

Hacking Away at the Corporate Octopus

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In January 1961, as he completed his second and final term as president of the United States, Dwight Eisenhower gave a farewell address to the nation (Ike's Warning, 2011). In many ways, it was a remarkable and prescient speech, especially given that Eisenhower was a West Point graduate, a retired five-star general, a military hero during World War II who led the D-Day invasion of Europe, and was essentially a very conservative man.

In the speech, Eisenhower warned the American people of the growing power of a "military-industrial complex," an alliance of the military with defense contractors that he saw as a threat to democracy:

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists, and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together. (Eisenhower Farewell Address, paras. 21-22)

Democracy in the United States is now under a similar assault from what I call the Education-Foundation-Political-Industrial Complex. This Complex takes many forms but its primary goal seems to be to shape state and federal educational policy in a way that maximizes private corporate profits at the expense of public education.

What used to be called the not-for-profit sector has been virtually taken over by the Complex. Non-profit no longer really means non-profit. According to an article in *Dissent Magazine*, "hundreds of private philanthropies together spend almost \$4 billion annually to support or transform K-12 education, most of it directed to schools that serve low-income children" (Barkan, 2011, para. 2). The three biggest players are the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Microsoft), the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation (finance, real estate, and insurance), and the Walton Family Foundation (Walmart). The Gates-Broad-Walton triumvirate support a range of what they champion as educational "reform," but their primary interest in each case appears to me as an effort to undermine the current system of public education by promoting market-based initiatives based on competition, privatization, high-stakes testing, and anti-union activities such as campaigns for "merit pay" (About the Broads, n.d.).



When a group of Indiana teachers surprisingly spoke out against seniority-based layoff policies, it turned out they were recruited by a group called Teach Plus, which is largely financed by the Gates Foundation. The foundation recruits and pays Harvard-trained data specialists to work in school districts where they promote Gates initiatives. Harvard University received \$3.5 million to place “strategic data fellows” who could act as “entrepreneurial change agents” in major urban school districts including Boston and Los Angeles.

In 2009, the last year for which tax records were available, the Gates Foundation spent \$78 million on educational advocacy, promoting its agenda, and another \$300 million funding model Gates programs through 360 educational grants. Gates money is so pervasive that many recipients do not even know the origin of their funds, including the Teach Plus teachers. The American Enterprise Institute received a half a million dollars “to influence the national education debates,” and money went to *Education Week* and public radio and television stations that cover education policies.

Gates money gets Gates opinions into the press, especially Gates opinions on the “common core curriculum” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). The Alliance for Excellent Education was paid over half a million dollars “to grow support for the common core standards initiative” (Dillon, 2011). The Center on Education Policy received a million dollars to “track which states adopted the standards.” The Fordham Institute got almost a million dollars to “review common core materials and develop supportive materials.” When Fordham president Chester E. Finn Jr., praised the standards, he was quoted in newspapers across the country.

The National Governors Association (NGA) played a key role along with Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in developing the “common core standards.” It presents itself on its website as “the bipartisan organization of the nation’s governors” designed to promote “visionary state leadership,” and “best practices,” yet it is virtually a wholly-owned subsidiary of the major edu-corporations. In 2010, it received about a third of its operating budget, \$7.5 million, from foundation grants and contracts, corporate fellows, and other contributions. The NGA and CCSSO have received millions of dollars from the Gates Foundation. Its over one hundred corporate partners include: Educational Testing Service, Apple, Pearson, Cisco, College Board, DeVry, Houghton Mifflin, IBM, Intel, Microsoft and Scholastic, all companies that stand to benefit from its policy recommendations. Recent corporate award winners include Walmart Intel, and Microsoft (Dillon, 2011).

In 2010, David Wakelyn represented the NGA at a series of regional meetings sponsored by the National Association of State Boards of Education to inform members about the Common Core Standards Initiative. At the meetings, he compared the common core standards to the invention of 110-volt electricity: “When you have common standards, the result is you can develop all kinds of appliances, materials, that plug into it...Productivity should increase” (Gerwertz, 2010).

Wakelyn sent me an email, objecting, when in a blog I identified him as a “corporate representative” whose appointment as Deputy Secretary for Education “cemented” Pearson’s “ties with the New York State governor and the State Education Department” (Singer, 2012). Either he was unaware of the close ties between the NGA and Pearson and Gates while he was promoting the common core, or he does not see that as a corporate connection. While the National Governors Association wrote his checks, the money came from Pearson and Gates. To quote William Shakespeare, Mr. Wakelyn “doth protest too much.” Curiously, after less than a

year, Wakelyn left the New York State Education Department to become a senior director at Democracy Prep charter schools.

According to Reuters, an international news service based in Great Britain, “investors of all stripes are beginning to sense big profit potential in public education. The K-12 market is tantalizingly huge: The U.S. spends more than \$500 billion a year to educate kids from ages five through 18. The entire education sector, including college and mid-career training, represents nearly 9 percent of U.S. gross domestic product, more than the energy or technology sectors” (Simon, 2012).

Pearson, a British multinational conglomerate, is one of the largest and most aggressive private companies seeking to profit from what they and others euphemistically call educational reform, but which teachers from groups like Rethinking Schools and FairTest see as an effort to sell, sell, sell substandard remedial education programs seamlessly aligned with the high stakes standardized tests for students and teacher assessments they are also selling. Pearson reported revenues of approximately \$9 billion in 2010 and generated approximately \$3 billion on digital revenues alone in 2011. According to a report prepared for the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, between 2007 and 2012, Pearson purchased twenty-five education and publishing companies valued at \$5 billion. They include Schoolnet, EDI, America’s Choice, eCollege.com, and Harcourt Assessment (Au, 2010; FairTest, n.d.; Gutstein, 2012). If it has its way, Pearson will soon be determining what gets taught in schools across the United States with little or no parental or educational oversight. Pearson standardized exams will assess how well teachers implement Pearson instruction modules and Pearson’s common core standards, but not what students really learn or whether students are actually learning things that are important to know. Pearson is already creating teacher certification exams for eighteen states, organizing staff development workshops to promote Pearson products, and providing school district Pearson assessment tools. In New York, Pearson Education currently has a five-year, \$32 million contract to administer state tests and provides other “testing services” to the State Education Department. It also recently received a share of a federal Race to the Top grant to create what the company calls the “next-generation” of online assessments (Hu, 2012). In the United Kingdom, Pearson is launching an on-line for profit “college” that is poised to offer business and enterprise degrees (Vitorovich, 2012). Given its past history, it is only a matter of time until Pearson enters the lucrative U.S. on-line proprietary school market where it can take advantage of generous poorly regulated federal student loan policies to attract low income, often marginally literate, students. In 2011, a company masquerading as the “University of Phoenix” offered almost 6,000 online teacher education degrees (Norris, 2012; Toppo & Schnaars, 2012).

Pearson, which claims to be the “world’s leading learning company,” is in the process of designing mind-numbing “multimedia textbooks...designed for pre-schoolers, school students and learners of all ages” for use on Apple’s iPad so that school systems will have more products to purchase instead of investing in quality teaching and instruction. In case you are not already worried about children sitting dazed in front of computer screens for hours on end, Pearson promises its “respected learning content” will be “brought to life with video, audio, assessment, interactive images and 3D animations.” It operates in more than sixty countries, although sixty percent of its sales are in the United States. Under the names Scott Foresman, Prentice Hall, Addison-Wesley, Allyn and Bacon, Benjamin Cummings, and Longman it produces material for use in classrooms from “pre-school to high school, early learning to professional certification” that “help to educate more than 100 million people worldwide—more than any other private

enterprise. In 2010, Pearson's U.S. sales were \$4 billion with an operating profit of \$733 million (Pearson releases new wave of interactive textbooks, 2012).

Starting in May 2014, Pearson Education will take over teacher certification in New York State as a way of fulfilling the state's promised "reforms" in its application for federal Race to the Top money (Regents Committee, 2012). The evaluation system known as the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) was developed at Stanford University with support from Pearson, but it will be solely administered, and prospective teachers will be entirely evaluated by Pearson and its agents (Stanford and Pearson collaborate, 2011; Winerip, 2012). Pearson is advertising for current or retired licensed teachers or administrators willing to evaluate applicants for teacher certification. It is prepared to pay \$75 per assessment (see <http://www.scoreedtpa.pearson.com>).

The Pearson footprint appears to be everywhere and taints academic research as well as government policy. For example, the Education Development Center (EDC), based in Waltham, Massachusetts, is a "global nonprofit organization that designs, delivers, and evaluates innovative programs to address some of the world's most urgent challenges in education, health, and economic opportunity." EDC works with "public-sector and private partners" to "harness the power of people and systems to improve education, health promotion and care, workforce preparation, communications technologies, and civic engagement." In education, it is involved in curriculum and materials development, research and evaluation, publication and distribution, online learning, professional development, and public policy development. According to its website, its funders include Cisco Systems, IBM, Intel, the Gates Foundation, and of course, Pearson Education, all companies or groups that stand to benefit from its policy recommendations.

EDC sponsored a study on the effectiveness of new teacher evaluation systems, "An Examination Of Performance-Based Teacher Evaluation Systems In Five States," that Pearson is promoting (Regional Education Laboratory, 2012). There are two very big flaws in the study, however. First, of the five states included in the study (Delaware, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Texas), four (Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Texas) are notorious anti-union states where teachers have virtually no job security or union protection, and Delaware used the imposition of new teacher assessments to make it more difficult for teachers to acquire tenure. In Texas, North Carolina, and Georgia collective bargaining by teachers is illegal. Tennessee, Texas and North Carolina used the new assessments to make it easier to fire teachers, and Georgia used the assessments to determine teacher pay. It is not clear how this model will be transferable to states where teachers have legal rights. The second flaw is that the study draws no connection between the evaluation system and improved student learning (Southern Regional Education Board, 2011).

According to the *Financial Times* of London, a Pearson-owned property and in what I consider to be a conflict of interests, Susan Fuhrman, the President of Teachers College at Columbia University has been a "Non-Executive Independent Director of Pearson PLC" since 2004 and a major stockholder in the company. As of June 6, 2013, she held 15,392 shares of Pearson stock valued on July 1, 2013, at \$280,000 (<http://quotes.wsj.com/PSO>). As a non-executive director she also receives an annual fee of £65,000 or almost \$100,000. Fuhrman has been a non-executive director since 2004 and has received fees and stock I estimate worth more than a million dollars.

Fuhrman also is “president of the National Academy of Education, and was previously dean of the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania and on the board of trustees of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.” The National Academy of Education, a major supporter of educational research in the United States with ties to literally thousands of potential academic allies for the Pearson company, received a \$140,000 grant from the Pearson Foundation in 2010. I believe the Pearson Foundation’s generosity serves to temper criticism of the Pearson company because people dependent on grants and other forms of financial support do not want to be publicly perceived as a corporate enemy.¹

There has been some resistance to Pearson’s influence over American education. In May 2012, students and teachers in the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus School of Education launched a national campaign challenging the forced implementation of Teacher Performance Assessment (Winerip, 2012). They argued that the field supervisors and cooperating teachers who guided their teaching practice and observed and evaluated them for six months in middle and high school classrooms were better equipped to judge their teaching skills and potential than people who had never seen nor spoken with them. They have refused to participate in a pilot program organized by Pearson and to submit the two 10-minute videos of themselves teaching and a take-home test. They are supported by United Opt Out National, a website that organized a campaign and petition drive to boycott Pearson evaluations of students, student teachers, and teachers (see: <http://unitedoptout.com/boycott-pearson-now/>).

In June 2012, New York parents protested against Pearson-designed reading tests that included standardized reading passages and meaningless choices. Sixty-one schools across the state, including forty-seven in New York City, refused to participate in a round of standardized tests. In addition, hundreds of parents and students picketed Pearson’s Manhattan headquarters (Kuczynski-Brown, 2012). One Westchester county school district, upon learning that many of the questions on the Pearson-designed reading test were considered experimental in nature, announced plans to bill Pearson \$20,000 for the time the students and teachers missed from class (Christ, 2012; Weiner, 2012).

The wave of parental protests were set off by outrage over a reading passage and questions on a Pearson-made New York State reading test that neither the eighth-grade teachers or the students could figure out. Pearson adapted the passage from a popular pre-teen book which itself was a remake of the classic Aesop’s fable about a race between a tortoise and the hare (turtle and rabbit). In this rendition, a talking “pineapple” challenges the hare to a race, outrages the rest of the animals when he proves uncompetitive, and gets eaten in revenge (Hartocollis, 2012).

John B. King Jr., the New York State education commissioner, announced, “due to the ambiguous nature of the test questions the department decided it will not be counted against students in their scores.” However, he also defended the test saying that, in the context of the full reading passage, the questions that accompanied the selection “make more sense.” “More sense” of course is an opinion, not a fact, which is a problem with many questions on Pearson-made exams, where students are frequently asked to identify the “best choice.” In this case, students

¹ See these links for relevant information on the relationships among Pearson, The Pearson Foundation, and Fuhrman:
<http://lt.hemscott.com/SSB/tiles/company-data/forecasts-deals/director-dealings.jsp?epic=PERSON&market=LSE&directorId=72434><http://markets.ft.com/Research/Markets/Tearsheets/Directors-and-dealings?s=PERSON:LSE><http://www.pearsonfoundation.org/about-us/financial-statements.html>

were asked to decide why the animals ate the pineapple, which the animals never actually explain, which animal was the wisest, which is definitely an opinion since no criteria were offered as the basis for evaluation, and what would have happened if the animals had cheered for the hare instead of the pineapple, which we can't know based on the passage because *it did not happen*.

Since the type of reading passages that appear on standardized tests quickly find themselves in the school curriculum, either because it is mandated by supervisors or because responsible teachers want to prepare their students for the assessments, the real issue was “Why is reading proficiency being measured using this type of passage?” Why not provide students with an article from a newspaper or magazine on a current event that requires them to draw real conclusions about real concerns? Students could, and should, be able to read a passage and answer questions about a range of topics including climate change, racial tension, immigration reform, or poverty and unemployment. These topics certainly belong in the eighth grade curriculum. What is Pearson afraid of?

A question that must be addressed is whether the British publishing giant Pearson and its Pearson Education subsidiary should determine who is qualified to teach and what should be taught in New York State and the United States? I don't think so! Not only did no one elect them, but when people learn who they are, they might not want them anywhere near a school—or a government official.

From what I can make out from its website, the three key players at Pearson and Pearson Education are Glen Moreno, chairman of the Pearson Board of Directors; Dame Marjorie Morris Scardino, formerly the overall chief executive for Pearson; and William Ethridge, chief executive for North American Education. The largest stockholders on the London exchange, however, are a British investment firm called Legal & General Group PLC, which controls 32 million shares (or 4% of the company) and the Libyan Investment Authority, with 24 million shares (or 3% of the company). According to the *Financial Times* of London, the Libyan Investment Authority was founded by Libyan dictator Muammer Gaddafi's son Seif al-Islam, his heir apparent until the regime's collapse in January 2007.²

Glen Moreno is wealthy, powerful, influential, and I believe highly suspect. According to a biography on Wikipedia, Moreno was born in California in 1943 and has a law degree from Harvard University. He worked for 18 years at Citigroup in Europe and Asia, running the investment banking and trading divisions. Moreno was a director of the politically influential Fidelity International Ltd. According to U.K. Electoral Commission records, “since 1994, Fidelity Investment Management, part of Fidelity International, has donated £495,500 to the party. Mr. Moreno is a former chief executive of Fidelity's international arm.” He became chairman of Pearson, the publisher of the British newspaper *Financial Times*, in October 2005.³

Moreno was chairman of UK Financial Investments, the group set up by the British government to protect public funds used to bail-out banks after the 2008 global economic

² See these links for relevant information:

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/1b5e11b6-d4cb-11e0-a7ac-00144feab49a.html> - axzz24qXoOwON

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/1b5e11b6-d4cb-11e0-a7ac-00144feab49a.html> - axzz24qXoOwON

³ See these links for relevant information:

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/sitesearch.do?querystring=glen+moreno&p=tto&pf=all&bl=on>

collapse. He was forced to resign in 2009 when it was revealed that he was a trustee of Liechtenstein Global Trust (LGT), a private bank accused of aiding tax evasion.

Moreno was also deputy chairman of Lloyds Banking Group, Great Britain's largest mortgage lender, but stepped down from there in May 2012 (Finch, 2012; Treanor, 2009).

Among the Pearson troika, Moreno is the lowest paid, although he apparently has other resources. According to *Forbes*, his total compensation in 2011 was a little over \$600,000. He does, however, own a home in London and a cattle farm in Virginia and, according to the *Times* of London, managed to purchase 200,000 shares of Lloyd stock in 2010.⁴

Dame Marjorie was also originally an American but became a British citizen. She became CEO of Pearson in 1997 and served until 2012. Before becoming CEO of Pearson, she was a lawyer in Georgia and a newspaper publisher. In 2007, *Forbes* magazine placed her seventeenth on its list of the 100 most powerful women in the world. She was named a "Dame of the British Empire" in 2010. According to *Forbes*, her total income in 2011 was \$2,455,000, but that represents a tiny fraction of her compensation that includes stock options. Scardino holds 1.5 million shares of Pearson stock.⁵

William Ethridge became chief executive of Pearson's North American Education division in 2008. He has what Pearson considers educational experience because he previously worked for Prentice Hall and Addison Wesley. At Pearson, he has been head of its Higher Education, International and Professional Publishing division and chairman of CourseSmart, a Pearson sponsored consortium of electronic textbook publishers. According to *Forbes*, his total compensation in 2011 was \$1,390,000. He holds a half million shares of Pearson stock.⁶

According to ILSE or London South East, which reports British stock market transactions, on July 30 and 31, 2012, Dame Marjorie and William Ethridge were involved in Pearson stock transfers and sales on the London exchanges. If I read the ILSE report correctly, the percentage of their holdings that Ethridge and Scardino sold seemed to be a bit less than 4% of their total holdings. The sales brought Ethridge approximately \$323,500 in U.S. dollars. However, a Pearson regulatory announcement issued on August 1, 2012, claims that share sales by Pearson directors on those dates related to shares earned through Pearson's long-term incentive plan (LTIP), whose rules "require that sufficient shares are sold to discharge the PAYE (Pay As You Earn) income tax liability on the shares released."⁷

⁴ See these links for relevant information:

<http://www.forbes.com/profile/glen-moreno/>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/sitesearch.do?querystring=glen+moreno&p=tto&pf=all&bl=on>

⁵ See these links for relevant information:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/media/9591486/Marjorie-Scardino-the-softly-spoken-American-who-rose-to-the-top-of-Pearson.html>

<http://www.forbes.com/profile/marjorie-scardino-1/>

<http://lt.hemscott.com/SSB/tiles/company-data/forecasts-deals/major-shareholders.jsp?epic=PERSON&market=LSE>

⁶ See these links for relevant information:

<http://people.forbes.com/profile/will-ethridge/62414>

<http://www.pearson.com/about-us/board-of-directors/Boardmembers/Will-EthridgeChief-executive,-North-American-Education-235/>

<http://lt.hemscott.com/SSB/tiles/company-data/forecasts-deals/major-shareholders.jsp?epic=PERSON&market=LSE>

⁷ See this link for relevant information:

<http://www.lse.co.uk/SharePrice.asp?SharePrice=PERSON>

This was at a time when financial observers, including the influential Nomura Group, were questioning whether Pearson stock on the London exchange was overvalued. ILSE reported that “Pearson had warned in April that its adjusted operating profit would be down in the first half of 2012...Sales at Penguin dropped 4%, with profits falling 48% to £22 million, which management said was caused by lower sales in its more profitable U.S. market. Uncertainty over potential national and local government spending cuts in the U.S. continues to cast a shadow over the group’s Education business.”⁸

In other words, Pearson’s chief operating officers, who are also heavily invested in the company, are busy trading stocks and racking up dollars and pounds while the corporation’s financial situation is shaky. And, their solution is to sell, sell, sell their products in the United States.

Meanwhile, according to *The New York Times*, New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman is “investigating whether the Pearson Foundation, the nonprofit arm of one of the nation’s largest educational publishers, acted improperly to influence state education officials by paying for overseas trips and other perks” (Hu, 2011). Since 2008, state education officials have been treated to trips to London, Helsinki, Finland, Singapore, and Rio de Janeiro.

Pearson organized a National Summit in Orlando, Florida, from February 9–11, 2012, to promote its concept of “Best Practices in School Improvement” and to sell its programs for integrating Common Core State Standards into curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Pearson National Summit, 2012). These include providing “struggling and successful schools alike with professional development and consultative services that have helped their leaders transform instruction in the classroom and raise students’ achievement levels.” The company brags that senior America’s Choice fellows Sally Hampton and Phil Daro, employees of a Pearson subdivision, “not only led the development of the Common Core Standards, but also helped design Pearson’s CCSS services, helping us tailor our professional development, district level consultative services, job-embedded coaching, learning teams for building capacity, and even whole school CCSS implementation services in order to meet your specific needs and interests as you align curriculum content and practices to the standards.”

New York Times education reporter Michael Winerip (2011) has charged Pearson with using its not-for-profit the Pearson Foundation to finance free international trips for education commissioners whose states do business with the company. Mark Nieker, President and CEO of the Pearson Foundation, replied, “I was stunned by the *New York Times*’ suggestions that the Pearson Foundation’s sponsorship of the International Education Summits had a commercial purpose...There is simply no factual basis for the suggestion that the Pearson Foundation’s support for the CCSSO International Education Summits is designed to win contracts for Pearson...We vigorously contest both columns. And we deeply regret the possibility that they may undermine the good intentions and the good work of the education leaders who took part in these important professional exchanges.”

The Pearson Foundation does like to spread its money around, and according to its 2010 tax forms, it supports many organizations that do important charitable work. These include colleges, public television, a woman’s refugee group, and a children’s hospital in Boston. But,

⁸ See relevant links here:

<http://www.lse.co.uk/SharePrice.asp?SharePrice=PSO>

<http://www.pearson.com/news/2012/august/directors--shareholding.html?article=true>

some contributions are a little more suspicious. Stanford University, which developed the Teacher Performance Assessment marketed by the Pearson company received a \$100,000 grant from the Pearson Foundation. The Council of Chief State School Officers, which organizes and supports the educational “conferences” questioned by Winerip and which partnered with the Pearson company in the creation and marketing of the National Common Core Standards, received \$340,000 from the Pearson Foundation.

The National Academy Foundation received over a million dollars from the Pearson Foundation to promote partnerships between the world of business and finance and the public schools, which buys good will and in politics would be called lobbying. Its Board of Directors is an all-star team of past or present officers of major corporations, including: Citicorp, American Express, Moody’s, Traveler’s Insurance, Xerox, Verizon, Capital One, and a number of venture capitalist firms.

One of the largest recipients of the Pearson Foundation’s largess in 2010 was Jumpstart, with an allocation of \$900,000.⁹ Jumpstart is an internationally recognized organization that promotes literacy in young children, especially pre-school children in low-income communities. On October 7, 2010, Jumpstart organized people around the world to simultaneously read *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats to over two million children. The activity set a world’s record for the largest shared reading experience in history. The 50th anniversary edition of the Keats book, which sells for \$13.59 on Amazon.com, is published by Viking Juvenile, a subsidiary of Penguin, which coincidentally is a Pearson company.

The boundary between Pearson the foundation and Pearson the company can be difficult to identify. The Pearson Foundation promotes the common core standards. The Pearson company markets material to implement them. Pearson, it is not clear which one, and Kentucky are collaborating to create the “first digital learning repository aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Kentucky, the first state to adopt the standards, uses Pearson’s EQUELLA software to embed the standards in the Kentucky Learning Depot, the state’s digital library and learning community. The EQUELLA software currently powers the Depot” (Kentucky, Pearson aim to create first digital learning repository, 2011).

Congress has also investigated products with a Pearson connection. The Department of Education’s research arm “found that students in schools that use Reading First, which provides grants to improve elementary school reading, scored no better on comprehension tests than their peers who attended schools that did not receive program money.” A 2006 report from the department’s inspector general found that “some program officials steered states to certain tests and textbooks.” In addition, Congressional testimony “revealed that some of those officials benefited financially because of ties to companies that produced those products.” Not surprisingly, “Pearson developed *Stanford Reading First* in response to the Reading First initiative of *No Child Left Behind*” (Gold, 2008)

The Gates and Pearson Foundations now have a number of shared initiatives centering on the development of the “common core curriculum” adopted by over forty of the states. Grover J. “Russ” Whitehurst, a former director of the U.S. Department of Education’s research arm, said the Pearson-Gates arrangement represents an “interesting intertwining” of non-profit and for-

⁹ See: <http://www.pearsonfoundation.org/about-us/financial-statements.html>

profit motives and will undoubtedly prompt questions about “who profits from the common core” (Dillon, 2011; Gerwertz, 2011).

The Education-Foundation-Political-Industrial Complex works in other mysterious ways as well. Sometimes corporations may not earn “profits,” but that does not mean their chief executives are working as a public service. According to the New Visions website, Robert L. Hughes was appointed president in 2000 and “under his leadership, New Visions has created 99 district and 2 charter public schools in New York City, provided mentoring services to hundreds of new principals, developed school-based certification programs for teachers and principals, and created an inquiry process now in use in 1,500 New York City public schools. New Visions currently is a Partnership Support Organization providing direct support to 76 schools serving almost 40,000 students.” Hughes, an attorney with no actual background working in schools, was paid \$358,525 by New Visions in 2010. That is forty percent more than the salary paid to the current school’s chancellor, who supervises the entire school system and the money allotted to pay the Mayor of New York City.¹⁰

Other people simply go back and forth between the corporations, foundations, and government. Karen Cator is the Director of the Office of Educational Technology at the U.S. Department of Education. Prior to this, Cator worked for Apple, where she focused on “the intersection of education policy and research, emerging technologies, and the reality faced by teachers, students and administrators.” Before that, she served as Special Assistant for Telecommunications for the Lieutenant Governor of Alaska and served as chair of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a national organization that advocates for educational readiness.

It was very difficult to find information online about Mark Nieker, the president and executive director of the not-for-profit Pearson Foundation. Nieker oversees Pearson’s philanthropic activity worldwide. However, prior to heading the Pearson Foundation, Nieker held executive positions in Pearson businesses in the United States and worked in Microsoft’s Consumer Publishing Division, both “profit-making” positions.

The dystopia described by George Orwell in his novel *1984* (1949) may be a few decades late, but it is coming, and it is coming to a school near you. Some of the plot and characters have changed, profit-driven corporate media has replaced the omnipresent “socialist” state as the instrument of “Big Brother,” but the large “telescreens,” now called “Smartboards” (an example of doublethink if there ever was one), that disseminate “newspeak” in our schools and ensure constant monitoring are no longer fantasies. As corporate-produced “powerpoints” replace professional teachers and genuine teaching, semi-skilled “clickers” will be assigned to classrooms to summon the next slide and act as Thought Police reporting students with subversive tendencies (e.g., not doing the assignments).

The Education-Foundation-Political-Industrial Complex producing this dystopian educational future includes some of the great names in the contemporary school reform

¹⁰ See these links for relevant information:

<http://www.newvisions.org/about-us/staff>

<http://www.newvisions.org/about-us/financials>

<http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=search.summary&orgid=4225>

<http://www.nytimes.com/schoolbook/2011/09/06/whos-who-at-tweed/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayor_of_New_York_City

movement. Apple and PC computer makers and marketers, who have been donating the last generation of technology to schools as a tax write-off, a form of product placement, and to build brand loyalty, will cash in by selling a new wave of hardware. Bill Gates' Microsoft will be generously promoting their software. Bloomberg LP and Murdoch's News Corp, where Bloomberg's former educational czar now resides, as well as the publishing giant Pearson, will be producing, pruning, and carefully pushing pre-digested "information" along with their own information technologies.

This corporate-sponsored educational reform movement is also an anti-union and an anti-government movement because the unions will have to be broken for them to put their plans in place and various levels of government will have to abandon their responsibilities and turn the school systems over to private interests. With government and the unions out of the way, kids can absorb whatever the corporations decide to provide without any interference.

In many ways the for-profit edu-corporations and their not-for-profit allies resemble a giant octopus with tentacles reaching into every facet of public education in the United States (see: <http://www.apush-xl.com/Monopolies.html>). I am reminded of the book *The Octopus* (1901) by Frank Norris that detailed the way railroads, at the start of the nineteenth century, controlled every facet of business and individual life. There is also a famous cartoon from 1904 that portrays the Standard Oil monopoly as a giant octopus controlling state and national governments.

This giant octopus is strangling public education in both blatant and subtle ways. For example, on the surface, the 2000 and 2003 editions of the popular middle school United States history book *The American Nation* barely differ. Both editions list the publisher as Prentice-Hall in association with *American Heritage* magazine, but by 2003, Prentice-Hall had become a sub-division of Pearson.

What does it mean that Prentice-Hall is now a sub-division of Pearson and that *The American Nation* is now a Pearson publication?

The 2000 edition of *The American Nation* was reviewed by a committee of eleven middle school teachers, including one from New York State and two, representing 18% of the total, from Texas. For the 2003 Pearson edition, the review committee was expanded to twenty-two classroom teachers, with seven or 32% of the total, from Texas. In addition, there was one representative each from Virginia, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Idaho, and still only one from New York State.

Anyone familiar with coverage of the 2008 and 2012 Presidential elections knows that this review committee leans heavily toward teachers from the most conservative "Red" (Republican) states. What Pearson is doing is tilting the coverage of U.S. history to win approval by school boards in these states, and in doing this, allowing the most conservative school boards in the nation to determine what gets taught in New York State schools.

The seven Texas teachers on the review board teach in a state where the ideologically-driven state curriculum requires them to teach about Judeo-Christian influences on the nation's Founding Fathers, but not the reasons they supported the principle of separation of Church and State. It describes the U.S. government as a "constitutional republic" instead of a "democratic" system. The standards promote the idea that the United States is somehow different from all other countries, a point of view known as "American exceptionalism," and champions

unregulated free enterprise without what it considers excessive government interference (Prabhu, 2010). A *New York Times* editorial charged that the “social conservatives who dominate the Texas Board of Education” had created an ideologically-driven curriculum (Politicized in Texas, 2010).

Teachers and parents could recommend that their school district use a different middle school United States history textbook. However, Pearson has been expanding voraciously and now controls what used to be the independent school textbook publishing companies: Scotts Foreman, Longman, Addison-Wesley, Allyn & Bacon, Silver, Burdette & Ginn, and the Macmillian Company, all in partnership with Colonial Williamsburg, the Smithsonian Institute, the Discovery Channel, Mapquest, and Inspiration Software.¹¹ Partnership in these cases generally means the other organizations get paid or receive donations to let Pearson use their names.

Pearson as a partner of the National Governors Association (NGA) and Council of Chief State School Officers has been promoting the common core standards, pushing Singapore as a model for education in the United States and promoting conferences for educational officials where they have “the opportunity to explore emerging international methods, best practices, and policies with an eye to the ways in which they may apply to their local education contexts” (Pearson Foundation, 2008b). A number of state governments, including Illinois, are now investigating whether trips to exotic locations paid for by Pearson were actually attempts to buy influence. Pearson has \$130 million worth of contracts with the state of Illinois alone. The NGA also partnered with the Pearson Foundation to create study guides that promote the organization’s role and “gubernatorial history” in the classroom (Pearson Foundation, 2008a).

In Jules Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), Captain Nemo and the submarine Nautilus are attacked by what is either a giant squid or octopus (depending on how you translate from the original French). Nemo and the crew have to chop off its tentacles with axes and harpoon the beast to escape. If our public schools are going to survive the current attack by the for-profit edu-corporations and their not-for-profit allies’ onslaught, we need a new Nautilus with a bold crew of parents, teachers, and students to hack away at the corporate octopus.

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¹¹ See:

<http://www.pearson.com/about-us/our-history/>
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