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Protecting Privilege: Resistance to Standardized Testing and the Reproduction of Class Status

by

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Introduction

In the spring of 2001, with the annual standardized test fast approaching, revolt was brewing in one of the wealthiest, most educated and highest achieving school districts in country: Scarsdale, New York. It began when the Superintendent of Scarsdale Public Schools polled parents to see if they would support entirely eliminating the district's test-prep curriculum. An overwhelming ninety percent of parents said they agreed. Quickly, what started with an opinion poll grew into a PTA led boycott of the state's standardized test. Over 200 parents rallied to remove their children from the exams with "the precision of seasoned rebels, communicating by cellphone and using specially designated cars and SUVs to pick up children who left school only for the duration of the test" (Green). By the end of the ordeal, CNN and NBC had covered the event on national TV and the parents had sent their message that standardized tests deny "local control in the name of what they say is accountability" all the way to the nation's Capitol (Green).

The fact that this very unique event took place in a district where "high test scores are as familiar to the community as spacious Tudor-style mansions and student admissions to top colleges" is quite remarkable because, without a doubt, Scarsdale's high test scores have bolstered its students' ability to gain admission to elite universities and land high-profile jobs (Green). People move to districts like Scarsdale largely because of their test scores and school counselors make sure to include such scores on transcripts sent to prestigious colleges. So what spurred this PTA led "revolution" (Green)? Why was it that a district that had benefited so much from testing also resisted it so fiercely? For those who are already out-performing

nearly everyone else in the country, how could a couple extra days of testing create an outrage so strong that it took this small town all the way to Washington D.C.?

These questions have become even more important in recent years since standardization in education has become an increasingly salient issue. Less than a year after this event in Scarsdale, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). His signature not only put into effect the most comprehensive change in national education law since the federal government first became involved in education, but also elevated the standardized test to a level of unprecedented importance. For the first time in history, every public school is now required to report test scores for all subgroups of students and can receive harsh sanctions based entirely on those scores.

In the past six years, standardized testing has dramatically reshaped the landscape of education in America. Scarsdale-style resistance is becoming more and more commonplace.[1] There have been multiple high-profile lawsuits challenging No Child Left Behind, several wealthy, high-achieving school districts have turned down federal monies in order to avoid the law's accountability measures and a plethora of editorials condemning high-stakes testing have peppered the opinion pages of newspapers nationwide. In short, in select sectors of society, No Child Left Behind has rapidly become a four-letter word. The movement towards standardization extends beyond No Child Left Behind as well. States are collaborating to develop shared, standardized curriculums, Advanced Placement tests are becoming nearly necessary for admission to the country's best colleges and topics such as science and

[1] Similar boycotts have occurred in other wealthy, high achieving districts such as Brookline, Cambridge and Amherst, Massachusetts (Tantraphol) (FairTest 2000).

writing have now become required subjects on some states' tests (Achieve, Inc.)(College Board). Yet, not everyone sees these changes as negative. According to one commentator, "Parents in poor and urban districts have generally either been silent or maintained that tests are a way to force their children's schools to teach at least the minimum" (Zernike). Minority groups, such as the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights, have hailed the increased standardization of NCLB as "the most important piece of civil rights legislation going right now" (Rigdon).

It is widely recognized that the educational system in the United States is the site of a perpetual social struggle for credentials, economic gain and social status (Collins)(Bowles) (Bourdieu 1984). Therefore, it is imperative to understand the social context of the standardization movement; why some people resist this movement while others continue to push for even more standardization. Why is it that those progressive elites who have traditionally dominated standardized tests increasingly protest them while those who consistently score lower are often found supporting further standardization? This essay seeks to answer this question. It begins by analyzing the relevant theories of social support for and opposition to standardization offered by Linda McNeil, Deborah Meier, Michael Apple and Pierre Bourdieu. It then applies these theoretical maps to three main areas of research. The first of these is a comprehensive analysis of letters-to-the-editor, local newspaper articles and public statements opposing testing within the state of Connecticut. Second, the essay examines three major instances of community and institutional resistance to No Child Left Behind within Connecticut. Lastly, the essay considers how this conflict over standardization extends far beyond the confines of

Connecticut and NCLB. The research suggests that the best map of this struggle is provided by Pierre Bourdieu, who demonstrates that resistance to standardization within the educational system comes from an inherited elite fighting to preserve invisible modes of evaluation that reproduce the privileged status of a select few. Furthermore, there is also evidence that indicates support for standardization may be linked to a rising middle class working to compete with the established elites.

Literature Review

For some time, advocates of a progressive approach to education have outlined their opposition to standardized testing. One of the most common critiques of standardized tests is that they utilize an inherently flawed metric of analysis. In her book, *Contradictions of School Reform: Educational Costs of Standardized Testing*, Linda McNeil makes precisely this case. She states that standardized tests have "trivialized and fragmented" the content of courses, making it impossible to have "a deep understanding of the richer knowledge of the course"(McNeil 235). She argues that tests simplify and categorize knowledge, making it less accurate and less approachable. In McNeil's view, the abstract nature of a standardized test necessarily removes it from the actual, embodied context of students' lives. Moreover, because all learning must be tethered to the standards of the test, a teacher cannot teach an "authentic curriculum," because a standardized curriculum "distances course content from the cultures of the students" (McNeil 235). McNeil cites many examples of schools that have abandoned large portions of their traditional curriculum in lieu of test-prep workbooks that focus exclusively on preparing for the state-administered, standardized exam. The end result of this is

"[a standardized curriculum that] is so generic that it does not involve the mind of the learner, it rarely involves the mind of the teacher, and it sits somewhere in the institution"(McNeil 248). Courses, McNeil Argues, become less relevant, less engaging and therefore less educational; standardized testing reduces the real learning that occurs in schools.

According to advocates of progressive education, the limitations of standardization extend beyond the walls of the classroom. By applying McNeil's critique of standardization to a larger social context, Deborah Meier laments how No Child Left Behind's standardization takes agency away from individual communities. Just as a standardized test makes knowledge less relevant to the individual student, "By relying on standardized tests as the only measure of school quality, NCLB usurps the right of local communities to define the attributes of a sound education" (Meier 71). NCLB has moved the locus of educational decision making from the individual school and local district to the state boards of education, where decisions about content standards and test providers are made. Meier points out that the concerns of small communities are lost when local schools have less ability to make decisions regarding leadership and evaluations. She believes this delocalization makes schools less effective, because, "When all the stakes rest on data that rests in the hands of distant authorities, the data itself becomes less and less reliable" (Meier 75). According to Meier, with standardized tests, schools are held accountable to a distant authority that may be out of touch with local concerns.

One can see the parallels between McNeil and Meier's critiques. Standardization usurps local relevance in both cases— on the level of the individual

for the former and the level of the community for the latter. By definition standardized tests only evaluate a limited number of characteristics through a set mode of evaluation; these may not include all those attributes needed for the success of an individual or a particular community. Meier states, "At best, standardized tests measure only a very small portion of what is vital for adult success in contemporary life. They totally ignore vast areas of critical significance (such as oral language, teamwork, reliability, initiative, and judgment)" (Meier 77). By being so narrow, standardized tests fail to include many of the skills needed for life in a community. For Meier, without local school board based democratic accountability, there is no accountability, because accountability must exist directly between the school and the community it serves. And, because all communities are different, she argues that a one-size-fits-all approach can never meet the needs of these localities; "even if it were possible to claim that one pedagogy was superior to another, in the field of education, as in the field of medicine, one solution does not fit all" (Meier 67). For Meier, schools need to teach in diverse ways and each must be measured with a unique rubric of success.

Drawing from the work of McNeil and Meier, it is possible to understand some of reasons why there is resistance to standardization and pinpoint where this resistance may come from. McNeil points towards those individuals whose curriculum has become "trivialized" and "irrelevant" while Meier highlights those communities where local control over decision-making is being threatened by the expansion of standardization. While helpful for understanding the rationale for opposing standardization, these authors' studies are limited because they do not

include a critical analysis of who has been affected the most by standardized tests and who is only tangentially affected by the "delocalization" of decision-making and curricula. Even more, Meier and McNeil pay little attention to who might benefit from standardization.

In his research on the relationship between power and standardization, Michael Apple begins to delineate the particularities of who loses and who benefits from standardization in education and the standardizing tests of NCLB in particular. Apple explains how educational systems, by only valuing certain types of knowledge, always benefit a particular sector of society. This process is governed by two principles. First, "there is always a selective appropriation of knowledge" because only a certain type of content or mode of acquiring and expressing information is qualified as "knowledge" by the educational institution (Apple 74). Second, knowledge is "subject to ideological transformations because of the various specialized and/or political interests whose conflicts structure the recontextualizing field" (Apple 74). Even within the limited field of information certified as "knowledge," special interest groups shape the meaning and value of that knowledge. Certain types of information and ways of expressing knowledge are valued more than others depending on who has control of the education, job and political markets. Using Apple's understanding of education, we cannot separate any curriculum, pedagogy or policy from the interests it serves because certain types of knowledge and ways of measuring knowledge will always be valued more than others. Apple sees that there are those who are invested in standardized testing and those who are disenfranchised by it.

The thrust of Apple's argument is that educational systems have biases that fit into the interests and investments of certain social groups. With a somewhat similar goal as this essay, Apple's work focuses on applying this framework to uncover the special interests within No Child Left Behind. Apple traces the parallels between the conservatives' "set of historical assumptions about 'tradition'" and the particular histories (white and middle class) included in standardized tests (Apple 40). He sees capital's investment in "a drastic truncating of the curriculum" that focuses on the basic skills needed to produce a diligent workforce and in the law's push towards privatizing education (Apple 95). In analyzing NCLB, Apple locates the push for standardization within "the needs of neoliberals and neoconservatives," or in other words, within the logic of capital and tradition (Apple 48). Apple also makes note of another group that has an investment in standardization: the narrow segment of society that contains "people with backgrounds in management and efficiency techniques who provide the technical and 'professional' support for accountability" (Apple 105). These are no more than the statisticians and managers directly involved in the testing and accountability industry. Therefore, apart from capital and neoconservatives, Apple only locates support for standardization among those few whose "own mobility *depends* on the expansion" of the standardized test industry itself (Apple 48). Apple finds three groups who support standardization, neoliberals, neoconservatives and testing professionals; each of these groups has a self-interest in the educational system privileging a standardized form of knowledge.

Apple's analysis is powerful in its ability to show who is invested in the state's standardization of education but his analysis of power only examines the hegemonic ways in which education is used by the Right, overlooking other forces at work (Apple 83). Apple completely takes for granted the self-interests of those progressives on the Left. Those resisting No Child Left Behind must have their own biases, just as those supporting it do. For this reason, Apple falls short by taking for granted the motivations social groups have to resist standardization; he fails to apply his analysis of power to the progressive opposition to testing of which he is a part. Apple uncovers the self-interest of those supporting standardization but never examines a similar logic for those opposed to standardized testing.

All of the authors mentioned above articulate powerful arguments about the negative realities of standardization and the motivations of those who support it, but they all lack needed self-reflexivity. Meier, McNeil and Apple fail to lay out the self-interested class logic behind arguments against standardized tests. They focus so much on those currently advocating standardization that they fail to critically analyze those who have often dictated systems of education in the past: the bourgeois, progressive, social elites.

In contrast to all of these scholars, Pierre Bourdieu offers a more encompassing theory that includes the class logic all of social groups. While Bourdieu's work includes Apple's insight that educational systems privilege certain groups by privileging certain knowledge, it also expands Apple's field of vision to include those who most strongly oppose standardization— the well-educated elites who also have much invested in the education system. In fact, Bourdieu finds that it

is these educated elites who are the most dependent on schools for securing their own privilege—not the neoliberals who want to control the job market or the neoconservatives who hope to preserve traditional values. This is because for these social elites it is only "by converting social hierarchies into academic hierarchies, [that] the educational system fulfils a function of legitimating which is more and more necessary to the perpetuation of the 'social order'" of the elite class (Bourdieu 1977, 496). The whole basis of well-educated social elites' privileged status comes from the educational system. This being said, it is time to begin to reevaluate the struggle over standardization with this social group in view.

In his seminal work, *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu underscores the importance of the debate over standardization. Along with Apple, Bourdieu found that there are social groups who benefit from a standardized definition of knowledge. But more than just this, he found there are those who gain from a non-standardized definition of knowledge as well. Bourdieu writes that we need to see all struggles over standardization as efforts to secure privilege in the educational market. In short:

> "what is ultimately at stake in everyday struggles over culture is the transformation of the price-forming mechanisms defining the relative values of the cultural productions associated with educational capital and social trajectory (and the primary variables through which they are grasped)" (Bourdieu 1984, 94).

Whoever controls the "price-forming mechanisms" of schooling, whatever group dictates what type of knowledge is valued, determines who succeeds in school and in "social trajectory." No wonder there is conflict over standardization! The struggle Bourdieu outlines here is precisely the same struggle being fought in Scarsdale and waged against standardized testing all across the nation. So then, who is on either side of this debate and what is at stake?

Bourdieu delineates two sides in this struggle. He writes that struggles over standardized testing, "are fought between those who are identified with the scholastic definition of culture and those scholastic modes of acquisition, and those who defend a 'non-institutional' culture and relation to culture'" (Bourdieu 1984, 92). According to Bourdieu, the battle over standardization is divided between two ways of defining, acquiring, and measuring knowledge; there are those who prefer "scholastic" and those who prefer "non-institutional" knowledge. There is a perpetual fight over what type of knowledge will be valued the most.

By using the phrase "scholastic" culture, Bourdieu is referring to the quantified, standards based, content driven, form of education used in standardized tests and curricula. Bourdieu explains that in this traditional educational institution:

> "In order for it to transmit at all, it has to perform a degree of rationalization of what it transmits. Thus, for example, in place of practical schemes of classification, which are always partial and linked to practical contexts, it puts explicit, standardized taxonomies, fixed once and for all in the form of synoptic schemas or dualistic typologies… that can be reproduced in virtually identical form by all the agents subject to its action"(Bourdieu 1984, 67).

In scholastic education, knowledge is always categorized into "standardized taxonomies;" correct answers are "explicit" in themselves, with no need for justification; and, the right response "can be reproduced in virtually identical form" by anyone. While Meier and McNeil would call this dry, trivialized, and not locally relevant, Bourdieu notes this mode of evaluation has the advantage of being straightforward and accessible because it "can be reproduced in virtually identical form" by anyone who has access to these well-defined taxonomies and standards. In this form of schooling, there is a well-defined correct answer and "a degree of

rationalization" that allows anyone to learn the specific steps to get to that answer, as dry and trivialized as the steps might be (Bourdieu 1984, 66). Those who study the logarithms in math, memorize the facts in history, and learn the phonics of reading are going to be the ones who succeed. Unlike Apple, Bourdieu does not limit support of this type of education to neoconservatives and neoliberals. Instead, he sees that it is also the rising middle class, the "parvenus," who has much to gain from standardization, as this class fraction has the resources to learn the standardized taxonomies but lacks inherited bourgeois cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, 95).

All of this is quite the opposite of what Bourdieu defines as the "non-institutional" relation to education. According to Bourdieu, non-institutional culture is founded on the logic of the well-educated bourgeoisie who value manners and self-expression over well-defined taxonomies of knowledge.[2] A standardized evaluation does not fit the tastes of these cultural elites because, "both in its subject matter and in the form of exchange it imposes, a survey by questionnaire… is the complete opposite of ordinary conversation; it has nothing in common with… the high society chatter which shuns pedantic precision and didactic insistence" (Bourdieu 1984, 95). Elite culture, which prides itself on subtlety, complexity and distinction, abhors strict definitions of knowledge. There is a "supposed spontaneity" in the knowledge of cultural elites such that, "the sovereign pleasure of the aesthete dispenses with concepts" entirely (Bourdieu 1984, 66). An example of

[2] Bourdieu goes at lengths to precisely identify this social grouping. When he speaks of bourgeois social elites he is referring to the well-educated socialites with old, inherited cultural capital and not those sections of the bourgeoisie with vast amounts of economic capital who have relatively little cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, 115). Following Bourdieu, this essay uses the terms "bourgeois" and "elites" to refer to this specific class fraction, even thought it varies from the traditional Marxian usage.

this that Bourdieu uses is those elites who say that the beauty of classical music cannot be rationalized or categorized but must be experienced by the individual in the concert hall. Instead of a scholastic, well-defined knowledge, this class fraction emphasizes the importance of manners, putting "'education' before 'instruction', 'character' before 'intelligence', sport before culture" (Bourdieu 1984,93). In essence, in non-institutional bourgeois culture, animated and unique self-expression is valued over the accuracy of the actual content expressed.

Bourdieu is confident that the reason for elites' particular valuation of knowledge is not arbitrary; it is not simply due to the "supposed spontaneity" of taste that elites claim it to be. Rather, it has its own class logic. Bourdieu writes that, "the dominant groups are always on the side of the most insensible and invisible mode of acquisition" because these modes of acquisition and evaluation are the most able to benefit their inherited manners and values (Bourdieu 1984, 72). As we shall see later, as the rising middle class attempts to use standardized tests to get ahead, the bourgeoisie always tries to skirt that standardization evaluation in lieu of a more "invisible mode of acquisition."

All this being said, we must reevaluate the progressive theories of McNeil and Meier mentioned above. McNeil argued that standardized tests trivialized learning for the individual and Meier argued the same for communities. But who's learning do they trivialize? The taxonomies of knowledge included in standardized tests are quite consonant with a working-class, visible pedagogy. Therefore, the progressive, student-centered values inherent in McNeil's "authentic curriculum" may actually be less accessible to the working class. Similarly, Meier's calls for evaluating

"teamwork, reliability, initiative, and judgment" are likely to end up supporting an "invisible mode of acquisition" that only privileges the non-institutional few. By opposing standardized testing, McNeil and Meier run the risk of devaluing those individuals and social groups who prefer standardized knowledge.

Multiple sociologists have found a division between scholastic and non-institutional culture similar to that observed by Bourdieu. Basil Bernstein's work analyzed the class values inherent in different types of schooling. He writes that for all educational systems, "class assumptions carry consequences for those children who are able to exploit the possibilities of the pedagogic practices"(Bernstein 2007, 103). For either progressive or traditional systems of education, certain pedagogies benefit particular classes within society. Bernstein's research found two main pedagogies, visible and invisible, which can be mapped onto Bourdieu's scholastic and non-institutional cultures, respectively. For example, in a visible pedagogy, "the rules of social order are generally explicit and specific" (Bernstein 2007, 109). In a visible pedagogy the hierarchy of the teacher is explicit; the educational system sets all the rules and decides the specifics of what is right and what is wrong. In short, this visible pedagogy is a back-to-the-basics, banking model of technical education that fits perfectly with a standardized test. Furthermore, this type of pedagogy privileges a particular class: "The assumptions of a visible pedagogy are more likely to be met by that fraction of the middle class whose employment has a direct relation to the economic field (production, distribution, and the circulation of capital)" (Bernstein 2007, 103). The assumptions of this visible, scholastic mode of education affirm the cultural capital of a working middle-class.

In opposition to this, the assumptions of an invisible pedagogy are likely to benefit those elites "who have a direct relation not to the economic field but to the field of symbolic control..." (Bernstein 2007, 103). The values embedded in the invisible pedagogy that Bernstein describes are precisely those traits passed onto children through an elite cultural capital. Invisible pedagogy values individual expression, critical thinking and similarly fuzzy traits. With invisible pedagogy,

> "the control of the teacher over the child is implicit rather than explicit;" "the teacher arranges the *context* which the child is expected to re-arrange and explore;" "the child apparently has wide powers over what he selects, over how he structures, and over the time scale of his activities;" "there is a reduced emphasis upon the transmission and acquisition of specific skills;" and "the criteria for evaluating the pedagogy are multiple and diffuse and so not easily managed" (Bernstein 1977, 511).

The cultural capital of elites is embedded in these modes of self-expression and relations with others. Articulating a personal opinion, engaging in critical reasoning, and expressing feelings are all characteristics valued by the elite, non-institutional culture. In schools dominated by an invisible pedagogy, it is the expression of these mannerisms that take priority over the accuracy of what is said. As a consequence of this need for unique expression, there is a direct conflict between these traits and standardization, because the nuances of personal expression are not easily expressed in a standardized test. Critical thinking, apparently, cannot be confined to a fill-in-the-bubble Scantron sheet.

In her work on the parenting styles of working and middle-class parents, Annette Lareau, like Bourdieu and Bernstein, found that social class largely determines how a parent raises their child and how that child interacts with the educational institution. Lareau has even called her research a contemporary,

empirical application of Bourdieu's work (Lareau 2003). Studying poor and working-class families, Lareau found that "Negotiations between parents and children… were infrequent. Parents tended to use firm directives and they expected prompt, positive instructions" (Lareau 2007, 340). This mode of parenting matches the rigid, inflexible demands of a standards-based curriculum. In both cases, parent or school, authority is explicit and disregarding that authority results in a penalty—in the form of "physical punishment" from a parent or in the form of lower scores on a standardized test (Lareau 2007, 340).

Following Bourdieu's theory, the parenting style of the upper classes reflects a more communicative and subjective cultural capital. Lareau found that "The extensive use of verbal negotiation is a pattern… observed in all of the middle-class homes... Talking fosters that development of children's' knowledge and opinions. Middle-class children learn to articulate their own views" (Lareau 2003, 110). Unlike those in the working class, upper/middle class children are taught critical thinking and self-expression skills at home.[3] Not surprisingly, these characteristics are those valued by the schools such children attend: "Schools expect children to know how to reason with one another… [and use] exceptional verbal skills that enable children to make special requests of adults in positions of power" (Lareau 2003, 111). The cultural capital cultivated in higher-class homes corresponds with the cultural capital rewarded by the higher reaches of the educational institution. Students with such skills of expression and reasoning can "'customize' certain

[3] A limitation of Lareau's (and to a lesser extent Bernstein's) work is how broadly she defines these social classes, grouping middle and upper classes together. The characteristics identified in this essay try to isolate more clearly the tastes of elite culture.

situations, and in doing so receive benefits," granted by their teachers (Lareau 2003, 111). This is the same ability possessed by the bourgeois student described by Bourdieu, who "chooses his terrain, sidesteps difficulties, [and] turns questions of knowledge into questions of preference" (Bourdieu 1984, 89).

In a similar manner of gaining privileges outside of the well-defined authority of a visible pedagogy, the transmission of elite learning is not confined to the schoolyard. While a visible pedagogy would expect a student's achievement to be measured exclusively by how they actually perform in school, Lareau found that well-educated upper classes emphasize what happens outside of the classroom. Parents foster "growth through involvement in music, church athletics, and academics" (Lareau 2007, 333). Lareau found instances where the direct costs of such activities was up to $4,000 per year, not even including the indirect expenses of taking time off work and forgoing other activities. One parent summarizes well the value placed on such extra-curricular activities by this social class: "I'm convinced that this rich experience will make [my son] a better person, a better citizen, a better husband, a better father—certainly a better student" (Lareau 2007, 331). The logic of this class's cultural capital argues that the skills and mannerisms learned from non-academic activities such as piano lessons and swim team will make better students. They have a serious advantage if the school system values extra-curricular activities, self-expression and leadership over standardized scholastic knowledge.

While Bernstein and Lareau's research succeeds in defining these two pedagogies and the class values they each privilege, their work does not examine the

conflicts over who controls the type of knowledge that is valued in the educational system. They do not see that the expansion of a working-class, visible pedagogy of standardization could actually be used to pose a very dangerous threat to the status of elites. To understand these struggles, one must to return to Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu, well-educated, bourgeois elites gain a strong advantage whenever their own cultural capital is valued by the educational system. He explains: "The emphasis on manners, and through them on mode of acquisition, enables seniority within a class to be made the basis of the hierarchy within the class; it also gives the recognized possessors of the legitimate manner an absolute, arbitrary power to recognize or exclude"(Bourdieu 1984, 95). When the mode of acquiring knowledge is not explicit, and the mode of evaluation is equally fuzzy, those in power have an "arbitrary power" to decide who succeeds and who fails. They can subjectively evaluate students on whether or not they have the correct, invisibly acquired manners. Bourdieu found evidence of this in his empirical research when he saw that, "The differences linked to social origin tend to increase as one moves away from the academic curriculum, from literature to painting or classical music" (Bourdieu 1984, 65). When tested on "scholastic" content, individuals from all classes performed nearly the same, but when the focus moved away from strictly academic topics, those born into more elite families moved ahead. Thus, it is by keeping the emphasis of evaluation away from the traditional, standardized academic subjects that bourgeois elites maintain their relative advantage.

Movement towards "scholastic" learning is exactly what hurts elite students' ability to compete:

> "above all- and this is why aesthetes so abhor pedagogues and pedagogy- the rational teaching of art provides substitutes for direct experience, it offers short cuts on the long path of familiarization, it makes possible practices which are the product of concepts and rules instead of springing from the supposed spontaneity of taste, thereby offering a solution to those who hope to make up for lost time" (Bourdieu 1984, 68).

Visible pedagogies shortcut and delegitimize knowledge valued by elites. Visible pedagogies shortcut a lifetime of experiences by replacing them with rational explanations. This allows the rising middle class to "make up for" all of their "lost time" of not having bourgeois experiences, ultimately allowing them to compete with the inherited elites in a manner not possible in invisible modes of evaluation. By rationalizing and categorizing knowledge, scholastic learning delegitimizes the supposed spontaneity of elite taste and turns invisibly acquired manners into explicit rubrics of knowledge. With a visible pedagogy, the beauty of Beethoven can no longer only be acquired and expressed through taking lessons and learning the music—studying the standardized curriculum and filling in a bubble on a test (completely and with a #2 pencil!) is good enough.[4]

Bourdieu's theory does more than merely describe two forms of knowledge that are in opposition to each other; it maps scholastic and non-institutional learning onto a struggle between "class fractions" fighting for "control over the conditions of their social reproduction"(Bourdieu 1984, 120). This struggle is fought, on the one hand, by the "parvenus"—or rising middle class—whose relatively new presence on the educational battlefield lends itself towards an institutionalized, quantified valorization of knowledge because such a formation of

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[4] While not the main focus of this essay, it should be noted that this way in which standardization can be used to strip elites of their privilege and thereby benefit the lower classes is completely missed by Lareau.

knowledge grants instant access to success, regardless of family history (Bourdieu 1984, 93, 95). The established bourgeoisie, on the other hand, have always fought for an educational system that privileges their inherited cultural capital over the information gained exclusively through schooling. In this struggle for social reproduction, the parvenus' children "compete dangerously with the children of the bourgeoisie on the terrain of the most academically defined academic competence" (Bourdieu 1984, 93). The bourgeois elites will always resist complete standardization in order to allow space for a non-institutional "terrain," or mode of evaluation, that privies their own inherited cultural capital. It is the rising middle class who wants to make the "terrain" of "the most academically defined academic competence" the *only* playing field in the educational system. This would allow them to be measured against the bourgeoisie with the exact same standards, eliminating any 'exceptionalism' and giving the parvenus a chance to use education as ladder up the social strata. And for this reason the well-educated, progressive, bourgeois elites have every reason to oppose standardized modes of evaluation.

Now, the limitations of Michael Apple's map have become even clearer. We can see that Bourdieu offers two main advantages over Apple. First, Apple completely misses the self-interested role progressives play in opposing standardization. Second, he fails to see a major player in the struggle over standardization: the rising middle class that has so much to gain from a standardized educational system. Only Bourdieu's theory encompasses the entirety of this conflict.

This struggle over standardization and social reproduction is not new. Historically, it was precisely this battle that influenced practices of exclusionary college admissions. At first, prestigious colleges created requirements that all applicants must know Greek and Latin, which were rarely included in the standard public school curriculum. Eventually these had to be refined as more and more public school students were meeting the minimum requirements and threatening the admission of those with legacy (Karabel). As an increasing number of Jewish students —a perfect example of the parvenus— fought for admission into elite colleges, admissions offices responded with a heavily reliance on the "qualities of personality and character" in the application process (Karabel 114). This is just one of many historical examples of how the rising middle class has tried to compete on the same standard as the established elites, but as they competed too dangerously, the elite colleges simply created a new, more invisible mode of evaluation.

Today, we still see mechanisms that favor elite cultural capital within systems of education. In the most accessible mainstream institutions this may be less true, but as one moves up to more elite schools and universities the value placed on "non-institutional" culture becomes increasingly important. This is evident in the fact that, "as one rises in the educational hierarchy… more value comes to be set on ways of using knowledge and less on merely knowing"(Bourdieu 1984, 80). What one actually knows takes a secondary position to the expression of that information. This expression of knowledge is conveyed through a college essay, or even better, an alumni interview—not through a readily available and uniform test. Similarly, in the highest "academic life… the whole person is evaluated"

(Bourdieu 1984, 88). Usually only the elite colleges have alumni interviews and only the highest qualifications—prep schools, undergraduate thesis and PhD's—have oral interviews. At the most prestigious level, elite manners and tastes take more and more precedence while the importance of standardized, scholastic knowledge falls away.

Of course, the increasing salience of invisible modes of evaluation does not tell the whole story. Bourgeois, non-institutional cultural capital is not the only measure of success in school. Bourdieu highlights this fact himself, saying, "Although the educational system, by its monopoly of certification, governs the conversion of inherited cultural capital into educational capital, it does not have a monopoly on the production of cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1984, 80). There are many ways that the educational system reproduces existing social hierarchies by stratifying students according to their inherited cultural capital, but this is not the only stratifying mechanism at work. As can bee seen so clearly in the importance of NCLB today, types of knowledge apart from non-institutional culture, especially standardized knowledge, are valued by the educational system. The most advantageous skill is being able to play both sides at once. Bourdieu notes that, "cultural excellence increasingly belongs to those who combine the two modes of acquisition"(Bourdieu 1984, 73). Being a switch-hitter, knowing the logarithms, memorizing the content and acing the test, along with a lifetime accumulating elite cultural capital allows an individual the greatest chance of success. With the fierceness of competition today, you have to ace the test before protesting it. It's not

a coincidence that Scarsdale students who walk out on a test end up at Harvard while Hartford students who refuse to test don't even get a high school diploma.[5]

Everyday forms of resistance

Public opposition to No Child Left Behind within the state of Connecticut has centered around a variety of different issues such as lack of funding, state-rights, inclusion of English Language Learners (ELLs), arguments over proper implementation and the use of punitive sanctions. Nevertheless, a closer examination of these debates reveals that the crux of all of these grounds for resistance is NCLB's reliance on standardized tests. For example, funding debates have revolved around who should pay for tests and if tests are the best use of education dollars while discussions of English Language Learners question whether ELLs can be exempted from taking tests in English. This section of this essay examines the discourse around three of the main arguments against standardized testing in Connecticut: tests don't measure real learning, tests take up too much time, and test-taking itself is unfair. It also examines the ways in which individuals have adapted to these three concerns beyond merely writing opinion statements.

A great deal of the discourse against No Child Left Behind laments how standardized tests don't measure real learning. This is often expressed through complaints that the law has forced schools to "teach to the test." In the early years of the law, for example, a school board member in Southington worried that testing

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[5] As a matter of fact, during the test boycotts that occurred at Brookline High School in Brookline, MA, the students who refused to take the MCAS standardized tests did not receive high school diplomas. Nevertheless, many of them were still admitted to prestigious colleges, further supporting the claim that elites disproportionately benefit from invisible modes of evaluation (Eppstein).

"might worsen academic performance as teachers 'teach to the test'" (Moy). Numerous letters-to-the-editor have followed suit, bemoaning that "The message of NCLB is simple: teach to the test" (Schweighoffer)(Luongo). All these claims of too much teaching to the test also assert, explicitly or implicitly, that testing denies "real" learning. One op-ed stated, "The test only measures how well the schools can get the kids to cram for the test" (Williams). Another letter-to-the-editor from Suffield said more directly that, "Standardized testing in Connecticut today has educators teaching to the test rather than educating students" (Parise). Instead of educating students, this author continued, tests only "prepare students to do well on the tests. Learning has become a secondary goal" (Parise). One must wonder why there has been such an outcry against teaching to the test. Aren't tests simply intended to measure what students learn in school? Why then, do these authors see a disjuncture between "learning" and "[preparing] students to do well on the tests"?[6]

Public objections to standardized testing maintain that tests are unable to measure the right type of knowledge. Individuals often claim that, "standardized tests are not valid indicators of success" (Woodiel). A statement made by the president of the very progressive Connecticut Education Association, Rosemary Coyle, declared that Connecticut's standardized test, the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) "fail[s] to recognize that children are individuals who learn in different ways

[6] It is important to note the difference between teaching to the test (aligning instruction with test material) and "gaming" the test (learning ways to do better on a test that having nothing to do with the content of the test, such as taking tests multiple times or using process of elimination on multiple choice questions). Interestingly, while many public statements criticized teaching to the test, very few mentioned the characteristics of gaming tests.

and at different rates. One size does not fit all when it comes to teaching and learning" (Coyle). This avers that tests fail because they do not recognize the unique individuality of students. Accordingly, Coyle lists "individualized attention" first in her recommendations for federal education reform (Coyle). Letters-to-the-editor are even more forthright about the faults of the standardized test. After Connecticut began including grammar testing on state exams, a resident of Brookfield wrote in: "When the state places more emphasis on technical grammar, teachers in classes will, too. This is a mistake. When cementing reading and writing skills, teachers should focus on the purpose of writing: to express ideas" (Baird). Connecticut's tests emphasize the conventions of writing and the author is fearful that teachers will teach the *rules* of writing rather than the *purpose*: individual expression. The author continues: "Expressing ideas and communicating is a higher-order concern and should be the concern most emphasized" (Baird). In essence, expressing ideas should be valued more than the fixed grammar of writing. These published opinions, which maintain that standardized tests are invalid, all base their argument on the tests' lack of individualization and failure to incorporate measures of self-expression. The affinity of such opinions to the types of knowledge valued in Bernstein's invisible pedagogy and Bourdieu's non-institutional culture is clearly identifiable.

The second major complaint in the discourse against No Child Left Behind is that its reliance on testing takes up too much time. This can be seen in opinions that testing has narrowed curriculums and that it has taken time away from extra curricular activities. Characteristic of complaints that testing narrows the

curriculum, a letter-to-the-editor from West Hartford claims that standardized testing, “displaces a disproportionate amount of instructional time that could otherwise be devoted to teaching and learning” (Woodiel). This implies that standardized evaluations are not an integral aspect of learning. Would anyone argue that in-class exams or writing essays displaces time “devoted to teaching and learning”? Standardized tests merely take time away from non-standardized forms of learning. Newspaper articles have documented how increased standardized testing leads to “cutting back on recess, the amount of time in the cafeteria, art, music, foreign language instruction and field trips” (Gottlieb). One parent’s op-ed grieved over how unhappy her son became when “his teacher began spending entire days doing math with the children (nothing else)” in order to prepare students for the CMTs (Bengtson). A PTA member from Middletown explained that because of pressure to teach to the test, "teachers put their maps away" and had to drop less structured, creative activities in lieu of the state’s academic curriculum (Pennington). "Kids lose out," she explained (Pennington). All of these opinions can be understood as criticisms of how an emphasis on standardization privileges the “most academically defined academic” subjects over less scholastic, non-institutional subjects.

Although there is a great deal of outcry against narrowing curriculums, there may be even more uproar over the loss of time available for extra curricular activities. Driven by the need to meet higher and higher levels of proficiency, schools are continually assigning more homework and cutting non-instructional time from their schedules. For many, this does not come without agitation. A Simsbury

mother featured in a local paper complained that her children have "'desk work' to do from the moment they arrive in the morning" (Gottlieb). One father "is outraged that his young son's schedule is so jammed with studies that he doesn't have time for swimming lessons" (Gottlieb). An elementary school principal noted that many parents have come to her saying homework is taking up too much family time (Stern). Another Connecticut resident captures the ethos of all such complaints: "School is about producing citizens and learning to contribute to society. [Students] get that from the social skills they learn on the playground, they get that in the cafeteria" (Gottlieb). Paralleling the class preferences of Bernstein, Lareau and Bourdieu, those who complain about losing time for extra-curricular activities and a narrowed curriculum imply that it is outside the purely scholastic classroom that the most important learning takes place.

The third main opposition to standardized testing is that test-taking itself is unfair. In public discourse, this usually emerges as cries that tests place too much pressure on students. A front-page feature article in the Hartford Courant documented how stressful test taking has become for some students. The article tells how one student, Blake, who "used to love math," took a standardized test where he "spent so much time on the tough questions… that he ran out of time to finish the rest;" in his words, the experience, "made me not like math" (Gottlieb). The next year, "The stress that test caused Blake… prompted his mother to keep him home for nearly three weeks as the high-stakes test" was being given (Gottlieb). "It just wasn't worth the tears and the anxiety," she said (Gottlieb). Another letter to the editor described how her child became physically ill because of the stress placed

on tests. The author claims that, “The whole problem turned out to be that his teacher… stressed to the children how ‘important’ the mastery tests are; that they would determine the rest of their lives” (Bengtson). A parent in Middletown also expressed concern over how much added pressure the tests placed on her children, saying, "When I was in school all we had to worry about was the SAT, now there is a whole world of new things to worry about. We've got 3rd graders taking the SAT!"(Pennington). While the connection here may be less obvious, these complaints that test taking is too stressful are also explained well by the class preferences mentioned earlier. The students above all became anxious when high-stakes were placed on a test based on the authoritarian demands of a visible pedagogy because such an exam is antithetical to the “ordinary conversation” cultivated in the homes of the upper classes. Published opinions have criticized No Child Left Behind’s imposition of standardized testing because it doesn’t measure real learning, it takes up too much time and the act of test-taking is unfair. These opinions fit well onto the map of social classes provided by Bernstein, Lareau, and, most of all, Bourdieu.

Beyond these published opinions, the same class preferences are also evident in the many avenues of resistance parents have taken against standardization. To evade standardization, some parents have worked to avoid dealing with standardized tests entirely. Many opinion pieces were sympathetic with a letter-to-the-editor from Columbia that “would urge banning all testing” saying, “classroom teachers are the best source for evaluating students' progress” (Fox). Other parents were so unhappy with these tests that they took their children out of public schools

and enrolled them in private schools where there is no standardized testing. One couple from Cheshire wrote an op-ed explaining why they moved their children to private school: “The reasons are the Connecticut Mastery Test and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test. These tests -- used in public schools for the past 15 years -- are choking the intellectual promise of students while stifling good teaching” (Harris). According to Jerry Mintz, director of the Alternative Education Resource Organization, "Thanks to ‘No Child Left Behind,’ people are abandoning [conventional] schools in droves" (Waldman). Interestingly, this flee from standardized testing has not only led parents to traditional private schools, it has created an “explosive” demand for alternative schools that are explicitly opposed to testing (Waldman). One cover story in the Hartford Courant told of a student attending a Simsbury public school who was compelled to move to an “unschool” because his extremely high-achieving public school was “so focused on standardized tests that it takes away from real learning" (Waldman). These “unschools” stress democratic decision making, independent study and, “On any given day, you're as likely to see [students] climbing trees as reading books” (Waldman). We can see that this movement from public to private school is simultaneously a movement from scholastic to non-institutional culture, from a visible to an invisible pedagogy.

Although some parents have taken their children out of public schools entirely, not everyone can afford such a tactic. This not being a possibility, other parents have worked to prepare their children to cope with the stress of the CMTs. One PTA parent said the only thing parents could do to stop the testing-mania “is to help the kids be comfortable” (Pennington). Accordingly, she attended meetings

organized for parents to learn how to support their children's success by helping them be less stressed by the test taking process (Marino). Along similar lines, a whole industry of test-prep organizations has formed in Connecticut in recent years. These businesses span from numerous pay-to-use websites that provide practice tests intended to make students at ease with the CMTs, all the way to private tutoring agencies such as Kaplan's SCORE! Program, which is only located in two of Connecticut's wealthiest towns: Darien and Westport (Study Island)(PR Newswire Publication). Apart from offering academic tutoring to students, SCORE! coaches parents on how to make their children more at ease while taking tests, telling them "If your child says that tests feel overwhelming and exhausting, tell him that it's OK to put his pencil down and close his eyes, stare out the window for a moment or just take a few deep breaths" (PR Newswire Publication). They even remind that "If the directions are confusing, ask the teacher… It is always better… to ask and be told by the teacher that they can't answer the question than to not ask at all" (PR Newswire Publication). While those who can afford private school can avoid most scholastic, visible modes of evaluation completely, those who cannot escape the public school system must be able to perform on the tests. Remarkably, the way individuals have adapted to the situation is exactly as theorized by Bourdieu. They "combine the two modes of acquisition," hiring a tutor to prepare for the test, but doing so in a way that continues to emphasize reasoning and self-expression (Bourdieu 1984, 73). While students who hire private tutors are taught the taxonomies of the test, they are also reminded that the "right attitude can make all the difference!" (PR Newswire Publication).

We have seen that in this discourse there is a strong correlation between the tastes of Bourgeois culture—outlined by Bourdieu, Bernstein and Lareau—and opinions lamenting increased standardization. However, this correlation is not the only important aspect of the discourse to note. A closer analysis reveals that opposition to standardization only makes sense when viewed as part of a larger struggle over the price-forming mechanisms of the educational system.

Let us re-examine the arguments that teaching to the test does not constitute "real learning." Recall the op-ed that stated, "Expressing ideas and communicating is a higher-order concern" than correct grammar. This is an opinion that correlates with a particular class preference but, more than just this, it is a valuation of what qualifies as knowledge. It should not be taken lightly that this author uses the phrase "higher-order concern." The author is literally arguing that the educational institution should privilege self-expression over the scholastic rules of grammar. We must see this argument in the context in which it arose, which was as part of a conflict over the modes of evaluation that the school system values. The op-ed was a direct response to the increasing importance Connecticut had placed on testing, first in math and reading and in this specific case, expanding into writing, all of which poses a direct threat against the unquantifiable cultural capital of the bourgeoisie. Testing grammar over self-expression allows an aspiring middle class to "compete dangerously" with the established elites because the "rationalization implied by every institutionalized pedagogy… has the effect of reducing… the weight of what is abandoned to inherited 'senses' and, consequently, the differences linked to economic and cultural inheritance" (Bourdieu 1984, 78). Standardizing the

evaluation of writing through a test rather than assuming "classroom teachers are the best source for evaluating students' progress" benefits anyone who can memorize the precise, cataloged rules of grammar—which are only one click away on the Department of Education website online. This does not mean that those with inherited privilege are necessarily less prepared to learn these rules, the opposite is probably true, but it does mean that they will be forced to compete dangerously on the same playing field as everyone else. Without the standardized test, more weight is given to "inherited 'senses'" and invisible measurements, creating a separate field of evaluation that always benefits those with "economic and cultural inheritance." This being said, it is likely not a coincidence that while a parent in Brookfield was criticizing this expansion of testing, an announcement made in the working-class city of Meriden credited Connecticut's first place national ranking in writing to the standardized test "that revitalized writing in the state's public schools" (Frahm July 2003). Some students have benefited from increased testing. All of these public statements, even though they appear to be nothing more than an opinion, are part of a struggle between different class fractions fighting over the modes of acquisition to be valued in schools.

By reexamining the discourse that standardized tests take up too much time, we can see that the same struggle is evident. Recall the PTA mother who said that when time is taken away from arts and non-state-curriculum activities, "kids lose out." One must wonder whose kids she is talking about. In fact, a nation-wide survey of students found that 78 percent of students said that the effort of preparing for tests "does not detract from other important topics" (Wadsworth). Not all

parents write letters to the editor complaining that their children to have "'desk work' to do from the moment they arrive in the morning;" some want their children to spend *more* time on scholastic tasks. Bourdieu found that "those who owe most of their cultural capital to the educational system," such as the rising middle class whose best chance to ascend the social ladder is through doing well in school, "tend to proportion their investments very strictly to the value the educational system sets on the different areas" (Bourdieu 1984, 87). According to Bourdieu, these less advantaged parents want their children to focus on preparing for the specific tests that the school uses for evaluations. There is evidence of this being the case in Connecticut, such as those minority opinions that argue, "the 'teaching to the test' criticism is misplaced in Connecticut. Our educators teach… and then simply test what our children should be learning" (Heagney). The class fraction characterized by this opinion would have a greater relative advantage if their children were measured *only* by these tests, which they can memorize the standards of and study for. The "social skills" that so many letters-to-the-editor say schools should value, on the other hand, are not as accessible as the knowledge included on standardized tests. Those with less money cannot afford the swim lessons and music classes that the bourgeois culture claims makes their children "a better person, a better citizen… certainly a better student."

It is imperative to see this resistance to narrowing the curriculum and increased time required to study for tests through the lens of those who stand to gain from a movement away from standardized tests. As Bourdieu revealed, "the dominant groups are always on the side of the most insensible and invisible mode of

acquisition." That is, bourgeois elites will always gain if students are measured by the invisible learning that takes place in the home, on sport teams, and in art classes instead of the visible learning of rubrics and standards. We must reread these protests against the time lost to testing in light of this. One parent complained that time devoted to testing, "affects the whole family. Kids don't have time to be kids anymore" (Gottlieb). Preparing for a test emphasizes a different mode of acquisition than that practiced at home and it takes children's time away from the family, both of which threaten the non-institutional culture. Kids will always be kids regardless of how much time they have, but increased testing runs the risk of not letting kids have time to be the kinds of kids that elites want them to be. Instead, they are forced to compete on the same playing field as everyone else, doing "desk work" instead of private music and swim lessons. Remembering that it is only if one can afford the lessons that they can make one a "better student" it might not be a coincidence that the vast majority of these anti-testing letters-to-the-editor come from towns such as Simsbury, West Hartford, Cheshire, Brookfield, Westport, Suffield and Darien, which all have household incomes near or above $100,000 and college completion rates in the high 40 percent range (Connecticut Economic Resource Center, Inc.). Both of these statistics are over 50 percent times the state average.

This conflict over the modes of evaluation used by schools even extends to protests over test-taking being unfair. Although there have been front-page articles, editorials and a whole industry of test-help agencies that have sprung up in response to test anxiety, there is evidence that concern over the anxiety associated

with a one-time test is not unanimous. A survey of students found that 23 percent of students don't get nervous at all during tests, 73 percent get nervous but can handle the pressure, and only 5 percent get so nervous they can't take the test (Wadsworth). It is important to note that many of those who complain about the anxiety of high-stakes tests actually remove their children from school during testing periods or ask educators to put a stop to testing entirely. In fact, there are so many calls to terminate the exam, such as a letter-to-the-editor that pleas for the end of the "one-time, live or die, standardized testing demanded of students," that there is very little voice given to the other practical solution to problem of the "one-time" test: testing more often and more comprehensively (Schweighoffer). Evoking test anxiety as a reason to end testing is not just a personal complaint but is a political statement about the type of knowledge that should be privileged by schools. Blake's mom may have removed her son from school for three weeks in part because the test made him anxious, but we can't forget that Blake spent so much time struggling "on the tough questions" that he failed the test. A standardized test offers no way for the "emerging sense of entitlement" of bourgeois children to help them "customize" situations and receive an advantage from teachers. Removing the teacher from the mode of evaluation means there is less of a chance to gain from asking for help, "If the directions are confusing." Those pushing for high-stakes tests have not necessarily raised the stakes of education but they certainly have raised the stakes of the test—a direct threat to the invisible modes of acquisition of non-institutional elites.

The conflict here, in the worlds of Bourdieu, is over the "price-forming mechanisms" of education, not just about test anxiety. For example, other parents have a different relationship to testing. Many parents in the immigrant populated, middle-class town of New Britain spent an evening taking standardized tests because of, in the words of one mother, "her interest in her children's success" (Munoz). After taking the test, another mother in this traditionally low-achieving district commented, "I kind of wanted more time, but I thought it was fair" (Munoz). Even though she ran out of time, she thought the test was fair. Another parent praised that the tests "require [my son] to really do some thinking" (Munoz). Many of these parents send their children to school an hour early for a free test-prep program not intended to help the students succeed by being comfortable and asking for help, but designed to teach students the content to "give the test a thrashing" (Munoz). This is a striking difference from those parents who lament the unfairness and lack of thinking involved in standardized tests. Surely this is linked to the potential for these tests to give students in low-achieving districts a chance at instant success. This possibility for the rising middle class, by definition, threatens the social reproduction of the established elites.

Seeing this discourse through the struggle for social reproduction explains more fully why so many parents are moving their children out of public schools and into schools without standardized tests. The class fractions pushing for accountability have made standards so strong that the safest refuge for those who value non-institutional culture can only be found by leaving public schooling entirely. It is fitting that the most progressive private schools use few standards in

order to “to deal with so-called "high-low" students -- low performers with high intelligence -- or those not finding success in a traditional school setting” (Waldman). Wealthy students who can’t compete with the increasing numbers of students scoring well on standardized tests have a much better chance of success through “learning a broader set of skills” rather than testing. This way they can still gain admission to elite colleges without test scores, as 90 percent of students at one “unschool” do (Waldman).

The arguments expressed in public opinions against standardized testing in Connecticut fit with the elite culture described by Bernstein, Lareau and Bourdieu. Even more, after examining the logic of these arguments, we can see that they are everyday acts of resistance against standardization that function to secure elites’ place of privilege within the educational system.

Institutionalized opposition to NCLB in Connecticut and beyond

In order to fully understand the origins of opposition to standardization, it is essential to study both the everyday acts of resistance of individuals as well as how that struggle translates into larger instances of institutionalized defiance. Just as Connecticut has seen a plethora of individuals’ uprisings, it has also witnessed many larger protests at the level of the school, city and state. The following pages map out resistance to standardization on these larger levels in three specific cases: schools that fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), Cheshire Public Schools rejection of Title I funding, and Attorney General Blumenthal’s lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Education.

The complexities of debates around standardization are amplified whenever a school district fails to make Adequate Yearly Progress.[7] In most school districts, when test scores are rising, nearly everyone supports "accountability" and "the intention" of No Child Left Behind. A recent survey conducted in Stamford, Norwalk and Greenwich found that a majority of residents "desire to help *all* students achieve" (Malone). Likewise, letters-to-the-editor, statements made by educators, and public addresses of school administrators all share the sentiment expressed by Superintendent Polansky of Southington Public Schools: "No one is arguing that we don't want to leave any child behind" (Moy) (Stern) (Pennington) (Hypolite). Nevertheless, as the stakes of accountability rise, as more and more must be sacrificed to fulfill the intention of NCLB, some schools seem to make an about-face. In the past eight years there have been many instances where schools in the wealthiest and highest-achieving districts in Connecticut, whenever they fail to make AYP, begin to make a distinction between the intention and implementation of NCLB.

Administrators, educators and parents in wealthy, high-achieving districts, with a remarkable degree of consistency, support the intention of No Child Left Behind— until it affects them. In many of these districts, NCLB's accountability provisions increasingly threaten schools because the law requires all subgroups of students to reach the same level of proficiency, even Special Education Students and English Language Learners. If even a small subgroup of students fails to make proficiency, the whole school is labeled as "failing." This recently happened at King

[7] Adequate Yearly Progress is the improvement on standardized tests schools must show in order to avoid being placed on track towards receiving punitive sanctions.

Philip Middle School, once named a Blue Ribbon School, in West Hartford.[8] At King Philip, Principal Hourdequin says she "supports the general intent of the No Child Left Behind legislation" (Moreau). Yet, when the school didn't make AYP because of its special education students she extolled, "this is grossly unfair" (Moreau). Hourdequin "is now worrying that being named on the list will affect… how West Hartford residents view their public schools (Moreau). She believes the implementation of the law is flawed, that it "sets unattainable standards for some subgroups of children" (Moreau). Then there is the case of Stamford, where administrators "praised the law for displaying all students' achievement levels and making sure they don't fall through the cracks" (Gosier). But, when schools were labeled as failing because of English Language Learners, administrators about-faced and criticized NCLB, saying, "it hurts our standings" (Gosier). Administrators in Stamford also protested NCLB's implementation of the standardized tests; they wanted to have ELLs exempted from test taking during their three first years at a school (Gosier). The same phenomenon occurred at Sedgwick Middle School in West Hartford, another Blue Ribbon winner, which faced the prospect of not making APY because of one subgroup of students. Troubled by this, Principal Newman said, "It scares me… We're doing all the right things [but] we're still going to end up on that list" (Frahm April 2003). All the while Newman maintains: "I think the [law's] intent is appropriate -- that every child should receive the best education possible" (Frahm April 2003). These schools all fit the non-institutional culture defined by Bourdieu

[8] The Blue Ribbon is the U.S. Department of Education's highest honor

like a glove. Fittingly, they protest against NCLB's use of standardized tests. So why then do they say they support NCLB's intent?

We must recall that, "cultural excellence increasingly belongs to those who combine the two modes of acquisition"(Bourdieu 1984, 73). Those who want to succeed need to be able to achieve on a standardized evaluation as well as an invisible one. As standardized tests are ubiquitous and required in public schools, they cannot be overlooked. Moreover, high-achieving schools have much to gain from doing well on standardized tests. Real estate agents use school rankings to help people find homes (Frahm 2005). The scores of schools are tied directly to property values and college admissions (Moreau). Parents, schools and politicians all know this. If a school is labeled as failing, it threatens the entire community, regardless of whether or not it is ideologically opposed to standardization. Therefore, it is not surprising that residents in West Hartford "take any perceived threat to this success seriously" even if they disagree standardized testing on principle (Moreau). The fact that high-achieving schools praise NCLB's intent yet criticize its implementation whenever one subgroup of students causes an entire school to fail, suggests these schools simply view NCLB's intent in a very particular way.

The text of No Child Left Behind states that schools must be held accountable for one hundred percent students reaching a set standard of proficiency (US Department of Education). Examining the statements above shows that the schools just mentioned understand NCLB's accountability in a different way. Principal Newman, for example, reworks NCLB's intent to say that all students should get "the

best education possible." The difference here is profound. The NCLB definition of accountability sets an absolute standard of what constitutes proficiency while the framework of "the best education possible" is completely relative, making accountability nearly impossible. As we saw in West Hartford, a school can miraculously be "doing all the right things" even when a large percentage of students from one subgroup are not proficient. In this framework, it is "grossly unfair" when a school is labeled as failing even when it is failing a small population of students.

Seeing this through the perspective of a struggle over the price-forming mechanisms of education that control social reproduction suggests that wealthy, high-achieving schools are perfectly happy to reap the benefits of great standardized test scores, as long as little sacrifice must be made to earn those scores. Yet, when so much emphasis is placed on raising test scores that it threatens the non-institutional culture, public opposition is almost certain. This is exactly what happened in the cases above. When a school doesn't make APY it must either accept being labeled as "failing" or it must shift a dramatic amount of resources to that failing population. The former threatens the legitimacy of the school's elite status and the latter (a different definition of "doing all the right things") risks having too many resources taken from the progressive education of the brightest students, a serious concern for many (Loveless). No wonder these schools created a third path: protesting, getting publicity in newspapers, and calling for NCLB to be changed.

What most powerfully demonstrates that this opposition to standardization is part of a class struggle is the fact that not everyone supports these actions. The schools above recommend that English Language Learners be given "three years, not just one, before they are evaluated on English-language learners' test results" because it is "unfair" for them to be labeled as failing when "many have trouble learning English" (Gosier). This is dramatically different from the recommendation of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), a predominantly middle-class Latino civil rights group that has been a strong advocate of NCLB. The NCLR would like to see even the current, one-year exemption from testing removed, because it would "create incentives for policy-makers and educators to take the steps necessary to increase achievement of all students" (National Council of La Raza).[9] For the NCLR, standardized accountability provides the pathway to closing the achievement gap and giving a leg up to ELLs. For this class fraction, exposing and holding schools accountable to the unequal achievement students is worth being labeled as failing because their children area already failing in relation to the elites. The discourse of the NCLR and other middle class groups argues that it is only through standardization that these fractions of students will have a chance to level the playing field with those who already know the language, so to speak (National Council of La Raza)(Education Trust). Such groups have nothing to lose because it is

[9] The NCLR supports testing ELLs in their native language along with testing in English. The debate over whether new measures of achievement should be additive (all tests must be passed) or exempting (succeeding on one test nullifies failure on another) has been a huge source of conflict in national education politics. Progressive groups such as the National Education Association, Fairtest and the American Federation of Teachers support exempting tests while civil rights groups (Education Trust, NCLR, Citizens Commission on Civil Rights) and the Department of Education support additive measures.

only those who are not already failing that being labeled as failing hurts. Education Trust, a group dedicated to "closing the achievement gaps that separate low-income students and students of color from other youth," recognizes that being labeled as failing harms some and benefits others. The group has said that by helping disadvantaged students standardization creates "changes that would inevitably make those who benefit from the status quo, including some educators, very unhappy" (Education Trust). For the parvenus class fraction typified by groups like the NCLR and Education Trust, accountability takes on an entirely different definition than that offered by Connecticut's highest-achieving schools.

In 2003, three wealthy and well-educated towns in Connecticut—Cheshire, Marlborough and Somers—joined a select handful of school districts in the nation that have chosen to turn down the Title I grant money offered through the No Child Left Behind. A close analysis of the decision to reject this funding in the town Cheshire can further uncover the sociological factors driving the struggle over standardization.

The year 2003 was the first time in 10 years that Cheshire Public Schools (CPS) had become eligible to receive Title I funding. Title I is a program with this specific purpose: "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (US Department of Education). Accordingly, Title I grant money is only given to districts with a certain percentage of "disadvantaged" students, as measured by the poverty rates gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau. The mission

statement of Title I makes it clear that what constitutes an equal, high-quality education should be measured almost exclusively through state-administered standardized tests. When Cheshire was notified of its eligibility for Title I, CPS was not excited, to say the least. As the Superintendent at the time, David A. Cressy, told the school board about the funding, he "emphasized his feelings that Title I is not a good fit for Cheshire as our student performance is and continues to be high" (Cheshire Public Schools Board of Education October 2003). While the U.S. Census had determined Cheshire should qualify for Title I, those living in the town itself disagreed.

Although Cheshire has uncommonly high test scores, CPS is not primarily interested in raising its student's achievement on standardized tests. Instead, the district seems more interested in cultivating the uniqueness of its students. The first Core Belief of CPS is, "We believe in the importance of respecting the individuality of each person"(Cheshire Public Schools Board of Education 2001). With this in mind, every year parents pay for their students' AP classes to go on trips to Europe and, according to the superintendent, "the variety of activities in our schools are as diverse as the students in our schools and serve to assure that the interests of all students can be met" through clubs such as video production, the robotics team, Honors Society and the community service club (Florio 2003). Individuality is central to CPS, so much so that even the amount expected of students is personalized; the second Core Belief is, "We believe each student deserves to be challenged to achieve at his/her highest level"(Cheshire Public Schools Board of Education 2001). This subjective "individual" measure of success parallels perfectly

with the fuzziness of "best education possible" ideology just mentioned above in relation to the schools not making AYP. In fact, in contrast to CPS' emphasis on personal distinction, the affirmation that "fundamental for all education, is the acquisition of the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics" is second to last out of its 12 Core Beliefs (Cheshire Public Schools Board of Education 2001). Accountability is mentioned last. The affinity of the school district to Bernstein's invisible pedagogy, Lareau's upper-middle class emphasis on extra-curricular activities and Bourdieu's non-institutional cultural is clearly recognizable.

If Cheshire's mission statement is compared to that of some of the poorer, lower-achieving Title I districts in the state, there is a striking contrast between the invisible goals of the former and the visible goals of the latter. Hartford's mission statement, for instance, explains: "Hartford's system of schools exists to provide all students with access to participation in a global economy through attainment of Academic Standards of the State of Connecticut" (Hartford Public Schools). Its vision for reaching these goals is that, "The attainment of Hartford students in reading, math, science, and college readiness will reflect the high educational outcomes of the State of Connecticut" (Hartford Public Schools). Hartford Public Schools declares very bluntly that success is measured by having all students attain Connecticut's Academic Standards. Likewise, the Five Bold Goals of New Haven Public Schools all are directly related to reaching testable standards. For example, "By 2008, 95% of students will achieve math and literacy standards" (New Haven Public Schools). It is not through the individuality of inner-city that they believe they can use education as a ladder to success (especially since Cheshire appears to

have monopoly on diverse student activities) but through high-achievement on a standardized test. Title I is in line with the notion of success embodied in these districts that embrace the logic of the rising middle class.

It is never easy for a school district to turn down money, as those involved in this process can attest to, so the forces driving Cheshire to reject Title I must have been considerable (Cheshire Herald Editorial Board) (Becker). The problem for CPS was in the sanctions. For all districts in the country, NCLB requires schools to report their test scores and then the U.S. Department of Education labels them as failing, if applicable. Accepting Title I money forces any school labeled as "failing" to undergo increasingly harsh sanctions, beginning with allowing for students to transfer schools, providing money for private tutoring and ultimately, state takeover and reconstitution. For this reason, Superintendent Cressy and the local newspaper, the Cheshire Herald voiced their belief that the possible sanctions "would most likely not make the acceptance of the funds worth it" (Cheshire Public Schools Board of Education August 2003)(Cheshire Herald Editorial Board). According to the current superintendent, Greg J. Florio, accepting the money was not worth "the potential risks" (Florio 2006).[10] The Board of Education concurred and voted unanimously to turn down the money (Cheshire Public Schools Board of Education October 2003).

In 2005 however, after two years of turning down its Title I funding, Cheshire's Board of Education reversed its decision and voted to accept the Title I funds (Cheshire Public Schools Board of Education 2005). One must wonder what

[10] The Superintendents changed between 2003-2005.

happened to facilitate this change. In 2003, CPS believed that if any one school accepted the money the entire district would face the potential punishments. But, in 2005, Superintendent Florio learned that "only individual schools that utilize the grant funds are subject to the more stringent sanctions" (Florio 2006). The district realized that by giving the money only to Darcy Kindergarten, which has no testing, there would be "little or no risk to the Cheshire Public Schools in utilizing this money" (Florio 2006). In the words of the principal of Darcy, Barbara Stern, "Giving the money to Darcy School was a way to get around No Child Left Behind, so to say" (Stern). Specifically, the money went to hire new teachers who could "guide instructional practices tailored to individual needs" (Florio 2006). The money was not targeted for the disadvantaged population nor used directly for meeting state academic standards, as the principle is opposed to "academizing kindergarten" (Stern).

One of the notable aspects of this event is that Cheshire never took the mission of Title I into serious consideration when making its decision. This is likely due to the fact Cheshire Public School does not associate itself with having any "'need' population" (Florio 2006). An editorial by the Cheshire Herald wrote that, "The achievement of Cheshire's schools and students is already so high" that Title I was not right for Cheshire (Cheshire Herald Editorial Board). Cheshire was so satisfied by its "already so high" test scores and other educational achievements that it completely overlooked any population in need, even though 39 percent of Economically Disadvantaged students failed to reach proficiency in reading, which is 26 percentage points lower than the district's average. We should keep in mind that

these are the concerns that are currently driving Hartford and New Haven's public schools; New Haven's Bold Goal is: "By 2008, the achievement gap will be no more than 5% for defined student subgroups" (New Haven Public Schools). Such a gap was not mentioned once in Cheshire's decision-making process. Instead, the discourse revolved around how there were too many "risks" associated with the money that it would not be "worth it." Before a single school had even failed to make AYP, the school district did not want to have any chance of facing the potential threat of additional sanctions that would force the district to improve the test scores of certain subgroups of students. The community praised the school board's "correct and responsible decision" (Cheshire Herald Editorial Board). In an interview, Principal Stern noted the district is currently concerned that Superintendent Florio read Title I incorrectly and Darcy's use of Title I money might subject the whole district to the potential sanctions. Not surprisingly, Stern predicted the money would be rejected once again if this were the case.

What exactly were the "risks" in this case, what was the threat of accepting Title I? To begin with, it was the possibility of the "loss of local control" (Stern). More specifically, the non-local control that would have been imposed by the state would have made the district move extra resources towards improving the test scores of it's failing subgroups. With a history of such decisions, whose interest would a local, democratically run school serve in Cheshire? It is clear that the district's interests are bound to a non-institutional, bourgeois educational system happy to benefit from high test scores but unwilling to be dictated by them. Even when offered money, the threat of standardized accountability was too great to risk

losing "local control" of the school system. Unlike Deborah Meier and Michael Apple, we cannot afford to overlook the interests of those resisting standardization just as those in Cheshire overlooked the interests of the disadvantaged.

In 2005, Connecticut's Attorney General, Richard Blumenthal, filed suit against the U.S. Department of Education because of the mandates of No Child Left Behind. Shortly thereafter, to the surprise of many, the NAACP announced that it was joining the side of the federal government in the case. Using the map provided by Apple, could we ever have predicted this happening? The NAACP is a far cry from being neoliberal, neoconservative or having any dependency on the testing industry and therefore it counters Apple's suggestion that resistance to standardization takes one of these three forms.

Originally, Attorney General Blumenthal based his case on two main arguments. The first argument was that Connecticut's assessment system was already good enough. At the time, the state of Connecticut only tested students once every other year, while NCLB required yearly testing. Blumenthal argued yearly testing was unneeded because, "Connecticut's CMT statutory scheme has been successful, for Connecticut's students are ranked as among the highest achieving in the nation" (State of Conneticut). This sounds remarkably similar to the assertion in Cheshire that achievement was "already so high" that no help to the disadvantaged was needed. This argument was thrown out almost immediately in court but it is important to remember its class logic; the already "doing all the right things" attitude it engenders can only come from those who are benefiting from the educational system and already receiving "all the right things."

The second basis for Blumenthal's case was that No Child Left Behind was "an unfunded mandate" and "Federal funding to Connecticut for NCLB mandates is substantially less than the costs attributable to the federal requirements of the NCLB Act" (State of Conneticut). The Attorney General's office found that the additional testing mandated by No Child Left Behind would cost Connecticut $8 million more than the federal government was providing. While this argument seems like an innocuous request for funding at first, upon deeper investigation, it has self-serving class logic to it as well. Those schools in West Hartford and Stamford "doing all the right things" had a limited outlook of what steps they could take to help their failing populations; they were unwilling to consider options that would change the status quo dramatically. The same is true here, as demonstrated by Blumenthal's warning to the federal government; upon announcing his lawsuit, Blumenthal declared, "Our message today is give up the unfunded mandate or give us the money" (NewsHour with Jim Lehrer). In this demand it is plainly seen that Blumenthal is only willing to fulfill the mandate if the state of Connecticut doesn't have to invest any of its own money. The way in which Blumenthal constructs this command is revealing. He first says to "give up" the mandate for more testing and, only after saying that, tells the government to "give us the money" so they could implement the new tests. The demand that would require the least sacrifice on Connecticut's part comes first. Blumenthal says that, "Our problem is not with the goal of No Child Left Behind; it is with the failed implementation" (NewsHour with Jim Lehrer). Yet, if Connecticut were truly supportive of the goal of NCLB, that all

students reach proficiency on state standardized tests, it would be most likely be willing to spend $8 million of its own $1.5 billion budget to support that goal.

While Blumenthal says he supports the goal of NCLB, he resists the inflexible implementation of the federal mandates, a resistance that is instructed by the struggle between visible and invisible modes of evaluation. He writes that the problem with NCLB is "with the failed implementation," arguing there is not enough "flexibility" in the law (NewsHour with Jim Lehrer). But standardized accountability, as articulated in the legislation of NCLB, is precisely about *inflexibility*, which denies any sort of special exceptions that measure one group according to a different standard than another. Yet, this is precisely the type of flexibility Connecticut sought in suing the federal government. Blumenthal wanted special education students to be tested at their own ability level instead of testing their proficiency at their grade level along with other students (Medina). And, he wanted ELLs to be exempted from testing for three years. Most importantly, Blumenthal wanted an exemption that would allow Connecticut to test students every other year (Medina). In the lawsuit, he argued that yearly testing is no better than alternating years. However, alternate year testing makes it impossible to use standardized tests directly aligned with yearly academic standards. Parents and teachers cannot use alternating year tests to know if their students learned what they were expected to learn during a given year. Alternate versus yearly testing functions more as a ranking system than an accountability system; it tests regularly enough to show impressive results but is too infrequent to actually ensure students learn what they need to learn every single year.

This is very similar to the way the schools in West Hartford and Stamford mentioned earlier related to standardized testing: supporting it when it benefited them but attacking it when it threatened the status quo. Like those schools, Blumenthal was willing to maintain the status quo (which benefited the state greatly because its scores were already so high) but was unwilling to spend any extra money to increase standardized accountability in a way that would jeopardize the current system. Even more revealing is that most school districts in Connecticut were already conducting yearly tests (Heagney). These locally administered tests, unlike the CMT, were not aligned with the state's academic standards and therefore made it possible to "compare scores across school districts nationwide" (Moy). In the case of these tests, which were never tied to punitive sanctions, questions of losing time for learning and spending too much money on testing would have been more relevant, as they were not directly aligned with what students were required to learn. But, eliminating these tests was not included in Blumenthal's argument.

Connecticut was already paying for yearly tests that made it possible to outrank nearly every other state in the country, but it was unwilling to invest in yearly tests that would force it to focus on those students in the state who were failing to meet proficiency. Connecticut had found a way to profit from both modes of evaluation at once. Many benefited from scoring well on visible modes of evaluation, but those modes of evaluation were not the absolute measure of success because, by resisting the reach of standardized accountability, non-institutional learning was still given priority in towns like Cheshire, West Hartford and Simsbury.

It is in this context that the NAACP's opposition to Blumenthal's case begins to make sense. Only the established bourgeois elites stood to gain from the invisible modes of evaluation Blumenthal was fighting to protect. Therefore, in opposing Blumenthal, the actions of the NAACP suggest that there was an effort to turn the price-forming mechanisms of the educational system back in their favor—towards a visible and standardized evaluation that would benefit their constituency.

The reason that the NAACP, along with support from John G. Brittain of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and William Taylor of the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights, joined the federal government in this case was because it perceived that Blumenthal had filed suit, "asking that the state be relieved of its obligations to aid the education of disadvantaged children" (Connecticut NAACP). Furthermore, the NAACP worried that if the state won the case, "disadvantaged children would be prevented from obtaining the educational resources needed for them to succeed in school" (Connecticut NAACP). In the case, the legal failure to provide adequate and equal "educational resources" revolved entirely around testing and because of this the NAACP and other civil rights groups used the differences in test scores between disadvantaged and advantaged students as leverage to ensure that all students were competing on an even playing field. In advocating its position, the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights called the achievement gap in test scores "the No. 1 educational equality issue in the new century" (Frahm 2006). The Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights made a similar statement, saying that NCLB is "the most important piece of civil rights legislation going right now" (Rigdon). By stressing that these gaps in standardized test scores

should be the focal point of education, these groups were both affirming that standardized tests were a valid measure of success and demanding that all students be treated equally on that one standard. The same is true of supporting NCLB, which, by making the standardized test the mode of evaluation that matters most, makes the achievement gap more visible and legally requires it to be the priority. The fact that these groups evoked NLCB and the achievement gap instead of equal funding or multi-cultural education suggests that they have embraced standardization under the logic of Bourdieu's parvenus.

Officials in Connecticut, on the other hand, had a diametrically different relation to this gap in standardized test scores. The state's Commissioner of Education, Betty Sternberg said of the gap: "our black students are scoring at the same level that other black students are across the nation… [In states where] there's a small gap, their white students are scoring significantly lower than Connecticut's white students" (NewsHour with Jim Lehrer). It appears that for Sternberg and the state of Connecticut that as long as its black students aren't doing worse than others in the country, the actual size of the gap between blacks and whites is relatively unimportant. Sternberg continued, saying, "We don't have to test more to know where the problems are" (NewsHour with Jim Lehrer). It is as if the test scores don't represent the real problems. But in statements made by civil rights groups the gap in test scores *is* the problem! It is exactly this acceptance of any gap in test scores that they used to justify their opposition to Blumenthal's case, explaining that: "Connecticut is the wealthiest state in the nation yet it has the widest gap of any state in the nation… according to the National Assessment of Educational

Progress, the most trusted testing agency in the nation" (Connecticut NAACP). In a letter to Blumenthal they declared, "the failure to meet these obligations cannot be excused by any theory that the federal government has imposed on Connecticut 'an unfunded mandate'" (Taylor). The NAACP even challenged the whole notion of the "unfunded mandate" that Blumenthal's case was based on, saying, "*Brown v. Board of Education* itself was an 'unfunded mandate'" (Connecticut NAACP). It should not be taken lightly that the NAACP evoked the most important civil rights case in education for the defense of the federal government's requirements for standardized tests. For these groups, this gap in standardized test scores has been the launching pad for the attack against the inequality in the educational system. Civil rights groups have utilized the inherent rigidities of standardization and the visibility of its results to make it difficult to make any sort of exceptions for why gaps perpetually exist between the disadvantaged and privileged.

Just like the everyday resistance of individuals, there is strong evidence to suggest that community and institutional resistance to standardization is best explained by the theories of Bourdieu. In all three of the examples examined above, standardization posed a serious threat to the invisible modes of evaluation that privilege bourgeois elites. Moreover, as is most evident in the case of the NAACP, there are signs that support for standardization comes from the parvenus trying to compete with established elites.

Resistance to standardization beyond No Child Left Behind

The struggle over standardization is not limited to either Connecticut or No Child Left Behind, it reaches into all aspects of the educational system. We can see

the scope of these debates in the examples of Advanced Placement tests and required community service hours. Not too surprisingly, Scarsdale is the most appropriate district to begin with in examining the role Advanced Placement plays in conflicts over standardization.

In 2007, Scarsdale became the first major public school district in the nation to phase out the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) courses entirely. The community wanted to replace "mountains of memorization with more sophisticated and creative curriculums" (Hu). While schools can design their own AP curriculum, the tests are completely uniform and the content of the test largely dictates what must be taught. For example, history classes must cover all the time-periods and regions that will be included on the exam and art classes must limit the size of their creations. Because of this, those in Scarsdale thought the classes had become too standardized due to AP. Without AP, they argued, "The teaching can be more indirect now and… richer and deeper" (Hu). English classes now have time not just to read Hamlet and memorize everything that might be on the test, but act it out, experience it, and "get at the emotions and intentions of the character" (Hu).

Scarsdale is part of a national movement, led by private schools, called Excellence Without AP. This fraction of schools is founded on the belief "that a locally designed curriculum better serves their students than a curriculum leading to a nationally-administered standardized test" (Excellence Without AP). The group argues that a "large amount of factual content... often creates an imperative for teacher-centered rather than student-centered learning" because teachers are forced to teach the content that will be tested rather than what makes students

"think critically and communicate effectively" (Excellence Without AP). Behind this movement we can easily see the relevance of Deborah Meier's work—each school wants to use a locally designed curriculum that will be the most relevant to their own students. Furthermore, the schools' reliance on invisible pedagogies is also quite transparent, with a strong emphasis on student-centered learning, embodied experience and critical thinking being valued over the "factual content" of a course. Nevertheless, while Meier and Bernstein may describe the characteristics of such an education, it is Bourdieu's theory that most fully explains why this type of schooling exists. He reminds us that, "Those who invoke experience against knowledge have a basis for their prejudice in the real opposition between the domestic [bourgeois] learning and the scholastic learning of culture" (Bourdieu 1984, 74). Without seeing this as part of a class struggle, much of the situation is overlooked.

This struggle being understood, it is not shocking that when Scarsdale decided to drop AP, it invested $40,000 to bring in 25 professors from Harvard, Yale and New York University to develop a new curriculum, called "Advanced Topics" (Hu). Simultaneously, Scarsdale's guidance counselors contacted admissions offices at 130 elite colleges to explain the rationale for their change and accommodate any the colleges' concerns (Hu). These actions can be interpreted as another case of an elite culture's attempt to separate itself from the rest of the educational system. The principal of Scarsdale High School himself demonstrated this 'exceptionalism' when he asserted ""If people called [AP] a gold curriculum in the past, I refer to this version as the platinum curriculum" (Hu). Not only does this new curriculum change the playing field of educational assessment, giving these schools a different

measure of achievement than all other schools, it does so in a way that privileges their inherited cultural capital. Excellence Without AP highlights how schools have been able to include more "hands-on learning," and "extended off-campus projects" that make learning "a voyage of joint discovery"—all of which require students to experience and express what they learn, not withstanding the need for huge amounts of resources to set up such programs (Excellence Without AP). While Excellence Without AP cites this flexibility as the main reason for dropping AP, they also are proud that "A home-grown curriculum can help schools define their niche in a competitive market" (Excellence Without AP). The new label of Advanced Topics distinguishes itself from AP. Even more, the courses cultivate critical thinking skills learned and in-depth learning experiences inaccessible to those taking generic AP. While AP students are spending their time preparing for the AP test, Advanced Topics students are completing an apprenticeship that makes a great addition to a college resume. This has proved beneficial for students who are looking for admission to top colleges. In Scarsdale acceptance to top colleges has gone up and the Excellence Without AP schools send a higher percentage of students to Harvard than those who continue to use AP (Hu)(Schneider).

Most striking of all this is that AP itself originally functioned as a means of distinguishing elite students from the masses. AP arose in the early 1950's, a decade that saw a significant expansion of standardization. Schools had begun using IQ test scores to sort students into different academic tracks in the name of "social justice" (Lemann 117). The SAT was also increasingly salient because it was in these years that Stanley Kaplan began "a nice little business in SAT tutoring," that he called "the

poor man's private school" (Lemann 112-113). In the context of the era in which it arose, AP was a more progressive mode of evaluation than other tests of the time. AP's origins can be traced to two separate initiatives. One included three of the nation's most prestigious prep schools, Andover, Exeter, and Lawrenceville, and the country's three most prestigious colleges: Harvard, Princeton, and Yale (College Board). The other group consisted of 12 elite colleges (Bowdoin, Brown, Carleton, Haverford, Kenyon, MIT, Middlebury, Oberlin, Swarthmore, Wabash, Wesleyan, and Williams) and 12 secondary school administrators (DiYanni). These two committees were concerned that the most advanced students were made to repeat in the first years of college what they had already learned in secondary school. They recommended that the best students take college level classes in their last two years of high school and take a specific examination to receive credit in college. Doing this, they argued, would make high school and college "two halves of a common enterprise" (College Board). The fact that this recommendation came from the most elite colleges and prep schools in the country makes one wonder what exactly that "common enterprise" might be.

In its early stages, very few minorities participated in AP (The JBHE Foundation). AP was a serious lift to one's chances of being admitted to college but those actually taking the test were few. Yet, in 1955, the College Board took over this initiative and by 1960, 600 schools were using AP to help their students get credit at the country's best colleges (DiYanni). Over time AP expanded exponentially, spreading to a majority of schools in the country. Very soon, states and special interest groups began to subsidize AP so that more and more students

could reap its benefits (DiYanni). African American advocates began encouraging blacks to take AP tests as a way to gain access to and succeed in college (The JBHE Foundation). Eventually, AP became a way to improve education for all and it leveled the playing field of college admissions because, "students in public schools had access to the same courses taken by students at schools such as Andover and Exeter" (Schneider). For most of its history, AP had been "a virtual prerequisite for admission to elite colleges" but as it became ubiquitous "it began to decline in prestige" and colleges began to give it less weight in the admissions process (Hu)(Schneider). With such widespread use, we can see the impetus for wanting to leave AP.

What had once been available for just a few to gain an advantage in the "common enterprise" between high school and college has now become a way for nearly anyone to attempt to gain that advantage. It is in this context that complaints over AP's standardization and inflexibility began to arise. As AP became more and more ubiquitous, it allowed for anyone who could study for the AP test to compete dangerously with the established elites. When over half of the schools in the country offer AP classes and over 2 million tests are taken a year the program switches from something that encourages critical thinking to one that forces classes to be "a mile wide and an inch deep," even though the content of AP has not changed (Schneider). In Scarsdale, what was once hailed by educators as having "rejuvenated my entire teaching career" became a standardized nuisance. Only when AP became too common did its standardization become a true problem. The most logical way to maintain an advantage in this struggle for recognition was for

the best schools in the country to create an entirely new measure of achievement. As long as these Advanced Topics courses are not standardized, only those schools that have already been recognized as high achieving can create them. And, by emphasizing hands-on, experiential learning, the courses will always privilege the inherited, non-institutional cultural capital of the bourgeoisie.

A similar debate over standardization is evident in schools' requiring a minimum number of hours of community service for graduation. The early 1990's, like the 1950's, were also a period of expanding standardized tests. The efforts of both the H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations brought about Goals 2000, an unprecedented federal push for standardization at that point in history (Ravitch). At the same time, prep schools began requiring students to do community service, expanding the spheres of educational experience and measurement. Private schools began this initiative, "to teach our children… to live in a world bigger than their own" (Quenqua). Of course, "It didn't hurt that colleges looked favorably on applicants who could claim hundreds of hours of charity work" (Quenqua). Soon however, public schools began requiring community service as well and the movement became so popular that entire states began adopting minimum hours for graduation; Maryland requires 75, the District of Columbia 100, and President Obama wants a national requirement of 50 hours (Quenqua). Everyone wanted to reap the benefits of having completed community service hours on their transcript. Now, with such requirements becoming standard nation-wide, many private schools have begun to rework their requirements.

The discourse around these decisions surprisingly parallels that surrounding standardized tests. Critics of the hours say the requirement "mistakes quantity for quality" and the situation "has devolved into an unseemly obsession with hours" (Quenqua). They say the "quality" of the service should be defined by "the charitable experience itself" and the actual amount of time volunteered is of lesser importance (Quenqua). One must wonder what bad quality hours would be or what type of community service doesn't involve a "charitable experience." Does an "obsession with hours" mean that no real service is taking place just as, for those editorials mentioned earlier, teaching to the test meant no real learning was taking place? This is certainly not the case for the charities where student volunteers are crucial to success. One chapter of Habitat for Humanity, for example, estimates that 50% of its construction is done by student volunteers. And, because of the need for to fulfill the required hours, these students "aren't fair-weather friends… They know they have to come out" (Quenqua).

The community benefit of these hourly notwithstanding, many private schools have now dropped their quantified hourly requirements. Instead, they have created new programs that place emphasis on "the charitable experience" by requiring unique, self-initiated projects that demand the "real camaraderie" of "doing something as a team" rather than a minimum number hours (Quenqua). This new development is best characterized as a push for a less quantifiable, less common mark of achievement. If requiring hours has become so standard that "college admissions officers roll their eyes at bogus-sounding claims," there is a serious advantage to a self-initiated, team project that can be translated into a killer

college essay (Quenqua). The new requirements move the mode of evaluation from the transcript, which literally cannot be touched by the student before it is sent to colleges, to the Common Application, allowing students (and the parents who help them) to show off the unique self-expression that colleges want to see. This is the same type of push for more invisible modes of evaluation that created the new Advanced Topics courses and is found in resistance to standardization in general. In all of these cases there is one social group who benefits—the bourgeois elites whose inherited cultural capital aligns with this invisible, progressive education.

Conclusion

In recent years, standardization has taken an increasingly prominent and controversial role in our nation's educational system. Most progressive scholars of education see this phenomenon as an issue divided between the Left and the Right. Progressive authors such as Linda McNeil and Deborah Meier advocate for limiting standardized testing, arguing that standardization trivializes knowledge and disenfranchises individuals and communities. And the Left labels support for standardized tests as a neoliberal and neoconservative attempt to control the workforce and ideology of the nation. The findings of this research suggest that such an understanding of standardization is both inaccurate and incomplete.

In all of the cases studied in this essay—individuals' resistance to standardized tests, community and institutional opposition to No Child Left Behind, and responses to standardization beyond government mandated tests—those who resist standardization make their claims within the context of an elite social class invested in protecting its privilege. They speak of defending real learning,

encouraging self-expression and cultivating the whole person. They write as if doing so will help society as a whole. But what is evident upon a closer analysis is that this understanding of knowledge they fight to preserve is informed by class values. The research of Bernstein and Lareau is important because it demonstrates that all social classes do not share the same relation to educational systems.

Rather than seeing debates over standardization as divided between the beneficent Left and the hegemonic Right, it is more fitting to see this conflict as Bourdieu would, as a class struggle for control of the price-forming mechanisms of the educational system that dictate social reproduction. In this framework, bourgeois elites fight for more invisible modes of evaluation that measure knowledge learned at home, in private lessons and in other localities that their inherited resources give them special access to. In contrast, those who do not come from a place of privilege stand to benefit from anything that makes the invisible visible and limits what is evaluated to only those things explicitly listed as the metric of analysis. The implications of understanding standardization within this framework are immense. As it stands now, traditional ideas of progressive education are intrinsically tied to the very modes of evaluation that create disparity within our society, even if they are couched in a language of greater learning and fairness. What options does this leave for an individual with a strong affinity for both progressive education and social equality?

When asked why she was protesting standardized tests, one of the leaders of the boycott in Scarsdale responded by saying: "The reason Scarsdale and districts like it can take the lead on this is that they do well on these tests, so no one can say,

'You don't want to take them because you won't do well.' We've shown we can do well. But we don't think this is the way to a quality education'' (Zernike). When I was in high school and was contemplating protesting our local standardized test, I felt a sentiment similar as this Scarsdale parent: the feeling of being a martyr for the cause of better education and a better society. Not only did I think a more self-expressive, student-centered, holistic education would be better for me, I thought it would be honorable to potentially sacrifice my own success in order to liberate other students from the ills of the standardized test. Now, I can see that this would not have been such an honorable route to take. I know that my own elite opposition to standardization is likely to benefit myself more than anyone else.

Progressives have often been wary of standardized tests, not only for the all reasons mentioned throughout this essay, but also because increased standardization could easily lead to the creation of a dictatorship of knowledge that governs what ideas are considered to be legitimate. After conducting this research, it seems to me that this dictatorship is already in place. It is nearly invisible and dressed in the language of self-expression, equality, and critical thinking, yet it, like any system of knowledge, judges and values. If this is the case, it may be possible that a visible dictatorship is no worse than the invisible one that already exists.

In *Distinction,* Bourdieu argues that the "supposed spontaneity" of bourgeois culture is not spontaneous, but rather, it is labeled as such so that elites can protect their privilege. They say that the knowledge they value is incompatible with standardization, yet there is no reason why this must be the case. It is provocative to think that the knowledge valued by any social class has the potential to be

standardized. This means the main difference between a standardized test and a college essay is the degree to which their implicit expectations are consciously made explicit. Therefore, it may be possible that even the most progressive formations of knowledge could be made visible if standardized tests were improved to include critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills—at least as long as the elite were willing to admit this possibility. If both learning and equality are things to be valued, we must entertain the thought that an expansion of standardization could make visible non-institutional modes of evaluation in the educational system, thus increasing access to previously invisible forms of knowledge and reducing the stratifying effects of inherited privilege. Maybe it is time to think about improving tests instead of boycotting them.

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