrote about when discussing *troubles* and *issues*. Mills (2000) wrote that troubles lie within the individual's milieu and that issues involve the larger social structures; the challenge of the sociologist, of course, is the ability to distinguish one from the other (p. 8). If an individual cannot find a job it could be because of his personal characteristics –rudeness, uncleanliness, lack of motivation –but it just as well could be because those in power have eliminated local jobs in favor of production overseas. If the latter is happening on a grand scale, at a national level, then many individuals will lose jobs and this has to be taken into account if joblessness as a social phenomenon is to be examined; one cannot simply focus on the behavior of the individual and their specific circumstances. By focusing on the individual, the larger picture can be ignored, and then social issues will be left unrecognized. An unrecognized issue has little chance of being solved. Furthermore, the individual does not have the ability or the power to solve public issues on her or his own (Mills, 2000, p. 10). When social issues are removed from their larger social context, when they are examined through the lens of individualism, they become decontextualized. Education policy and reforms in the U.S. decontextualize issues by examining situations through a lens of individualism.

An individualist lens provides policy-makers and education reformers with a view of education that leaves broader social contexts unrecognized. In 2002, when No Child Left Behind was signed into law, the idea of accountability became a federally mandated policy for public education in the U.S. Accountability, of course, could be an excellent tool toward solving

social issues if large social structures are examined, if society as a whole is examined. However, if accountability is defined from an individualist perspective, then you get elected officials defining accountability by a measurement of learning coupled with a system of rewards and punishments for people who are at fault (Ravitch, 2011, p. 95). The measurement of learning has proven to be based solely upon standardized tests –a tool of individualization. The system of rewards and punishments proved to be another tool of individualization.

History of Testing

Standardized testing has a long history of de-contextualizing. Nicholas Lemann’s book, *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy*, outlines a history of standardized testing in the U.S. Before standardized testing was used to direct funding to or away from public schools in the U.S., it was, as it is still today, used to determine if students would be successful in college or not; scores determined whether a college wanted to accept a student. Before the college entrance tests, though, standardized testing was used. Alfred Binet, a French psychologist, created the first test to measure intelligence in 1905 (Lemann, 1999, p. 17). In the U.S., intelligence testing was trumpeted loudest by Lewis M. Terman, who helped convince the Army to give IQ tests to all enlisted men (Fraser, 2001, p. 207). Terman worked hard to convince the educational community that intelligence tests should be applied universally to students in schools of the U.S., and he stressed the idea of standardization because he wanted to find a student’s “mental age,” by which he meant “that degree of general mental ability which is possessed by the average child of corresponding chronological age” (Fraser, 2001, p. 210). Terman thought it very important that an average IQ could be determined; he used the word “normal” frequently when talking about testing children, and the whole purpose was to predict that child’s IQ in the future, which he believed the Stanford-Binet IQ tests could do (Fraser,

2001, p. 211). It is important to note that Terman did discuss the context of a child, but he did not believe that context to have a significant impact on the IQ scores. Terman believed that “social environment” could affect a child’s IQ, but only if it was an extreme case; he believed that any child who attended school would have the same basic social environment and “opportunity to learn the language . . . whatever the social status of home” (Fraser, 2001, p. 212). He did not see any importance in gender, social class, or culture. He seems to claim that a basic understanding of the language is enough to compensate for any “social” differences. The idea was to find out a child’s IQ or mental age, and then he or she could be grouped into classes with students of similar IQs or mental ages. Terman’s philosophy of education reflects the industrialized society that is his context. Students are perceived the way a factory might treat individual pieces to be put together in the most efficient way. Those pieces need to be standard pieces; there should be no diversity in size or quality. The school was industrialized for mass production the way the factory was at the turn of the 1800s to the 1900s.

Even before Terman pushed for these tests to be given to all students in the U.S., there were differing philosophies of education. John Dewey pushed hard for democratic principles and freedom in education before IQ testing was being looked at for a way to organize schools. Dewey (1899) spoke out against competition in schools, and he was a proponent of schools as communities, saying that students must help each other learn so that society can work together for the greater good of all members:

When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious. (p. 207)

Dewey had extensive plans for how to organize education so that it would promote the kind of democratic society he envisioned. However, if one looks at the current practices in education, the legislation that is currently passing to implement mandated practices in schools across the nation, one can see that the philosophy of Dewey did not come to fruition, whereas the philosophy of Terman is everywhere. This is because the dominant culture in the U.S. values an individualistic perspective. This individualistic perspective will always allow for practices which separate, alienate and de-contextualize individuals while pushing away and avoiding practices which allow individuals to come together as diverse communities where social contexts are taken into account.

Nicholas Lemann (1999) points out that those education reformers who were proponents of IQ testing really wanted to reorganize society in such a way that the most intelligent people, as determined by the tests, would end up as members of a ruling class (p. 24). Their philosophies were a part of the overall philosophy that included eugenics; IQ tests given to enlisted men at the time of World War I showed that scores reproduced the ideas of the eugenicists (Lemann, 1999, p. 30). Eugenicists went on with intelligence testing to prove arguments that people who were native to the U.S., that is white natives, not Native Americans, were superior in intelligence to immigrants—they did this in the early 1900s when immigration to the U.S. was happening at a relatively high rate. Eugenicists tested huge amounts of the population to show that the longer an immigrant was in the U.S. the higher their intelligence would be as shown by IQ testing (Painter, 2010, pp. 289-290). The eugenicists were trying to prove that by simply being in the presence of highly intelligent people, natives of the U.S.—really meaning the white people who had been in the U.S. longer, the imaginatively labeled Anglo-Saxons —immigrants could become more intelligent. Of course, they did this with an individualistic perspective, which de-

contextualized the people who took the tests. It is much more plausible that the tests measured knowledge of U.S. culture, and that those who were in the U.S. long enough to learn cultural knowledge could score higher on the test. This is what standardized IQ tests really tested for, and it is what standardized tests still do in most cases. The tests may do a very good job of testing levels of knowledge of dominant U.S. culture; but it is an individualist perspective that causes the results of tests that do this to be used for destructive and harmful purposes. When knowledge of a dominant culture is confused with intelligence, cultures other than the dominant will be looked at as less intelligent, less able, less valuable, less capable of participating in the decision-making process. Democracy will not be possible.

Nicholas Lemann shows that the creators of the SAT, a standardized test that is given to everyone who wishes to enter college, did not want a democracy but an aristocracy. James Bryant Conant, who was president of Harvard throughout the 1930s and 1940s, wished that all students in the U.S. would take the SAT so that those who were inherently more intelligent than others would end up going on to college and ultimately becoming the aristocratic rulers of the U.S. (Lemann, 2001, pp. 42-44). He wanted a ruling elite that was selected on the basis of educational merit (Lemann, 2001, p. 52). The idea was to give everyone a standardized test, and the highest achievers would go on to college to learn how to rule; the best colleges, the Ivy League colleges, would go after the very highest achievers. Of course, this is the practice today. But the question that needs to be asked is whether the tests are testing merit in a non-biased way, or if they are just assessing a level of knowledge of dominant U.S. culture.

Berliner and Biddle (1995) list several “myths” that have been created to convince the public that schools are failing: overall declining student achievement, failing student performance in college, students in the U.S. not competing academically with other countries

(pp. 13-64). Each of these myths was shown to be false; that is, they were created by looking extensively at the available data. SAT scores were shown to have not dropped significantly in the 1960s, and there has been no general drop since the 1970s (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, pp. 15-17). The reason for the moderate drop in the 60s and 70s was that more minority groups and students from less wealthy backgrounds were taking the test (Berliner and Biddle, 1995, p. 20). These are groups who had not taken the test before the 1960s in significant numbers. So if the scores leveled out after the drops in the 60s and the 70s, it would really mean that schools were working quite well, if SAT scores are really indicators of successful education. Since the beginning, SAT tests have been problematic as measurements of student achievement.

The main idea behind using the SAT was that students could be decontextualized from their social existences. Henry Chauncey, one of the main proponents of creating the SAT as a college entrance exam to be taken by every student in the U.S., believed that the U.S. should be ruled by the most able people in the country (Lemann, 2000, pp. 67-68). He thought that a test like the SAT could sort through the entire population of the country and indicate who was the most able, and they could be sent to the Ivy League schools he was affiliated with—namely Harvard and Princeton—to prepare for becoming the nation's leaders (Lemann, 2000, pp. 65-68). The individualizing factor in this philosophy is the idea that people can be separated from their social contexts. The idea that a person's abilities are inherent was part of the philosophy of Henry Chauncey and his partners when they pushed for national testing using the SAT; that is how they were able to believe in the capacity of a multiple choice test. If you believe that a person's abilities can be measured by a handful of questions given on a pencil and paper test, that of course is one thing, but if you believe the same about every student taking the same test, this is a different thing. When standardization enters the picture, then individualization, then

decontextualization enters the picture. A person's larger social context has to go by the wayside. It is not feasible to have hundreds or thousands of different tests to make up for the fact that we have such a culturally diverse country—so the idea that inherent intelligence/ability can be tested by a standardized multiple choice test (it has to be easy to administer) must be believed in. How can one believe in such an idea? Furthermore, who profits from such an idea?

Certainly, if I receive a very high score on the SAT I would like to believe that it is because of my inherent abilities—I would not want to believe that it is because I was raised in the culture that the test is a part of, that I have become an expert in the test's culture by being a member of an elite culture since birth. Certainly, if I am wealthy and powerful I would like to believe that I am so because of some inherent intelligence/ability that I have. As well, it may be comforting for me if I can believe that all of those who are of lower socioeconomic status are because of their inherent abilities, not because some institutionalized form of oppression is going on. Standardized tests are a tool of this illusory belief system. The population of the U.S. has greater disparity in wealth than other similar industrialized nations, and the U.S. has historically spent less money on education than other similar industrialized nations (Berliner and Biddle, 1995, pp. 236-237). This may be because those in power here in the U.S. do not value a democratic society; it may be that the public does not value a democratic society.

The idea that students in college are not performing as well as they once did is a commonly held belief by the media and, in turn, the public in the U.S. SAT scores, of course, are related. They are supposed to demonstrate college readiness. Again, if the scores went down because a more diverse population of non-traditional SAT test takers was taking the test, the same would probably be true for college attendance. When Berliner and Biddle (1995) looked at the evidence of students taking the GRE, the GMAT, the LSAT and the MCAT, from the 60s to

the 90s, they found that there were no significant declines in scores (pp. 35-41). These of course are more standardized tests, and many would argue that they might not assess college performance very well or very completely. However, the fact is that the data here do not coincide with what the media is telling us about college performance in the 40 years of data that were examined here. And again, the question becomes: Why would people want to disregard evidence here? Who profits from the idea that students are not performing as well in college as they used to? The answer is that blame can be put upon schools, administrators, and finally teachers who, in turn, under the idea of accountability. Those in power, then, by using business model reforms, can divert funds from public education to other areas.

Reforms in Education

Current education reform does not encourage students to know teachers, or students to even know other students. Technology does play a part. Online learning is a growing industry, and as I will discuss later, many states are being encouraged through legislation, if not commanded, to increase online learning. Elliott and Lemert (2005) point out that if no one really knows who we are, we will not know who we are; we will not have a true self (p. 31). As well, in a world where many of our relationships are already online, especially for the present teenagers and their younger siblings, the amount of others with which one has to reflect upon to define one's self increases exponentially (Elliott and Lemert, 2005, p. 31). This is problematic because so many of these people are strangers that one never really gets to know, and in order to keep up the relationships with so many people the individual must constantly recreate and redefine their identity, their perceptions of themselves as an individual (Elliott and Lemert, 2005, p. 32). Public schools in the U.S. could provide a solid ground where students could engage in true dialogue creating honest relationships with other students and teachers, but as long as

standardized testing is forced upon schools with high stakes attached, this is unlikely to happen. As well, when public education is taken over by business model reforms, when the neo-liberal agenda is forced upon schools through legislation, state and federally mandated reforms, the chance of schools being places where healthy relationships can be created becomes slimmer.

Diane Ravitch's book *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* gives a history of current business-minded reforms in education in the U.S. and a critical analysis of their effectiveness. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), is what most of the book centers around; however, she provides a short historical context for that legislation. Ravitch (2011) explains how NCLB has made testing and accountability the focus of education in the U.S, but that it started with the *A Nation at Risk* document that the Reagan administration put out (p. 30). She explains that ANAR called for effective school reform and that it would generally improve upon the quality of education in the U.S. by calling for national standards and specifying high expectations for students and teachers (Ravitch, 2011, p. 30). She differentiates NCLB by explaining its narrow approach to school reform; NCLB only asks for increased test scores in reading and math (Ravitch, 2011, p. 30). Both ANAR and NCLB, however, stem from the same individualistic cultural framework.

Both ANAR and NCLB de-contextualize the perceived problems in education. The perceived problem in education that ANAR addressed was that education had become poorer in quality over the years and students just weren't learning as much as they needed to (Ravitch, 2011, pp. 24-26). The perceived problem of NCLB is the same: students are not succeeding in school. Both ANAR and NCLB, though, blame schools for the problems. ANAR said that curriculums in schools were not good enough and that this was causing the country to lose its

edge in the competitive global economy (Ravitch, 2011, pp. 28-29). To suggest that because teachers are not teaching the right material in schools, or that teachers are not teaching enough material in schools, is an individualistic explanation to the problem of a declining economy. To claim that if better standards and higher expectations were to be put into place, a better economy would be created, is an individualistic solution. It is individualistic because it decontextualizes the problem. It fails to examine social issues as explanations for problems and chooses to focus on teachers and students. Teachers are to blame for students not learning enough; the economy is in a decline because students are not learning enough. The solution: make teachers teach better so that we have smarter students. Individuals lie at the heart of both the problem and solution here. ANAR does see a bigger picture, though; it looks at the school as a whole and how it needs to shape society better. NCLB is more individualistic, more decontextualizing.

NCLB differs from ANAR in that it focuses entirely on mandating standardized tests to improve reading and math so that schools can be held accountable for the quality of the education they are providing their students (Ravitch, 2011, p. 29). This is where NCLB completely de-contextualizes a problem of society. Standardized tests are highly individualistic—they separate students from their classmates, their teachers, and their communities. Holding a school accountable for their success or failure by looking only at standardized test scores de-contextualizes the problem by removing it from its social explanation. There are reasons that students do not do well on tests outside of the schools they are in; one needs to look at the communities where the schools are, the cities where those communities are, the country those cities exist within, and the globalized world those countries are parts of.

No Child Left Behind forces schools to compete for funding. First, scarcity is created. This is how commodification works. Education should be part of a community's livelihood, and

it is. However, when education becomes an industry, when economic principles, specifically neoliberal principles, are applied to education, it is no longer community-based; it is no longer free; it is no longer available to everyone. NCLB states:

Any school not making adequate progress . . . toward the goal of 100 percent proficiency would be labeled a school in need of improvement (SINI). In the first year of failing to make AYP, the school would be put on notice. In the second year, it would be required to offer all of its students the right to transfer to a successful school, with transportation paid from the districts' allotment of federal funds. In the third year, the school would be required to offer free tutoring to low-income students, paid from the district's funds. (Ravitch, 2010, pp. 97-98)

It is clear that the school is punished financially for failing to meet adequate progress toward the goal of 100% proficiency, as set by the federal government. A school can lose its students to another school if that one is more "successful." Schools are forced to compete for funding. As well, NCLB decontextualizes schools because it does not care if one school has a large population of students with disabilities and another school does not; they both have to be 100% proficient by 2014.

When schools are fighting for survival, competing for less and less funding, standardized tests become more than measurements of achievement; they become the determining factor of whether or not a student will benefit the school. This is why students who are not close to being proficient have been encouraged at times to drop out or transfer into other programs, and have even been expelled or arrested unfairly (Advancement Project et al., 2011, p. 3). One can see how the idea of community and cooperation has been abandoned for the idea of competition for survival. Of course, once districts, schools, and students have been decontextualized from their

larger social contexts, the student can be blamed—not the greater social context. If we all have the same opportunity to succeed but we don't, then punishment makes sense. However, if we all start out with different levels of opportunity, then punishment is arbitrary and not conducive to everyone succeeding. Of course, it must be that some are never meant to succeed, and others are meant to always succeed because there are larger social contexts which districts, schools, and students cannot be separated from.

No Child Left Behind is explicit in who is to be held accountable for students not learning as much or as fast as elected officials expect them to. The social issue that they want us to see is that America's children are not learning as much or as fast as they used to, or that they are not learning as much or as fast as other countries' children. Berliner and Biddle (1996), in their book *The Manufactured Crisis*, show how this social issue was actually created so that a group of powerful people could further an agenda to dismantle public education by manipulating the public to revoke support of public education and to redirect state and federal financial support from public education to other types of education (pp. 125-172). The idea of convincing the public that schools are failing to do their jobs and that children are the victims of teachers and administrators not doing their jobs properly was around before No Child Left Behind. At times, schools were even being held responsible for the economy's downturn throughout the 1980s. *A Nation at Risk* asserted both ideas and wanted to drive home the points by comparing the U.S. to Japan.

The Reagan Administration's document (1983), *A Nation at Risk*, describes a national crisis, which is centered on economics:

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by com-

petitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. (7)

The document places blame on schools. It does admit that there are other facets involved, but schools are the focus here. The problem is decontextualized. The document wishes us to believe that the country is falling apart, that other nations may overtake us in the competitive arena of global markets. The document (1983) draws a very grim and threatening picture of the U.S. being dominated by foreign powers:

The risk is not only that the Japanese make automobiles more efficiently than Americans and have government subsidies for development and export. It is not just that the South Koreans recently built the world's most efficient steel mill, or that American machine tools, once the pride of the world, are being displaced by German products. It is also that these developments signify a redistribution of trained capability throughout the globe. Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce and are today spreading throughout the world as vigorously as miracle drugs, synthetic fertilizers, and blue jeans did earlier. If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in

world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all—old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority. (8)

Schools take the blame, and schools must fix the problem. Berliner and Biddle (1995) demonstrate however, that the document lacks data to support its claims, that what it said about schooling in the U.S. was false, that there was no evidence at all that could tie the problems the document identified with schools in the U.S. (p. 95).

Business-model reforms have one goal in mind: privatization. One of the main goals of business-model reforms on schools is to privatize them; this is the ultimate business reform for public education. Elliott and Lemert (2005) point out the effects of privatization on the individual: “emotional isolation generated as a consequence of privatized spaces and privatized worlds” (p. 35). With no public forums, no public life, no public institutions, people become more and more isolated from others. The relationships with others become shallower and scarcer. Privatization of schools is the creating of education for profit—the relationship between students and teachers becomes too much like the relationship between the capitalist and the worker. Lemert and Elliott (2005) describe the language used to describe one’s identity as “more and more fixed into a syntax of possession, ownership, control and market value” (p. 36). The authors are saying that people are internalizing neoliberalism to the extent that they define themselves in neoliberal terms and perceptions (Elliott and Lemert, 2005, p. 36). This is exploitation; this is complete oppression. Yet it all follows the line of individualism that is a deeply rooted part of culture in the U.S.

The standardized test creates a unique type of relationship in the classroom with other students. The standardized test creates competition between students as passed down through the

meritocratic tradition. It is competition to see who can get the most questions right—a student does not help her peers during the standardized test and she can expect no help from them or her teacher. This is the type of relationship between teacher and student that Paulo Friere (2007) described so much in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: that of the relationship of the oppressed and their oppressors, that of the oppressed as objects rather than subjects (p. 67). The student is an object of the teacher here. The teacher does not involve the student in any kind of decision-making process, and the student's experiences are not a part of the learning process—the standardized test. It is not possible for standardized tests to be based on the experiences of students because the tests are the same for every student across a large population, and as long as students are not creating these tests, which are kept secret from everyone until they are taken, and then the students will be the objects not the subjects. Freire (2007) writes that both teachers and students must be subjects; they must work together to create new knowledge by analyzing reality (p. 69). That type of relationship would create a very different view for the student as an individual. They would see themselves as a subject among other subjects. This relationship involves an intimate knowledge of the student and the teacher—they must know each other well. Elliott and Lemert (2005) assert that to construct an honest view of yourself as an individual, others must really know you (p. 29).

The idea that the individual teacher is responsible for the successes and failures of the student is a highly individualistic idea. Meaning, this idea does not take into account the social forces outside of the teacher's control. This idea denies the importance of socioeconomics, cultural bias, and racial bias. The idea of standardization rests upon the idea that we are all individuals without social contexts. This is problematic because the denying of social contexts results in social inequalities, which in turn, results in a society that is undemocratic.

Standardized tests, because they are standardized, because they expect that everyone can achieve at the same levels, assume that large differences due to social contexts do not exist.

As well, standardization assumes that everyone is the same, or that everyone has the same capacity, interests, goals, and expectations. In a democratic society, diversity must be recognized. We are not all the same, nor should we be. Nel Noddings (2007) discusses this in her book *When School Reform Goes Wrong* by addressing the standardization of school curriculums:

A democratic view of equality does not imply equality of aptitudes, achievements, incomes, possessions, or social status. It means rather, that all competent, adult human beings are recognized as persons capable and worthy of citizenship—that is, participation in the affairs of local, national, and global governance. (p. 37)

We see that there is differentiation drawn between different ideas of equality and the idea of citizenship. In a democratic society, citizens are important. Without citizens, there is no democracy. The problem arises when some are allowed to be citizens and some are not. Throughout history, women of course, and minority groups based on ethnicity, culture, or immigrant status have been denied the rights of citizenship. As Noddings wrote, those who are not given the rights to participate in the various levels of society are not really citizens. Indeed, someone can be granted citizenship formally, legally, or technically; but they may not be viewed by those in power as being able to handle the responsibilities of citizenship, and so are marginalized into a different class of citizenship. For education and its standardization, the focus seems to be that everyone has the same ability, that everyone is on equal footing. If everyone were not on equal footing, if some people were more privileged than others, then the idea of

standardized education doesn't make much sense; and unfortunately, the idea of standardization coupled with high stakes testing, becomes devastating to those who are less privileged and of course profitable to those who are more privileged. But as long as individualism is a strong characteristic of the culture, as long as the individual is *the* social unit, then it will make sense to punish those who do not do as well with a standardized curriculum with tests and to merit those who succeed with a standardized curriculum with tests.

To see the individual as *the* social unit is to see an individual separated from their cultural group, their gender, socioeconomic group, or their ethnicity. This is what can be most destructive in an individualistic view when it is applied to education. To deny individuals' existence within larger social groups is to ignore reality. When reality is ignored real problems can never be solved. The first step in solving any problem is to identify what the problem is. You have to examine things clearly and realistically. If the U.S. wishes to have a better education system, if the U.S. wishes to have a decent education system, it needs to recognize the difference between problems associated with illusions and real problems. The idea that public education in the U.S. is deteriorating due to individuals failing to meet expectations (whether it be teachers not doing their jobs or students not working hard enough) is an illusion brought on by a deep cultural tradition of individualism. The real problems in public education in the U.S. cannot be recognized as long as we look at things from an individualist perspective within an individualist framework. The individualist framework will decontextualize problems and solutions. To recognize problems we need to look at contexts.

One of the contexts that cannot be ignored is the inequitable distribution of wealth in the U.S. The U.S. has a large population of poor and a small population of extremely wealthy. When compared to other industrialized nations, the U.S. has a larger percentage of poor, and the

percentages are even larger when children are looked at specifically (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 218). A large part of this problem is that the U.S. spends a great deal more money on the military than it does on social services. When compared to other industrialized nations, the U.S. is spending much less than them on social services and much more on the military (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 217). With a deep individualistic tradition, it is seen as acceptable to let people struggle to make ends meet in such a wealthy country. The current debate over health care is an interesting example. Many believe that it is completely wrong that the government should have a say in whether or not everyone should have health insurance. It is an individual freedom to decide for yourself if you want health insurance or not. The option of everyone having free health care is not even on the table. Some other industrialized nations have no problem with this, but in the U.S. it is an argument about the individual's right to decide for his or herself. It is the same argument in education: people are beginning to believe, in large constituents, that a free equitable public education for everyone is wrong. This is nothing new, perhaps; just one generation ago, African Americans had to fight to be allowed to attend white schools. The inequitable distribution of wealth in the U.S. is causing huge problems in public education. Schools in neighborhoods where more poor people live must work a bit harder than schools in neighborhoods where more wealthy people live. There are many reasons for this. Social problems are more numerous in areas where poverty is more concentrated. Schools must deal with educating youngsters, but they must deal with all of the social ills on top of that. Children have a hard time learning if too many problems are occurring in their lives—violence, instability, unsafe environments, and many more factors come into play, especially in urban areas where poverty is concentrated. This leads to the second real problem in education: inequitable funding.

Inequitable funding is a reality in this country. It has been well documented and it has been experienced by millions of young people throughout the country. Furthermore, the inequitable funding that occurs in the U.S., when exposed, can show that decontextualizing the problems of society, of public education in the U.S., will only create illusory solutions for mythic troubles. Those in power do not want the real problems solved because they profit off of them. Those in power want the individualist tradition to remain strong in the U.S.

Public schools in the U.S. are funded using a system that creates and recreates inequality. One of the main problems is that school funding is based in large part on local and state money. Only about 10% of funding for schools comes from federal money; about half of the rest comes from state money, and the rest comes from the local tax base (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, pp. 264-265). This is great if you live in an affluent area. This is terrible and destructive if you live in a poor area. One of the problems, of course, is that if you grow up poor you already do not have the advantages in life that a person who grows up rich has. Something as simple as nutritional meals could become a problem if you grow up poor. Of course, schools can provide nutritional meals for students, and many do; however, the schools found in affluent areas will have far fewer free and reduced lunches than schools in poorer areas. Schools in poorer areas, as well, may have to deal with students who have inadequate health care. Schools in poorer areas will have students with more emotional problems due to the fact that their parents can't afford to take them to get professional help as much as those students in wealthy areas. There are many factors that make it hard for schools serving poor students. However, if all of those factors are added on to the largest factor, that being that poorer areas have a much smaller tax base to draw from, the idea of providing an equitable education becomes not only difficult and unlikely, it becomes impossible. Jonathan Kozol's (2005) book *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of*

Apartheid Schooling in America focuses on inequity in public schooling in the U.S.: spending per pupil for Bloomfield Hills, Michigan was 12,825 for the 2002-2003 school year, Detroit's was 9,576, in New York, Manhasset spent 22,311 per-pupil while New York City spent 11,627 per-pupil, in the Chicago area, Highland Park and Deerfield spent 17,291 per-pupil while Chicago spent 8,482 per pupil (pp. 320-324). This data shows that some schools spend a great deal more than others. This is inequitable funding. Now, if the schools are placed within their contexts, further problems can be identified: Detroit is 95% Black and Hispanic and 59% low income while Bloomfield Hills is 8% black and Hispanic and 2% low income; New York City is 72% Black and Hispanic and 83% low income while Manhasset is 9% Black and Hispanic and 5% low income; Chicago is 87% Black and Hispanic and 85% low income while Highland Park and Deerfield is 10% Black and Hispanic and 8% low income (Kozol, 2005, p. 320-324). Not only is the per-pupil funding inequitable, but the lines are drawn clearly by race and income. Schools with overwhelming white majority populations and overwhelmingly low amounts of low-income students spend more on their students than schools with majority Black and Hispanic populations with large majorities of low-income students. The same trends are shown in four other areas of the U.S.

This data shows no accident. This data shows what many do not want to believe about educational reform in the U.S. It shows that those in power wish to keep their power and they will use education as a tool, as a weapon, to fight any threat to their current way of life. Equitable education would be a solid first step toward democracy and freedom. The wealthy and powerful do not want democracy; they do not want freedom. Democracy and freedom would put their power and wealth at risk. Many reforms, including state bills and laws, have been introduced and passed into action to prevent democracy and freedom from occurring within

public education in the U.S. Individualism is always at the core of this legislation, but they must be examined closely.

An individualistic answer to this problem would sound something like this: “If we just get teachers who teach really well, who really do their jobs well, then those students will get a good education”. Or something like this: “If students have high expectations and work really hard, they will be as successful and they will learn as much as anyone else.” The individualistic perspective is to de-contextualize the problem; it is going to ignore the idea that government institutions in the U.S are systematically oppressing African Americans and Latinos. The individualistic perspective will ignore the idea that government institutions in the U.S are oppressing the working class and the poor. The system of public education is oppressing these groups of people by providing a lower-quality education to them. You cannot teach twice as much with half as much. A public education that ignores this problem by holding teachers and students accountable for failing to succeed against insurmountable odds is an individualized public education that will never be effective in creating and recreating a democratic society. This type of education will create a system where some can be citizens very easily, while some are not seen as citizens and have to work four times as hard to participate in citizenship. Furthermore, an education which is standardized will destroy the types of thinking we need to recognize and solve this problem. If our educational system continues to create and recreate an illusory view of society, then the ability to clearly see the real problems we face will be extremely difficult.

In an article on teachers’ identities, Bhaskar Upadhyay (2009) found that teachers’ identities were fluid as well (p. 585). Upadhyay (2009), through a qualitative case study of a science teacher, found that in an environment of high stakes testing, the teacher had to negotiate between what they felt were good teaching practices, and those practices that were pushed on her

to do to raise test scores—they were not the same (pp. 579-581). The article does not discuss many problems or harmful experiences; rather, the article shows that the teacher was able to negotiate and keep her “core identity” (Upadhyay, 2009, p. 580). As well, the article showed that the students and the teacher were able to create “co-identities,” which allowed each party to understand that identities needed to shift between the two types of learning: “long-term learning” and learning for tests (Upadhyay, 2009, p. 580). It is not surprising, given the theoretical groundwork laid by Lemert and Elliott, that the teachers and students were able to create dual identities. However, as the article stated in its conclusion, questions remain about how many teachers are able to keep their core identities and develop “co-identities” with their students (Upadhyay, 2009, p. 585). As well, the long-term effects of a teacher compromising his or her identity were not discussed. Furthermore, the article was not an incredibly long-term study, which might show more complications. How often does the teacher need to find new identities as further changes are forced upon her by administrators because of state and federal legislation and reforms? Changes are likely to occur more, and more frequently in this time period. More and more uncertainty, the kind discussed by Bauman and Elliot and Lemert, will not help to create quality education. Such an environment of fear and anxiety is much more conducive to an authoritarian state than a democratic one.

Another main point that is made by Elliott and Lemert is the rapidity of change in the new globalized world society and how this affects people. People become afraid of long-term experiences; people reject lasting connections with others because that is what is reflected by the neo-liberal globalized society (Elliott and Lemert, 2005, p. 87). Schools, rather than being instruments of this destructive tendency, should be an alternative to it. However, with the rapidly changing expectations of schools, new tests almost every year, new mandated

curriculum, teachers and administrators always expecting new standards and benchmarks, schools become enforcers of the rapidly changing quality that is the neo-liberal globalized society. Even specific free trade tactics and principles have been applied to education.

Neoliberalism

Education, where deep cultural roots grow deeper, has watered those roots with neoliberal views. A neoliberal agenda has shaped much of what happens within public schools in the U.S. In recent times, schools have taught students not to act as humane citizens but to act out “one of two roles: buyer and seller” (Giroux, 2009, p. 252). When President Obama became president, Henry Giroux (2009) argued, Obama could have helped create reforms for democratic education, and the neoliberal agenda could have been slowed and perhaps transformed into something positive for students in the U.S., but he did not (2009, pp. 252-254). Obama, in the beginning of his presidency, showed support for the educational reform ideas of Michelle Rhee (Chancellor of Washington D.C. Public Schools); who has, “clos(ed) dozens of schools, fir(ed) more than thirty principals, rel(ied) on test-score-driven modes of accountability, undermin(ed) teacher security and autonomy, and constru(ed) the teacher’s union as the major impediment to educational reform (Giroux, 2009, p. 254). Furthermore, Obama selected Arne Duncan, former C.E.O. of the Chicago Public Schools, to be Secretary of Education. Duncan’s work in Chicago: privatizing schools, creating prison like atmospheres in schools that could not achieve high expectations on standardized testing, shows that his philosophy toward education, and the methods he uses, will further the neoliberal agenda (Giroux, 2009, pp. 260-262). The neoliberal agenda will be furthered under the Obama administration. Democracy and social freedom will not be guiding principles of our public educational institutions. In fact, public educational institutions are likely to disappear.

Michael Apple's (2006) book *Educating the Right Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality* shows the main groups of people who profit from the myths that were created in the 1980s about education. These groups are a diverse compilation of a few varying conservative philosophies. These philosophies are commonly called the Right. He describes the right as a diverse group of people who fit into three basic categories: 1) the neoliberals, 2) neoconservatives, and 3) authoritarian populists (Apple, 2006, p. 9). The neoliberals, in particular, have a highly individualist philosophy. The neoliberals are those who follow closely a political philosophy defined by the neoliberal economic philosophy. The economy seems to guide this group more than anything else. The neoliberals view public institutions as problematic because money gets put into them while profits cannot be directly seen as growing; schools receive money from the public, and the public cannot see profit being turned like in a private business (Apple, 2006, p. 32). Apple (2006) describes the neoconservatives as a patriotic group somewhat fixated on a view of America's past as being golden as opposed to the present (p. 39). The neoconservatives, as well, value a strong state and push for standardization nationwide (p. 39). The neoconservatives may not be individualistic like the neoliberals, but they tend to decontextualize in their hopes that a national curriculum wouldn't be oppressive to America's diversity. As well, the neoliberals and the neoconservatives have joined forces to create a powerful force—the authoritarian populists have joined this force (Apple, 2006, p. 44). The authoritarian populists are that group of the right that values the bible, "gender roles, and the family" (Apple, 2006, p. 44). This group has a deep distrust of public institutions, schools in particular, because of their lack of morality, biblical morality. For this reason, and their deep value of family and gender roles, the authoritarian populists are proponents of home schooling (Apple, 2006, pp. 45-46). The authoritarian populists wish to have ultimate control over the

education of their family members. They believe that they should be able to spend public education money on their own home schooling with its bible-based curriculum. These three groups work together to weaken public education and to strengthen the diversion of public school money to other areas.

Privatization is a major part of the neo-liberal agenda and is pushed into reality through free trade principles deals made under NAFTA. Privatization in education is a part of this system. If schools remain public, if they are not privatized due to current legislature and reform, then NAFTA rules will not apply to them, but once they are privatized NAFTA directives become legally binding (Barlow and Robertson, 1996, p. 64). NAFTA will not allow schools to be returned to public control without some kind of fiscal payment to the private owners (Barlow and Robertson, 1996, p. 64). Privatizing is a way of diverting money from publicly funded institutions to private interests. One of the main ways this is done is to open charter schools. Many foundations, including the Gates Foundation and The Broad Foundation, have invested billions of dollars into opening charter schools in the U.S. (Ravitch, 2010, pp. 211-218). Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, in fact, chose a charter school chief operating officer to design Race to the Top (Ravitch, 2010, p. 218). Race to the Top awards prize money to schools that adopt the most of its education reform plans, which are not supported by much evidence (Ravitch, 2010, p. 218). The reforms will privatize. Will they privatize for the sake of privatizing, or will someone profit from the privatization? The foundations are in it for the long run, they will not be able to sustain their investments unless they are profitable. The neo-liberal agenda of free trade and privatization is not leaving schools out of its aim. Mexican and U.S. government meetings have taken place to discuss standards for teachers across the continent: Canada, the U.S. and Mexico (Barlow and Robertson, 1996, p. 70). The problems here are that

diverse standards are needed to reflect cultural differences that exist throughout the continent, and that a corporate model of reform undermines democracy (Barlow and Robertson, 1996, p. 70). Schools do not have to be the agents of the neo-liberal agenda; they are public institutions and necessary for democracy. But if the business model is applied over and over again in new ways year after year then public education will be a part of the past when there was a public as differentiated from the private.

Public institutions, though, are areas where real democracy can exist and where community can replace individuality. As well, the idea of freedom and democracy to the neoliberal is important to understanding their philosophy. Freedom for the neoliberal is about being a consumer and being able to choose what one consumes, democracy amounts to nothing more than individuals having the freedom to consume whatever they wish to consume (Apple, 2006, p. 32).

The philosophy of equating freedom with consumption leads people to confuse democracy with capitalism. Schools are needed in order to have a democratic society. The schooling must be equitable though. As well, education must be free from coercive and manipulating forces that create an authoritarian structure in the minds of students. This type of education will lead to true democracy. True democracy does not need capitalism. It does not need free or private enterprise. The neoliberals will wish that schools are places where consumers can choose to buy a product or not. The successful school will be the one which more people choose; the others will fail and disappear. Michael Apple (2006) relates this to the metaphor of the supermarket. Of course, the consumer can go into the market and choose what she does or does not want to buy; however, some people cannot even afford to get to the supermarket because there are none in their neighborhoods (2006, pp. 32-33). If all people are

individualized, if they are decontextualized from their larger social existence, then it makes sense to say that we all have the same opportunities in life. We can all choose the schools that are the best. However, if one places people into their larger social context, one can understand that not everyone has the same opportunities in life.

Furthermore, the end results of a neoliberal economic policy are not desirable to anyone but the extremely wealthy. Free trade is one of the pillars of a neoliberal philosophy. As the economy is seen to be the foundational aspect of all decisions and policies, it has become a part of peoples' value-systems (Morris, 1996, pp. 218-220). Free trade places the flow of capital, and the progress of profitable domains above any humanistic principle. David Morris (1996), in his article "Free Trade: The Great Destroyer," points out the three main facets of free trade that have become the legs of a contemporary belief system for many people:

- Competition spurs innovation, raises productivity, and lowers prices.
- The division of labor allows specialization, which raises productivity and lowers prices.
- The larger the production unit, the greater the division of labor and specialization, and thus the greater the benefits. (p. 219)

Each of these facets embodies a deeper cultural belief: individualism. Without a deep value of the individual being valued above the community, these beliefs would not hold. The beliefs would never have materialized.

Competition is an individualistic concept. To value competition is to value a winner and a loser. To value its opposite is to value community. A community, a true community, is a place with a commons: a place where people can come together to share basic necessities, culture, and tradition. To value competition above community causes one to see the commons as a source of

possible profit: water is commodified, food is commodified, culture is commodified, learning is commodified, and competition replaces cooperation. The individual replaces the community. Schools have been individualistic throughout their history in the U.S. and have no doubt been competitive. However, contemporary legislation has created greater competition.

The second aspect of Morris' three tenets of Free Trade, the value in the division of labor, demonstrates another aspect of individualization. Factories, in the era of industrialization, used the division of labor in order to be competitive in the marketplace, to maximize profits, and to be more efficient. Karl Marx (2008) described this idea when he wrote of cooperation in a capitalist system: a person can do a certain amount of work in an 8 hour day for example, however, if you put one hundred people together they can do more in an 8 hour day than they could individually (pp. 197-199). The capitalist who puts them together under his factory, will get more than eight hundred hours worth of work out of one hundred people in an 8 hour day; yet he will only have to pay each person for the 8 hours, not the greater collective from working together (pp. 197-199). So the capitalist uses the cooperation of the workers to maximize his profits, yet he is keeping them individualized by not allowing them to earn as a collective. The idea of the union is to revert this capitalist scenario of collective profits and individualized pay. The capitalist must create an illusion. The capitalist wants the worker to see himself or herself as an individual, though he profits off of a collective work force. Furthermore, Marx (2008) pointed out that in a factory which uses the division of labor effectively for the profit of the capitalist, the workers each have one small job that they do; this job is only a step toward one final product (a contemporary example would be putting a handle on a car door) (p. 218).

This differs from previous systems of production where people created their own products and then put them together into new products. For example, a person could create

handles for car doors, and that is their trade. The difference is that one has her or his own commodity for sale and the other has no commodity, just a small job that results in a commodity at the end, and he has nothing he can sell (Marx, 2008, p. 219). So the worker is separated from the final product to an extent that makes them a consumer rather than an actual producer of a commodity. This is what Marx (2008) called the “separation of the labourer from his means of production ” (p. 222). The worker is highly individualized because she is disconnected not only from the other workers in the sense that she is paid for her individual job which has no means of production on its own, but she is also separated from the larger community as she becomes a decontextualized consumer. This is what happens in education, to the student’s and the community’s detriment,

In a school, the teacher could be seen as the worker. As a public institution there should be no capitalist exacting profit from any production. However, if economic principles overpower humanistic or democratic principles, then the school comes to resemble any other capitalist enterprise. In most schools, the teacher has his own class and he passes his students on to the next teacher or the next grade with minimum connection. Separate rooms and separate subjects allow a kind of division of labor to happen in the school. In the end, a teacher has only his or her part to do with the final product –the graduating student who needs to be proficient in math and reading. Marx’s original ideas about division of labor and the separation of the worker from the means of production apply in this case when the idea of accountability is taken into account here. It becomes clear that the government is looking for some kind of product, commodity, or profit for schools to offer. This will then be measured to determine success or failure. Scores on standardized tests become that commodity.

The school that produces high scores on a standardized test is seen as a profitable enterprise where resources can be invested. The school that produces low scores on standardized tests is seen as an unprofitable enterprise where resources should not be invested. However, learning is fragmented through this whole process. Schools, set up like factories where the commodity is a score on a standardized test, divide the work up into pieces where individuals have a small part to perform. Learning is split into pieces. Subjects are divided. Concepts are divided. Standards and objectives are divided into pieces to be accomplished. The teacher, being separated, though, from the means of production, really can't do that much to increase those scores. This is partly because of the individualization that accompanies this process of separation. Some call this *teaching to the test*, but it is more than that. It is not just teaching specifically what is on a test, though this does happen. There is an entire pedagogy that is associated with this type of learning, and it starts with the notion that we have an end product: scores on a standardized test. What we all have to do is to reach those scores at all cost. The scores become the ultimate indicator of success or failure.

No Child Left Behind demonstrates that this type of learning is federally mandated, but it is not the only legislation out there that is pushing this type of learning. At the state level, many states are putting together legislation which will increase the levels of individualism in learning, minimize true community in education, and spread the neoliberal ideals to the larger society. It is important to note that, as Morris (1996) wrote in his article, free trade wants to maximize profits and the argument is that this will in turn reduce prices; a company can be competitive and competition will drive down prices (p. 224). This is why companies wish to have free reign to set up shop overseas in locations where production can cost a fraction of what it costs in the U.S. or other industrialized nations. However, Morris (1996) points out that there is a difference

between price and cost: “ Price is what an individual pays; cost is what the community as a whole pays” (p. 225). It is no surprise that the neoliberal philosophy cares little about the community cost, yet is concerned completely with the individual price. In a hyper-individualized society, the cost to the community, the social cost, is not always recognized.

It becomes less and less likely that we as a society will have the ability to determine things like social cost as neoliberal agendas create ever-increasingly individualized institutions. As schools become complete instruments of the neoliberal agenda, not only are social costs unaccounted for and unrecognized but individuals are held responsible for social ills. The results section of this paper will address this issue in detail, but the neoliberal practices of blaming individuals for social ills and the neoconservative idea of standardizing in attempts to decontextualize learning to ignore a diverse society, forces democracy into the shadows.

Chapter 3: Methods

This research helps to explain the relationship between education, democracy, and culture in the U.S. As such, this research used a qualitative analysis to gain a deep understanding of culture and the way that it affects education. Quantitative methods, for this particular topic, were not adequate. The goal was not to gather scores, amounts, or vast collections of statistics. Though quantitative data of that type are informative and very important to any discipline, it would not have facilitated the aims of this project.

For this thesis, I conducted a textual analysis. I needed to situate my question in the “context of a pertinent conceptual framework” and “theoretical orientation” (McMillan, 2008, p. 56). It was necessary to “identify, delimit and define relevant scholarship in which the study was grounded”, and to “summarize the intellectual tradition on which it [was] based” (McMillan, 2008, p. 56). The textual analysis was research that qualitatively analyzed data from a variety of sources. For the most part, the sources I used were books. While some journal articles were utilized, books were the most appropriate sources for this work, largely because books are more exhaustive; they provide the researcher with a deeper point of view into a specific topic. As well, books completely answer research questions. Articles tend to begin to answer questions but often ask more questions than are answered.

I analyzed language the way a literature scholar might. I analyzed the deeper meanings behind what those in power are handing down to society as law. This was an important part of my analysis because current trends in legislation can say a great deal about the culture that produces them. Primary sources are important because they, more than secondary sources, provide concrete evidence. When the legislation, and the language used in the legislation, is analyzed, it is hard to miss the individualist tradition. By analyzing the language used in some of

the most current legislation affecting education in the U.S., I was able to uncover some tremendous connections between what sociologists, historians, and philosophers have been saying about education and culture in the U.S. for a long time. Primary texts allowed me to provide concrete evidence for many of the ideas that my analysis was uncovering as I studied some of the questions asked by scholars from a variety of disciplines. For this thesis I needed to see the deep thinking of scholars and their full answers of the questions related to my topic.

I analyzed books from a variety of disciplines. I chose several historical accounts to get solid data of what historians have to say about testing and public education reform. Historians often provide an excellent beginning for an analysis of any topic. It is helpful when they provide contexts for the present. I wanted to understand current school reform and legislation, but analysis of history provides a framework for understanding why and how these things have evolved. Furthermore, my topic needed an understanding of a depth that could only be reached by accessing historical data through the work of historians. Additionally, I attempted to analyze work from historians with differing perspectives, covering different topics, and answering different questions. When looking at the history of education, one can make sense of why things are the way they are now, and even make predictions about things that will occur in the future. In education, there are patterns that historians can help to uncover. As well, historians can be critical in a way other scholars may not be able. If one analyzes the past, one has the benefit of hindsight and knows what happened in the end when certain things were attempted. A critical analysis was important to me because of the grave problems I dealt with here and the seriousness of what is at stake: freedom and democracy.

Sociology was important to my analysis. The sociological perspective, which differentiates between individual phenomena and social phenomena, was absolutely necessary

when analyzing the extent to which the U.S. is individualist. Sociology, by examining multiple experiences of people existing together under varying social systems, demonstrates that the “individual experience” is “incomplete” (Bauman, 2001, p. 13). Emile Durkheim (2008) said of human existence that there are really two beings within the human: an individual being and a social being (p. 18). There is an individual, but one cannot “reduce reason to individual experience” (Durkheim, 2008, p. 18). The individual constantly rises above individual experience and existence because he or she is constantly participating in society, participating in a collective experience (Durkheim, 2008, p. 18). As well, sociologists are able to point out concrete problems associated with individualist tendencies within a culture. Out of all disciplines, it seems, sociology is the most critical. For many, it is difficult to look critically at culture because culture is such a part of us that most of the time it is invisible. It is highly internal, a bit like our organs working hard every second of the day, but most of the time unknown to us. There are real problems in society and there are perceived problems in society; they are not always one in the same. I wanted to sort out where the perception may be faulty in an attempt to perceive real problems. Culture is extremely powerful; in many ways, this is *because* it is invisible. As well, culture can be extremely harmful and destructive; this too, because it is invisible. When analyzing any problem, it is important to look at culture explicitly because what is not seen, what lies beneath the surface, is often more important than what is seen floating at the surface.

Philosophy helped me to trace the roots of culture. Philosophers often attempt to go beyond any other discipline when analyzing culture. Sometimes they get there; sometimes they do not. However, when analyzing the texts, one finds a window into cultural trends. One can see the roots of a culture’s thinking patterns. For example, Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the*

Oppressed traces the patterns of dehumanization by showing that dehumanization captures those who oppress and those who are oppressors at the same time (2007, p. 44). The depth is seen here in that the oppression is so deep that even the oppressed are not likely to become free without using a system of oppression that will perpetuate itself. Teachers often end up oppressing their students. Students fight back by attempting to dehumanize the teacher or the classmates that are presumed to be threats. Oppression is perpetuated. No one is freed. Only philosophy could gain access to a view of this depth. One can trace connections and evolutions of deep cultural ideas and traditions that remain in contemporary society. Contemporary society rarely abandons these cultural traditions; more often than not, the traditions will grow and change. Joel Spring (2008) said that, “culture is a product of human interaction and that it should constantly be reconstructed to meet the changing needs of society” (p. 121). But to make sense of what a culture is doing now, one can look at philosophical texts from the past. Many of the texts I examined, though, are really amalgamations of various disciplines.

Great scholars make use of various fields of study. This is another reason why I chose to focus my textual analysis on books rather than articles from journals and other publications. Books often make use of multiple disciplines because they have the time to do so. A book’s scope allows the author to explore more perspectives than a briefer type of scholarship. As a student of the Social Foundations of Education (SOFD), I understood that a multi-disciplined approach would be appropriate. SOFD does not use one discipline. It uses many. This is because SOFD’s challenge is so great that one discipline would be less effective.

SOFD’s challenge is to critically look at our society by studying education so that a more democratic society can be created. This is a huge challenge. This challenge can only be met by drawing from the largest and deepest wells of knowledge and experience. To create a more

democratic society, we must draw from all waters to gather a diverse, multifaceted, body of understanding. A narrow scope will be helpful only in the contexts of all of the larger pictures.

Chapter 4: Results

Individualism is a deep and long-standing tradition in U.S. culture. It stems from cultural traditions brought over from Europe during the country's colonization by the Puritans. The importance of the Protestant religion to the Puritans was what made individualism such a strong tenet of their culture. The cultural roots of individualism remain powerful in contemporary U.S. culture. A study of recent educational reforms and legislation demonstrates that, though the culture has changed over the years, individualism remains a key component of U.S. culture.

Individualism has changed in contemporary U.S. culture because of globalization and neoliberalism. Globalization and neoliberalism have become guiding forces in U.S. culture. Globalization has worked with neoliberalism to increase individualism and strengthen it. It has done this through raising the economy to the status that religion once held in the earlier years of the colonization of the U.S. Where God was once the guiding power, where religious literature was once the holder of social contracts, economic practices, specifically neoliberal economic practices and principles, are now the laws by which society and its institutions find structure and direction. The U.S. has become hyper-individualist and extremely competitive. This is demonstrated through studies of public education in the U.S., education reforms, and current legislation dealing with education.

Studies of education in the U.S. show that individualism is one of the main guiding forces. Individualism shapes the environment that public education exists within. The main evidence of this is high-stakes testing. Federally mandated high-stakes testing, through No Child Left Behind, is the most powerful shaping force in U.S. public education at this time. High-stakes testing has created the current atmosphere in education, and it has shaped both curriculum and methods. It has created a type of learning that is shallow, short-term, and conducive to

authoritarianism. Individualism, as a powerful characteristic of the culture, allows high-stakes testing to become the shaping force in education. High-stakes testing both recreates individualism and creates new possibilities for the evolution of individualism in U.S. culture. This is because of the nature of high-stakes testing.

High-stakes testing enforces a certain type of learning. This learning is authoritarian in nature. The authoritarian nature of this learning creates a certain type of relationship between the student and the teacher. It is a relationship of power and dominance. The teacher is in complete control because only he or she has access to the test, the questions, and the answers; the student has absolutely no control over anything during testing aside from small bubbles filled in to tiny spaces (Kleinsasser, 1995, pp. 205-207). The teacher is in a similar relationship. With high-stakes testing used for accountability, the teacher does not have as much power and authority over what is tested, when, and how the testing is experienced. Those things are determined by others up the hierarchy. There are different forms of high-stakes testing, but they all work in similar fashions.

The tests, which are produced by the state for holding schools accountable, are created by testing agencies. These agencies want to keep the tests very secret and have strict rules about when, where, and how the tests are administered. The teacher has no say in the way the students are tested, or on what information or skills the tests focus on. Teachers are subordinates to a higher authority. This type of testing is familiar by now and is the one mandated by No Child Left Behind. In this type of testing, the students are broken down into decontextualized individuals. As well, they are pitted against each other in a culture of meritocracy. Tests are used to show who is ready for college and who is deemed successful in high school. The lower grades, though, are not exempt. Those who achieve at higher levels are those who will be

expected to be successful in college, and from there, who will be expected to be successful in life. The main problem here is the break down of community.

This meritocratic system based on decontextualizing tests that individualize students offers little opportunity for developing the skills necessary for living in a community. There is little opportunity for students to work together, and those possibilities will only shrink the lower a school's overall test scores fall. This is because schools with lower test scores must focus on raising the test scores or face closure. Under funding, particularly in lower income and minority dominated districts, will cause an inequitable public education system where higher-income white districts provide somewhat less of an education based on high-stakes testing, and lower-income minority districts will end up providing a more high-stakes testing oriented education. This is not democratic. Yet the individualistic nature of our culture creates a myth to justify this. People are decontextualized to the point where high-income and low-income are believed to have no bearing on life's opportunities. As well, minority status and ethnicity are believed to have no bearing on life's opportunities. The myth of individualism and meritocracy in the U.S. tells the fallacious story that any individual, regardless of their context, can be successful in life, because it is all based on a system of academic achievement that is standardized.

The standardized nature of education is necessary for the myth of meritocracy and is easily created in a highly individualized society. Whoever creates the tests, creates the questions and answers that will be on the tests. Every single student must get the same test; otherwise, no comparisons can be scientifically made. One school cannot be compared to another, unless their tests and testing conditions are identical. As well, no two students can be compared, unless their tests and testing conditions are identical. Yet they still cannot be compared. The possibility of comparing this way is mythical. It is not possible if contexts are taken into account. A person

whose first language is not English cannot be expected to have the same opportunity for success as a person whose first language is English when the test is created and delivered in English. Furthermore, language encapsulates culture. A simple translation is not an adequate solution in this case. Culture cannot be so easily translated. The U.S. is an extremely diverse country. A multicultural approach to testing is the only way to get an accurate picture of the achievement of all cultures in comparison to one another. However, a multicultural perspective is not conducive to high-stakes testing as we know it because individualism, competition in the form of meritocracy, and standardization are the basis for high-stakes testing. As well, recent legislation is adding on to the evolution of high-stakes testing in the U.S. in ways that promote higher levels of individualism, meritocracy, and standardization.

Current legislation and educational reform are recreating individualism and competition through standardization; they are creating new levels of individualism and competition through standardization. Standardized high-stakes tests are now being used as tools to destroy solidarity in the workforce. Unions are being torn apart with legislation and reform so that opposition will be less powerful. Union-destroying legislation creates opportunities for neoliberal practices to step in and take ultimate and total control. Ultimate individualism and competition applied to the economy helps to create neoliberalist policies. Unionized workers have no place in the neoliberal agenda. Like the students, atomized into separate automatons to complete work in their standardized tests, workers must be separated into their individualized pieces. The fluidity of society and the economy must be perpetuated and increased when teachers become like bolts in a machine. One will work as well as another. If one does not fit, throw it away. Replace it with one that will fit, with one of the millions that identically fit. Current legislation, as examined earlier, as exemplified by Michigan, wishes to create a profession in teaching that

allows teachers to flow through positions in schools as easily, as fluid, as capital from country to country under NAFTA or the WTO. High-stakes tests, ever evolving, will be the instruments with which to do this.

In Arizona, a recent bill was signed into law that directly attacks democracy and freedom. Specifically, it aims to eliminate democracy and freedom within public education. HB 2281 is a law that was passed recently in Arizona. This law states that in Arizona a public school cannot have a course that will “advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals” (State of Arizona, 2010). The history of this bill involves schools in Arizona that have attempted to teach their students about the oppression of Mexicans in the U.S.; Mexican American Studies classes were designed in schools to help students understand the oppressive relationship between U.S. mainstream culture and Mexican culture (Au, Bigelow, Christensen, Levine, Karp, Miller, Peterson, Salas, Sokolower, Tempel, Walters, 2012, pp. 8-10). That the bill specifically orders schools to treat students as individuals is of importance here. We can see clearly that those who are in power see a definite threat in people unifying. Specifically, a threat is seen in people unifying on the basis of ethnicity. This is an excellent example of why those in power wish to decontextualize. To remove people from their larger groups, their contexts, is celebrate that tradition of individualism that creates the idea that if we all just work hard we can be successful. Oppression of Mexicans by whites is a myth, they say, because we are all individuals; there are no groups, and groups are illegal. We should only be as successful in life as much as our own individual merits allow. The reality, though, is that there are groups, and those groups are treated differently. The reality is that education is used to separate people into groups so that democracy and freedom will not occur.

If we examine the educational reform plan of Michigan's current governor and the legislation that is being created and passed in Michigan, we can see how the individual price is taken into account, but not the cost to the community. We can see that an individualizing educational system is desired while a community of learning is either feared or abhorred. In the beginning of Governor Snyder's (2011) special plan for educational reform, several problems are outlined: "... less than 50% of our students are proficient in writing . . . ,” we are ranked 39th in the NAEP for 4th grade math, 34th for 4th grade reading and 37th for 8th grade math, “Only 16% of all students statewide are college-ready based on the ACT,” and “238 Michigan high schools have zero college-ready students in all subjects based on the spring 2010 ACT test” (pp. 1-2). These seem to be some large problems, especially when Governor Snyder (2011) adds that Michigan is ranked 21st in the nation for per-pupil spending (p. 1). Snyder (2011) also says, “Michigan's education system is not giving our taxpayers, our teachers, or our students the return on the investment we deserve” (p. 1). Clearly, the problems that the Governor sees in education are with the scores on the standardized tests. He does not mention any kind of social cost. The problem, it seems, is that the schools are not making profits; that is, they are not producing scores that would indicate success. As well, he says, “(w)e can no longer tolerate a system where either schools or students are rewarded for just showing up” (Snyder, 2011, p. 2). This is an individualized explanation for why schools are not making profits. The greater social context is not examined in search of an explanation for why the schools are failing. The reason given is that individuals are not doing their jobs, and they're getting rewarded for it.

One of Governor Snyder's solutions to the problems he stated is a plan for a “Performance-Based System of Schools”. Snyder (2011) says, “(t)here must be greater . . . accountability at the individual school level . . .” (p. 4). Accountability, as discussed earlier,

means holding individuals responsible for successes and failures to make profits. Governor Snyder (2011) proposes here that bonuses be given to schools that can show improvement versus funding schools based on how many students attend the school (p. 4). The schools are decontextualized. There is no mention of the diverse challenges schools must contend with based on the social context of their local community.

As well, the Governor of Michigan proposes in his special educational reform plan that tenure law be restructured (Snyder, 2011, p. 11). Snyder (2011) writes that several changes be made to tenure law in Michigan; one of which is that tenure be granted to teachers who are rated as effective on annual evaluations, and that “40% (is) based on student achievement growth” (p. 11). Of course, he is talking about standardized test scores. Individual teachers should be held accountable for scores on standardized tests. Prior to the passing of legislation in 2011, teachers were granted tenure on evaluations, however, their effectiveness was not tied to student achievement. High-stakes testing has many problems associated with its implementation.

High-Stakes testing is problematic for a variety of reasons. First of all, tests are not that accurate; tests always have margins of error (Ravitch, 2010, p. 152). As well, when tests mean the difference between a teacher having a job or not, an administrator having a job or not, a school having enough money to function or not, alternative means are sometimes used to show gains when learning is not really being effected at all (Ravitch, 2010, p. 155). Ravitch (2010), as well, points out that the student is removed from the equation, that teachers are held accountable for making the student learn, and that a system that is unfair, one that takes no account of the inequalities of opportunity in our society, will create cheaters (p. 155-165). However, Ravitch does not investigate the fact that this process deteriorates democracy, and it does so by individualizing. Competitiveness is fostered in an environment of high-stakes testing. The real

problem comes when you take into account the fact that when schools are seen as not making profits and their funding is cut, then layoffs happen. Prior to 2011, Michigan teachers were laid off on the basis of seniority. However, high-stakes testing, and the kind of accountability we have talked about, coupled with Governor Snyder's ideas about teacher tenure law, and the creation and passage of House Bills 4625-4628, have changed the layoff practice to be based on teacher evaluations. As well, it is important to note that 40% of those evaluations are to be based on student achievement growth. The achievement growth piece does not come into effect until 2013, but one can see the opportunity for a highly competitive environment. Teachers must compete for high evaluation scores because educational budget cuts are being handed down as well. Then, when you add the rest of the Governor's ideas, no caps on charter schools being one of them, you can see that schools will lay off teachers. A teacher, now, can see no benefit in working together with other teachers to improve scores overall; they just want their scores to go up so that they will not be laid off.

Evaluating teachers is a good idea (it has always been done); using scores on standardized tests as 40% of the determining factor of whether a teacher is effective or ineffective is not. Many, though, believe that if students' test scores are tied to individual teachers, and rewards and punishments are distributed on the basis of those scores, then teacher effectiveness in schools will rise: there will be more effective teachers and less ineffective teachers. President Obama's original education plan included a great deal of money to be set aside for states to build data systems which would connect student test scores to individual teachers and systems that would utilize merit pay programs for teachers (Ravitch, 2011, p. 183). Holding individual teachers responsible for test scores ignores social contexts completely. Those who see this type of program as the panacea in U.S. education call these types of reform data-

driven. Data-driven reformers believe that if enough data is collected, tying teachers to their students' test scores, then schools can fill themselves with only the most effective teachers and then raise test scores; the unions, they say, are the only thing standing in the way (Ravitch, 2011, p. 171).

Unions protect teachers from being fired for arbitrary reasons. Data-driven reformers would like to see teachers fired for being ineffective, that is, for not achieving highly on standardized test scores. The research does not support the idea that students will achieve at higher rates if unions are eliminated. In the southern U.S., teacher unions are either weaker than the north or there aren't any unions; however, they have the lowest achievement rates on national assessments (Ravitch, 2011, p. 175). Massachusetts has the highest performance on national assessments in the nation; they also have a very strong and long-standing union (Ravitch, 2011, p. 175). Also, Finland has the highest scores on international reading tests, and their teachers are close to one hundred percent in unions (Ravitch, 2011, p. 175). This data does not show that unions cause students to achieve at higher rates on national tests, but it refutes the argument that unions are the cause of students' poor scores on tests. It does not lead one to believe that unions are destroying education in the U.S. However, states are passing legislation that attacks and destroys unions.

The state government of Michigan, led by Governor Snyder, has introduced and signed numerous bills that work to destroy unions in Michigan. On March 3rd he signed HB 4929, which makes it illegal for school districts to bargain for language in contracts that allows for payroll deductions for union dues (MEA, 2012). HB 4625 or PA 1010'11, which makes teacher evaluations emphasize student achievement, ties teacher probationary status to student achievement, allows taking tenure away because of student achievement, and prohibits

bargaining over evaluations, was signed in July of 2011 (MEA, 2012). HB 4627 or PA 102'11, which prohibits seniority as the factor in layoffs and recalls, was signed in July of 2011 (MEA, 2012). HB 4929 or PA 45'12, which prohibits graduate students from organizing and collectively bargaining, was signed in March of 2012 (MEA, 2012). These are only a handful of the bills that were introduced and signed since 2011 in Michigan which work to weaken, and ultimately, eliminate unions. They are aimed specifically at unions in educational institutions.

The argument over unions in education centers on individualism. Unions allow workers to come together so that they are not split into individual entities in the way Marx described. The state government may argue that unions are preventing quality education from occurring. They may argue that unions protect teachers who do not do their jobs, and they may argue that unions prevent effective teachers from being inspired to work harder; but the underlying philosophy here is guided by a belief that people coming together to create a collective power in the face of an individualizing system is dangerous. Of course, for the capitalist, it is.

High-stakes tests have played an interesting role in the last couple of years. They are no longer the sole way for the federal or state government to hold schools accountable. They are becoming, if they have not already become, ways in which administrators and school boards replace and eliminate teachers. In the school district that I have been teaching in for the last two years, the legislation discussed earlier has been implemented. I work for one of the largest school districts in the state of Michigan. This year was the first year that the layoff process was not based on seniority. Layoffs were based on scores that administrators gave teachers based on observations using rubrics during evaluations. We have been promised that next year, the propositions made earlier by Governor Snyder about teacher layoffs being based on scores from standardized tests, will at least in part, become practice. For the last couple of years, teachers

have been asked by administrators to form groups based on subject areas. These groups are called Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The main role of the PLC is to create standardized tests that can be given by class. These standardized tests are called Common Assessments. For example, all 10th Grade English classes will have 4 common assessments during the course of the semester. The term common assessment is misleading; they are not really common, they are identical. One section of English 10 cannot have a similar assessment, it has to be the same assessment, given the same general time, and following exactly the same procedure. The tests will provide teachers with scores for their individual students. Post-tests and pre-tests have been asked for. The scores will be examined for growth over the course of the semester. The scores for each individual student, organized by class and specific teacher, will then be entered into an electronic data system. Then, scores of students can be compared; more importantly, teachers can be compared. The teacher who raises their students' scores the most will be seen as the most effective teacher.

It seems progressive at first sight. Teachers are playing the role of test creators instead of some removed entity with an unreliable or unknown agenda. However, what has happened, what is happening, is that teachers have been so effected by the last 10 years or so worth of standardization and high stakes testing (for newer teachers it is all they have known from the time they graduated high school to the time they completed teacher preparation at university), that the assessments being created are no different than the assessments that have been forced upon us all by the state, those designed by testing corporations. The individualized, competitive, and standardized way of education that was once created and handed down to teachers from outside hands, has been internalized by the educators, many of whom once opposed these practices and their principles. Teachers have become the creators of their own instruments of

surveillance. And as they enter data into the data system, they become their own agents of surveillance. At the end, they are asked to gather all the data and present the numbers to the administrators assigned to them. The administrator simply has to compare the data, see who raised scores enough and see who did not. This data will then, in addition to the scores from the evaluative rubrics, assign a teacher the rating of highly effective, effective, minimally effective, or ineffective. Multiple years of a minimally effective or ineffective rating can cause teachers to be fired. As well, schools will be required to send letters home to the parents of any student who has a teacher that has been rated ineffective or minimally effective multiple years in a row. The system individualizes, standardizes, and creates high levels of competition.

This system makes use of long held traditions within U.S. culture, but it does so with some specific plans. The agenda of those who have created this system, as shown by the research earlier, is to divert money away from public education into other avenues. Public education in the U.S. is being torn apart from within the teacher and outward, to every tenet of the system. Democracy falls further and further from becoming reality, as education becomes something that the wealthy will have access to of a higher quality than the poor. In addition, because of the decontextualizing nature of the process, inequalities will be great between ethnicities as well as by socioeconomic status.

The wealthy will profit from this. They will be able to afford a good education for their children. When their children succeed in school, they can say it is because their children are smarter than those who did not succeed. When their children go off to good colleges, they will say their children are going off to good colleges because they earned those opportunities through merit shown by scores on standardized tests. After all, we all take the same tests, right? Fair is fair. Those students who attend and graduate from prestigious universities will be offered the

best jobs, the highest-paying jobs, positions of power and prestige. They will believe they have earned these positions because of their hard work. And when they look across the cityscape to the less fortunate, to the neighborhoods where schools were free, they will be grateful that the country they have inherited is so egalitarian that it provides free education to those who cannot afford it. They may sometimes wonder why everyone they work with has similar backgrounds to them, but they won't judge those who didn't work as hard as they did because they will remember some words similar to those spoken to Nick Carraway, that well-known narrator of F. Scott Fitzgerald's (1995) biting critique of 1920s society and the death of the American Dream written some 100 years earlier, those words spoken to Nick by his father: "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone, just remember that all the people in this world, haven't had the advantages that you've had," (p. 2).

Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings of this research show that individualism, to a great extent, has influenced contemporary education reform in the U.S. The research here indicates that current legislation, to a great extent, is part of an individualist tradition in the U.S. The literature in this area of study, though, does not deal specifically with individualism and how it relates to education.

This research study drew from various sources to investigate a question that was not found specifically in the literature. Research that was studied here confirmed the answer to the question, as stated above. Specifically, research had not been done to put together what this thesis explored. It is difficult to compare what I found with prior research because I did not see others asking the exact same questions, or at least not in the same way that my questions were asked. Plenty of research has been done on individualism, but not to the extent in which it influences contemporary school reform and related legislation.

My findings do not differ greatly from prior research on individualism. They add to the body of research that expresses the high level of individualism in U.S. culture. As well, my findings show that individualism is evolving into a new form. This is similar to what others have found in their studies of culture, in particular, individualism.

My findings on education do not differ greatly from other educational studies in what they have said of the harms of standardized testing and high-stakes testing. This study has looked at standardized and high-stakes testing in perhaps a slightly unique light, but what was found adds on to what has already been found. That is, standardized testing impacts students and teachers in ways that are not conducive to quality learning, in particular, learning that would promote a democratic society. Prior research on the effects of standardized and high-stakes testing shows that learning is affected greatly. Perhaps my study only looked at those effects a

little differently. Much has been said about the affects of standardized testing on students and teachers, but specifically, extensive research has not been done that shows the connection between standardized testing, its ill effects on students and teachers, and individualism. As well, prior research does not specifically deal with high-stakes testing in terms of individualism.

The role that individualism has played in the implementation, support, and effects of high-stakes testing has not been a focus of a great amount of prior research. Much prior research shows that high-stakes testing is not a good idea, that it does not promote what most educators would call good education. It does not produce high quality educators in the way that proponents of high-stakes testing say that it does. The research shows that proponents either do not realize that they are wrong, or that they are hiding the truth. My research only took that research in a specific direction: that of showing the role that individualism plays in all of this. My research adds to the body of critical research as a whole.

This study fits in with the body of research that looks critically at education in the U.S. Specifically, a critical view applied to education in the U.S. and how neoliberalism has begun to increasingly shape our public institutions and culture. Everything that this study demonstrates fits in with the growing body of research that opposes neoliberal practices, specifically in education. There has been some research that has discussed this in relation to individualist traditions in the U.S. Research has shown that individualism is a cultural characteristic that becomes embodied in neoliberal thinking, policies, and practices. The hope, with this research, is that more will be done to investigate specific traditions within U.S. culture so that specific traditions can be discarded and others can be held and encouraged to evolve.

This notion fits in with the Ecojustice field that is growing today. This research, though it does not make use of a strict ecojustice framework, does utilize some aspects of the ecojustice

perspective. The ecojustice perspective wishes to sort traditions. Traditions must be sorted to indicate those which are destructive and those which are not. This study, in hopes of adding to the growing body of ecojustice work, shows that individualism is a destructive tradition. The study did not examine the role that individualism plays in human interaction with the natural world. That was outside of the scope of this study, however, further research in that direction would add to what this study has found.

Further research is needed in many areas. First of all, more research is needed to investigate education that is not highly individualistic. There are schools out there that are less individualist than others. In particular, education that occurs within other cultural traditions must be researched. This would help to create a comparison: a cross-cultural, anthropological even, comparison between individualistic education and non- or less-individualistic education. As well, much research is needed in non-individualistic, or collective, cultures. There is a lot of literature out there on these topics. The research for this study did not include those kinds of comparison. This is one of the main limitations of this study.

As well, my study has not offered a solution to the problems associated with this high level of individualism, high-stakes testing, and standardization. My study has not provided a course of action for providing a meaningful education reform for public education in the U.S. If more cross-cultural and comparison research is done on educational systems and practices, then there will be a better idea of alternative approaches to the type of education reforms we are dealing with in the U.S. right now. The proposition I would like to make is a design for learning within a school that would promote the skills needed to function appropriately and democratically within a community. A Community of Learning model could be applied to schools to foster this type of education.

Further research is needed in this area, but a Community of Learning model for public schools in the U.S. could be an alternative to the current trends in education. A Community of Learning would involve many things, but the main point would be to provide greater opportunities for students to engage in being the subjects of their education, playing an active role in the creation and delivery of lessons, and creating and participating in democratic practices that effect their local communities. It is beyond the scope of this study to go into greater detail about this Community of Learning, however, if more research were conducted in the areas mentioned above, to see to what extent schools out there are doing these things and how effective they are, then a detailed model could be diagrammed and recreated in any school.

Schools must have specified directions in which to go. Most schools do not have a direction in mind other than to get students through with good grades and high test scores so that they can move on and be successful in the next level of their educational or professional lives. These are excellent ideas; they are important goals to have for the youth of the U.S., however, they will not help to create democratic societies where freedom is real and valued. Schools must decide what kinds of communities they wish to create, what kinds of societies they wish to be a part of. Schools are not passive entities with simple jobs to perform, and simple services to render. Schools are, have always been, and need to be, powerful active forces that shape the communities they exist within, either effecting change within a society or perpetuating the current state of a society. Schools create and recreate culture. They need to realize the power in this, and they need to decide whether or not the culture they are creating and recreating, one marred by social injustices, one in which democracy is suffocated under authoritarianism, one in which commercialism replaces true freedom, is the one that they wish to create and recreate. If it is not, current reform trends and legislation must be met with opposition and alternatives must be

created and used to effect change. This is the further research that must be done; these are the further actions that must be taken.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Through a deep textual analysis, examining secondary sources from a variety of disciplines and primary sources which illustrate current legislation and reform, this study has shown that individualism exists in the culture of the U.S. in diverse and complicated ways. There is an extensive history of individualism in the U.S. It has caused society to be created in certain ways. Society has set up institutions that reinforce individualist perspectives. Public education in the U.S. is an institution that recreates individualism. Individualism is recreated in the way schooling is organized. From the way people see achievement, to the ways that teachers are hired and fired, individualism is a driving philosophy with great power. Individualism, a powerful cultural force, though, does not support a democratic society. It supports a neoliberal agenda.

Free-flowing capital, a workforce with no security, the privatization of public institutions, citizens as no more than consumers, individuals cut from the bonds of community--these are the arms of the neoliberal agenda. These are the things created and recreated by education in the U.S. These are the things young men and women are taking with them into the world as they leave the last grades of high school, and they are the things they will find in their years of higher education. They are the things that will encircle them as they work within the economic system, making their way through adulthood.

As schools prepare new generations to live in this world they can continue to produce broken individuals in search of security that consumption can never provide. "Consumer markets" can make promises of security, but they cannot deliver those things that humanize us: "roots, kinship, friendship, love" (Bauman, 2004, p. 130).

Economic philosophies and business models cannot be the engines of education anymore. A new perspective toward education must be adopted in the U.S. Schools must educate using the principles of real democracy. In order for this to happen, individualist practices must be examined and replaced by community-building practices.

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