Standardizing Correspondence: Reflections on the Indispensability of Testing to the Process of Social Reproduction in Education

Tyler Poisson

University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA

Abstract

In Schooling in Capitalist America*, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis theorize a correspondence between the social relations of production and those of education. They advance the argument that the education system inures students to the dispositions required of workers under capitalism by virtue of social and organizational parallels that exist between public schools and corporate workplaces. Their 'correspondence theory' of social reproduction has been criticized for being overly deterministic, not least because it downplays the realities of resistance in the classroom. In this paper, I reconcile my teaching experience with correspondence theory. Following a brief history of educational testing and drawing on experiential data, I argue that standardized testing cements the correspondence observed by Bowles and Gintis between schools and corporations in the U.S. by nullifying pedagogical autonomy to the end of ensuring alienation. In other words, it is precisely because teachers possess creative and inexpedient agency that testing is used as a means to forestall resistance and guarantee participation in the process of social reproduction.*

Keywords: *correspondence, testing, reproduction, resistance, alienation*

1. Narrative Background

I read *Schooling in Capitalist America* in 2022 while teaching in a public school in the United States. It provided me with a lens through which to interpret my experiences in the classroom. However, standardized testing is significantly more prominent today than it was in 1976, when Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis published the first edition of *Schooling*. It is therefore unsurprising that *Schooling* undertheorized testing in relation to the process of social reproduction. Inasmuch as my classroom experiences reflected Bowles and Gintis's analysis, nothing constrained or stifled my pedagogy more than tests and their attendant pressures. It was for this reason that I began to work on this essay. I wanted to square Bowles and Gintis's analysis with the presence of high-stakes, standardized testing to the end of advancing my own and other teachers' understanding. Eventually, I encountered the book *Unequal by Design* in which Wayne Au addresses a variation on the question that so concerned me: "What is the role of high-stakes, standardized testing in the (re)production of social and educational inequality?" (Au, 2022, p. 9). In fact, there is a sense in which Au made the contribution that I had envisioned, if only more comprehensively and incisively. Building on the work of critical education scholars such as Michael Apple and analysts such as Mark Weber, Au exposes how high-stakes tests are designed to exercise control over: (1) curricular content; (2) the form that knowledge takes in the classroom; (3) the practice of teaching; (4) the structure and function of educational bureaucracies; (5) educational discourse; and (6) student and teacher consciousness (see pp. 85-87). Au examines how each of these mechanisms of control are gendered, raced, and classed and thus how high-stakes tests inherently reproduce social inequalities. In contrast to *Unequal by Design*, the present paper is rather narrowly concerned with the reproduction of social class, following Bowles and Gintis' *Schooling in Capitalist America*. I am aware that restricting the scope of this paper as such

blunts my analysis. For this reason, I want to make it clear that I am not advancing a comprehensive theory of high-stakes testing or of social reproduction. Neither am I purporting to conduct a comprehensive review of the expansive literature on these subjects. What I am instead attempting is to reflect on Bowles and Gintis' analysis, flawed though it may be, in the context of my experience of high-stakes, standardized testing as a teacher. I am less concerned with the question of whether correspondence theory is a sufficient theory of social reproduction—it certainly is not—than I am with the question of how a teacher's classroom experiences may or may not map onto it. That is, I am interested in the effect of testing on the position and disposition of the teacher in relation to the process of social reproduction. In this spirit, I intend to respond to the problem statement articulated by Mark Carnoy and Henry Levine in their book *Schooling and Work in the Democratic State*.

> In our view, the challenge today is to explain how the public school can at one and the same time be an institution that reproduces the unequal class relations of capitalist society and an institution that is more democratic and equal than the workplace for which it prepares students. We reject both a mechanistic correspondence between work and school and a clear separation of the two. Rather we believe that though schools do reproduce unequal class relations, the fact that they do so imperfectly merely reflects the social conflict that characterizes the capitalist society they serve... How do schools reproduce social relations (1985, pp. 3-4, as cited in Apple, 1981)?

My reasons for drawing on *Schooling in Capitalist America* are straightforward. Bowles and Gintis' analysis provided me with a framework within which I was able to make sense of the challenges my students and I faced in the classroom. For me, the "explanatory value" of correspondence theory was "great" (Bowles & Gintis, 1988, p. 17). In consideration of whether it would be worth pursuing this project, I came to the conclusion that it might be useful for teachers, researchers,

and perhaps even for parents or students to read a school teacher's interpretation of *Schooling*. Therefore, the modest contribution that I hope to make isn't a theory or an argument (the arguments I advance in this essay have been made by others, in more depth, and with greater precision). Rather, this paper contributes to the literature the *perspective* of a fourth-grade teacher who read *Schooling in Capitalist America* while confronting the pressures of high-stakes, standardized testing.

Bowles and Gintis are accused of undertheorizing teacher and student autonomy in the process of social reproduction (see Cole, 1988). I take this as my point of departure. Drawing on experiential data, I contend that high-stakes, standardized testing affirms the reality of teacher and student agency insofar as it serves as an institution designed to nullify it. More specifically, I argue that the utility of testing derives from the fact that tested standards function to ensure the structural correspondences between learning and working in the U.S. by prescripting and constricting pedagogy under the guise of educational meritocracy. This paper constitutes an effort to reconcile correspondence theory and teacher agency. It is not one or the other but both reproduction and resistance, and it is standardized testing that adjudicates between them. Finally, as against the "simplistic image of teachers... [that is] vividly portrayed in the numerous personal accounts of 'teaching in the system', particularly the inner-city school system" which can demoralize "critically-minded teachers currently working or planning to work in public school systems" (Carlson, 1988, p. 163), I have found that correspondence theory is indispensable for its power to clarify and revolutionize K-12 educators' discontents.

Wayne Au ends *Unequal by Design* with a pertinent lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020 schools closed and "the federal government canceled the tests. Poof. Just like that, the states did not have to administer the federally mandated tests. And, then what happened? Nothing. The educational world did not end" (p. 136). Where Au ends his book is where I began my teaching career. Over the course of the 2021/22 school year I taught 4th grade in a "low-scoring" urban public school in Massachusetts in the United States. Laying bare the instrumentality of standardized testing in the U.S., the pandemic induced a nationwide panic over "learning loss" as measured through test scores (Cohodes et al., 2022; Frantz, 2023). It was at this juncture that I found myself in a school that produced some of the lowest scores in a state that achieves some of the highest, under the leadership of a school administration distinguished for having increased test scores at other schools in the district. In consequence, my students and I faced a litany of deadlines, prescriptions, standards, quantifications, and evaluations owing to the regime of high-stakes, standardized testing. Whether or not other teachers have or will experience comparable pressures, this paper offers insight into the pedagogical effect of testing in the limit. To maximize the exportability of my observations, it is necessary to state my positionality as the subject-author of this critical reflection.

The 2021/22 school year marked my first year as a head classroom teacher and my second year at an urban public school in one of Massachusetts's largest districts, where I taught English Language Arts to two classes of roughly twenty-five fourth grade students. I should add that prior to joining this school in a professional capacity, I had accumulated hundreds of hours as a volunteer, intern, and student-researcher in public schools in the same city and as far away as Hawaii. With that said, I did not teach in 2021/22 with the aim of conducting research or producing

an auto-ethnography. As such, this modest reflection is not to be confused for a methodologically rigorous auto-ethnography. Instead, I draw on direct experience and records that I kept for my own edification. As is expected of teachers, I paid close attention to my students over the course of the year in an effort to track their educational and social development. Although, I cannot speak on behalf of anyone but myself. Each of my students and colleagues will have endured a unique, if coterminous, experience. To be able to recount mine puts me in a privileged position. I am careful not to extract data from the relationships that I built with students for the purposes of this paper; I hope and trust that they run far deeper than I can do justice to here. On the contrary, I intend for this essay to build upon and honor those relationships. After all, it was my students who ultimately bore the brunt of the repressive testing policies that we were forced to navigate together. With all of that said, it is necessary to say more about my students and the school that I taught in so that readers can further contextualize my arguments.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, more than nine-tenths of the students at the school where I taught in 2021/22 are “High Needs” and “Low-Income”. About three-quarters of my students identified as Hispanic, many of whom were children of first-generation immigrants. With few exceptions, the remaining quarter of my class was multi-racial. Many of my students were English-Spanish bilinguals and a dozen or so were English second language learners. Like most of the other teachers who were concurrently employed at the school, I am white and I do not speak fluent Spanish. I was one of the youngest teachers in the school and one of the only male employees on the grounds. Finally, I should mention that I have subsequent teaching experience to draw on for purposes of comparison. Namely, I spent the 2022/23 school year employed as a paraprofessional in a predominantly white

(although fairly diverse) third grade class in a nearby, comparatively high-income public school district in Massachusetts. It is against this backdrop that I present this paper.

2. Correspondence Theory

Schooling in Capitalist America is a book about schooling, capitalism, and the ways in which they influence, reflect, and undermine each other. The book's authors, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (henceforth B&G) contend that the unequal educational outcomes characteristic of U.S. public schools are, by and large, consequences of the U.S. economic system. It follows from this view that liberal education reforms are a nonstarter. In fact, B&G maintain that the American education system cannot be relied on to produce equal outcomes so long as the American economic system remains undemocratic. In an effort to expose the undemocratic nature of capitalism, B&G start their book with a basic characterization of the capitalist mode of production. In the first chapter of *Schooling in Capitalist America*, B&G propose that

> The motivating force in the capitalist economy is the employer's quest for profit. Profits are made through hiring workers and organizing production in such a way that the price paid for the worker's time—the wage—is less than the value of the goods produced by labor. The difference between the wage and the value of goods produced is profit, or surplus value. The production of surplus value requires as a precondition the existence of a body of wage workers whose sole source of livelihood is the sale of their capacity to work, their labor power. Opposing these wage workers is the employer, whose control of the tools, structures, and goods required in production constitutes both the immediate basis of his power over labor and his legal claim on the surplus value generated in production (Bowles & Gintis, 1979, p. 10).

The capitalist production process is organized around the accumulation of surplus value, which is predicated on the expropriation of the products of unpaid labor. According to B&G, labor is an exploitative enterprise in the context of capitalism. For, on the basis of property relations, employees are paid less than the value of their labor while employers accumulate tremendous wealth. This remunerative disproportion is upheld and compounded by a litany of relational imbalances, many of which are mediated by the managerial class. For instance, managers assign tasks, employees attend to them; managers set deadlines, employees meet them; employers and managers author codes, employees adhere to them; employers set the standards that managers strive to meet while managers set standards that employees strive to meet; employers design workplaces, employees labor in them; employers predetermine benefits, employees enjoy them; employers level rewards and penalties, employees experience them; employers administer wages, employees rely on them. One could go on, but as B&G remark in the preface to the first edition of *Schooling*, "for nearly all to work is to take orders in an organization over which one has no control" (p. viii). Granted, workers "are neither machines nor commodities but, rather, active human beings who participate in production with the aim of satisfying their personal and social needs" (p. 10). As a result, the working class is pitted against the capitalist class in a constant, if sometimes latent, struggle to shape the contours of the labor process. Evidently, the individual worker's power to do so is incommensurate with that of the employer's. The process of production is thus rife with contradictions and contestations at every level of its operation.

An inescapable question arises in connection with this state of affairs. Namely, how are the social relations of production reproduced from one generation of workers to the next? In other words, how does the capitalist class perpetuate the

forms of hierarchical organization and interpersonal consciousness that corporate capitalism necessitates? There are, of course, a number of interrelated factors at stake. Among them, the state sponsored education system is widely recognized to be a prominent institution of social reproduction in the U.S. and elsewhere. Althusser famously labels schools (as well as churches, families, etc.) as "ideological state apparatuses" in the sense that they inculcate, through nonviolent means, the working class with values and habits that reinforce capitalist class relations (Althusser, 1970). In the same vein, B&G contend that

> "The initiation of youth into the economic system is... facilitated by a series of institutions including... the educational system [which] through the institutional relations to which students are subjected, fosters and rewards the development of certain capacities while thwarting and penalizing others... The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the workplace, but develops the types of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social-class identifications which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy" (p. 129-130).

Schools are, among other things, sites of social reproduction that serve to legitimate class inequalities. According to B&G, it is in consequence of the "correspondence principle" that the education system succeeds in instilling bankable habits and attitudes in successive generations of students. Correspondence theory relates the institutional structures and patterns of association in schools to those that characterize the capitalist production process. In fact, workplaces and schools are remarkably similar in numerous and important respects. First and foremost, it is a reality in both the educational and economic arena that superordinates exercise authority over subordinates. Strikingly, almost everything that was said in the preceding paragraph regarding the power imbalances between employers, managers, and employees applies in the case of

administrators, teachers, and students. For instance, teachers assign tasks, students attend to them; teachers set deadlines, students meet them; administrators and teachers author codes, students adhere to them; administrators set standards that teachers strive to meet, while teachers set standards that students strive to meet; teachers design classrooms, students learn in them; teachers predetermine benefits, students enjoy them; teachers level rewards and penalties, students accept them; teachers administer grades, students rely on them. For all of these reasons and others too multifarious to enumerate, "the social relationships of education—the relationships between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, students and students, and students and their work—replicate the hierarchical division of labor" (p. 130). What's more, schools and workplaces are organizationally coextensive. For instance, the school day lasts roughly the same amount of time as the workday and both are punctuated at their halfway point by a lunch break. Classes in schools are compartmentalized by subject reflecting the division of labor at work. Furthermore, competition is engendered among students—with each seeking a higher rank than every other—as among workers in the contest for promotion. Perhaps most consequentially, "the motivational system of the school, involving as it does grades and other external rewards and the threat of failure... mirrors closely the role of wages and the specter of unemployment in the motivation of workers" (p. 12).

In summary, correspondence theory highlights the similarities between schools and workplaces that obtain at the level of social relations and organizational structure. On the one hand, B&G argue that the existence of such correspondences between schools and workplaces follows as a necessary consequence of corporate capitalism, which demands a steady flow of human capital willing to accept decidedly inegalitarian social circumstances in exchange for a wage. On the other

hand, correspondence theory depends for its conceptual thrust on the recognition that schools can in fact be different kinds of institutions than they have been and tend to be in the U.S. We know that this is true because alternative schools exist inside and outside of the United States. However, as B&G recognize, educational alternatives—especially those which afford students more, rather than less, autonomy—are typically reserved for the privileged, wealthy, and lucky few in the U.S. This is by no means a problem for capitalism and social reproduction, since alternative schools offer opportunities for the development of the capacity for sustained independent work and of the characteristics required for adequate performance in the upper levels of the occupational hierarchy (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 131). Indeed, as Althusser (1970) remarks, capitalism necessitates "a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression..." It is with this in mind that B&G criticize the "free school" movement and related efforts at liberal reform on the grounds that such projects fail to grasp "the intransigence of the educational system to 'enlightened change' within the context of corporate capitalism" (p. 42).

Liberal reforms, for their part, are often inspired by the recognition that the education system isn't—but can and should be—geared towards the egalitarian development of pupils. Despite earnest efforts on the part of innumerable reformers and movements, the history of systematic, national education reform in the United States has been punctuated by a series of failures, even as reforms have succeeded at the local and state level (Young, 2018). B&G intervene in the interpretation of this history with the observation that a failing school system is not the cause of economic inequality, but rather its outcome. Work, as B&G say, "casts a long shadow" over education. It is appropriate to apply Bowles and Gintis's statement

about labor to education: for the majority of students in the U.S. today, to go to school is "to take orders in an organization over which one has no control" (p. viii). Nevertheless, it is not politically expedient to outright oppose reform. As Michael Apple recalls Gramsci, "the fight against existing relations of domination and exploitation needs to be waged on a variety of fronts" (Apple, 1981, p. 42). To a greater extent than students from wealthy backgrounds, working class students, and especially students of color hailing from low-income metropolitan areas, are subjected to a "hidden curriculum" that serves to prepare them psychologically for waged work (Anyon, 1980). The hidden curriculum takes the form of social norms and behavioral expectations which discipline students to the modes of thinking and habits of action that are appropriate for social reproduction (Giroux & Penna, 1983). I am interested to explore how high-stakes, standardized testing affects teachers' relationships to the hidden curriculum and thus the process of social reproduction.

3. Resistance to Correspondence

Again, I was a public school employee in Massachusetts for three consecutive years, first as a fourth grade teacher in a low-income school and later as a third grade paraprofessional in a comparatively wealthy district. B&G's contention that the school system functions—not without giving rise to numerous contradictions—to inure students to the forms of powerlessness and alienation with which they will be faced as mature workers comports with my experience. B&G conclude that schools servicing the socioeconomically privileged attune students to less restrictive sets of behaviors and social relations than schools servicing working class families. According to their analysis, the former institutions prepare students for managerial roles in the production process, while the latter graduate workers. My experience leads me to the same conclusion. An illustrative comparison is

called for. It was the policy of the administration at the low-income school I taught at to punish all students, my fourth graders included, for talking, or walking in any formation other than single-file, in the hallways. Classes of 20 to 30 elementary-aged students were expected to move to and from places within the school in silent straight lines, and teachers were instructed to police the hallways to this end. I was much more permissive in this connection than I was trained to be. Most, though certainly not all, of my colleagues were too. And yet, I felt compelled to enforce these punitive "rules" on occasion, such as when administrators were within eyesight or earshot. In one such instance, I vividly recall responding honestly to a student who asked, "but isn't this what they make prisoners do?" In fact, I persistently conveyed moral opposition to the rules that I was made to enforce, and students respected my honesty insofar as it went. However, far from applauding myself on this score, on more occasions than I would like to admit I found myself incapable or unwilling to translate ethical opposition into resistance at the level of pedagogy and action. That is to say, I occupied the morally exhausting position of having to carry out orders that offended my ethics and, far more importantly, disciplined my students. Making matters more difficult, whenever I did not enforce punitive rules, students took liberty to inform my colleagues, who were teaching them in other classes, that I let them "get away with" something or other. There were also times when I enforced rules that students had been allowed to contravene in their other classes. Any one teacher's act of resistance threatened to delegitimize other teachers' routines.

When I taught in a comparatively high-income school, third-graders' movements through the halls were characterized by an absence of rules: students talked and walked more or less how they saw fit. Granted, my students and I must have internalized the expectation that we walk in an orderly and quiet fashion, for that

was what we did most of the time. Even still, the presence of an explicit policy in the low-income setting, replete with rewards and punishments in accordance with the Positive Behavioral Intervention System (Horner & Sugai, 2015), translated into behaviors and dispositions that I did not witness in the high-income setting. The Positive Behavioral Intervention System (PBIS) has been labeled by critical scholars as "trauma-inducing".

> "During classroom observations of the implementation of 'positive feedback,' Rhiannon noted that educators offered students tokens for 'sitting still,' 'waiting their turn,' and 'being quiet.' She observed educators' shame-based and coercive comments like 'I was going to give you a [point] but you started talking.' Coercion and shame are features of traumatizing conditions, not of justice and healing" (Kim & Venet, 2023, p. 17).

Interactions like these were commonplace at the low-income school that I taught in. PBIS was augmented with the computer monitoring software DyKnow and the gamified data-mining program ClassDojo (Manolev et al., 2019), which markets itself as a classroom management tool. Among other things, ClassDojo enables teachers to give "points" to, and take them away from, students. The student(s) with the most points after some predetermined interval of time were rewarded with such things as 10 minutes of extra recess or opportunities to select prizes from boxes of goodies. Although I resisted using ClassDojo in my capacity as head classroom teacher—not necessarily to the benefit of my students who resultantly lost out on "points" they might've earned—various specialists and paraprofessionals stationed in my room used it with regularity. Relatedly, the administration encouraged new teachers to study *Teach Like a Champion 2.0*, a book consisting of formulaic classroom management techniques that has been criticized for promoting a "deficit ideology" (Valenti, 2019; see also Au, 2022). As

against this array of rules and enforcement mechanism, the high-income public school that I taught at did not subscribe to behavior management systems. Teachers were expressly encouraged to implement their own strategies for managing their classroom. Students, for their part, were not rewarded for behaving in accordance with explicit standards, or penalized for deviating slightly from expected behavioral patterns.

These differences accord with B&G's analysis and have been recorded by other scholars (e.g., see Anyon, 1980) with critical attention paid to the racial and gendered nature of such divisions (e.g., see Cole, 1988). Along with other critics of capitalism, B&G recognize that the existing relations of production cannot be reproduced unless workers relate to the production process differently than managers and capitalists do (and men differently than women, minorities differently than non-minorities, immigrants differently than citizens, and so on). Accordingly, predominantly nonwhite low-income students are trained to follow directions and rewarded for obedience to a much greater extent than predominantly white, high-income students are. When social reproduction succeeds, students develop habits commensurate with their occupational prospects and view their probable position in the occupational hierarchy as justified on the basis of their efforts and capabilities. For B&G, the individuating ideology of meritocracy serves to mask the inflexibility of social class in aggregate. However, the mere existence of differences between the circumstances of schooling for the "lower" and "upper" classes comes with no guarantees in the way of social reproduction. Organizational correspondences between schools and workplaces cannot determine the nature of the social relationships that take shape within either institution. An individual's experience in school depends in some measure upon her own personality traits, as well as those of her teachers, not to mention caregivers. This observation, self-

evident though it may seem, is the focal point of the most forceful objections to the "structural-functional" theory of schooling that was animated by B&G's analysis. According to Carlson writing in *Bowles And Gintis Revisited: Correspondence And Contradiction In Educational Theory* (Cole, 1988), structural-functionalist theory is characterized by "an understanding of the special role of the state in social and economic reproduction, a functional view of the schools as an apparatus of the state, and a reductionistic treatment of teachers as the agents or functionaries of schooling" (1988, p. 159). In the same volume, B&G acknowledge that "our critics in this area have generally limited themselves to demonstrating a *culture of resistance* to the impositions of formal education on the part of exploited groups" (Bowles & Gintis, 1988, p. 238; emphasis preserved from original). But, as Wayne Au points out in *Unequal by Design*, a close reading of *Schooling* reveals that B&G, though seriously misguided in some respects, were appropriately sensitive to the contradictory dynamics of schooling. In the preface to the first edition of *Schooling*, for instance, they presage their commentary to the effect that education "is a major arena in which the democratic and productive potential of capitalism confronts its limits. The confrontation is part of our daily experience—our joy and our chagrin—as teachers, as students, as parents, and as citizens" (1976, p. x; see also pp. 12, 67, 169, 278, 299). In any case, by the force of its own definition correspondence theory acknowledges contradictory dynamics in the classroom at least to the extent that it acknowledges them in the workplace, as B&G point out in *Schooling in Capitalist America Revisited* (2002).

Nevertheless, the binary "reproduction-resistance debate" has received appreciable attention in the critical education studies literature, following this line of critique of *Schooling*, namely that it discounts the contradictions that arise in connection with teacher and student agency. Althusser and B&G are typically situated by

commentators on the "reproduction" side of this debate, while scholars such as Henry Giroux, Michael Apple and various contributors to Cole's *Bowles And Gintis Revisited* are identified as defending the "resistance" side (Backer, 2021). Theories of reproduction are typically structural-functional. As in the case of *Schooling*, reproduction theories are often accused of being "deterministic" for failing to theorize students and teachers as active agents in the process of schooling and for ignoring the realities of resistance in the classroom. Posed in opposition to structural-functional accounts, theories of resistance ascribe students and teachers with agency and recognize their power to interfere in the process of social reproduction (Backer, 2021). As evidenced by the foregoing insights into my teaching experiences in two different public schools, I was capable of reframing and resisting certain procedures that would have otherwise disciplined students in accordance with their race and class position. I was not alone in this respect. However, my opposition was largely, though certainly not wholly, ineffectual in the sense that it didn't significantly change material conditions for my students, who were still subjected, sometimes by and through me, to objectionable disciplinary structures and modes of surveillance. This is to be expected of individual resistance as a "mode of daily activity" in education (Carlson, 1988, p. 167).

Needless to say, students themselves are able to meaningfully resist educational oppression. In keeping with Paul Willis' (1977) famous ethnographic study of "the lads", or a group of boys who evolved a counterculture of resistance to subordination and alienation in an English secondary school, if only to the end of ensuring their class position, certain students of mine from both schools could be counted on to protest or disobey the oppressive learning conditions they confronted. Though B&G point to the "system of grades and other external awards" as an alienating force in the classroom comparable to the wage in the

workplace, the two are not exactly analogs. That is because individual students can reject the incentive to achieve good marks without suffering immediate, life-altering consequences. In comparison, individual workers are not in a position to defiantly risk wages, upon which they depend for sustenance and, in the U.S., health care. It is within any given student's power to refuse to assent to educational competition. Among the handful of my students who outright refused to complete alienating work, more than one proudly rejected the race to the "top" by touting their position at or near the "bottom" as an indicator of successful rebellion. With that said, I will argue in the final section of this paper that tests are used to force teachers to apply coercive pressure to recalcitrant students, since tests tie student performance to teacher evaluations. But first, a brief detour into the history of educational testing is necessary for the purpose of revealing that it has long been an integral aspect of capitalist education in the U.S.

4. A History of Educational Testing

It is necessary to take a detour into the history of high-stakes, educational testing in the U.S., which is coterminous with the history of public education. Both inventions were spurred by mid nineteenth-century industrialization, which led to novel social problems. In particular, the capitalist class was concerned with integrating workers—a class of people who up to that point had mainly labored autonomously and sold the products of their labor as opposed to their labor power—into new political and vocational relationships to the means of production. Class tensions and labor unrest led capitalists and business owners to fear what they called "social disorder". The industrialists "articulated their concerns in terms of civic virtue, and pursued educational reform as an instrument of order" to the end of social reproduction (Garrison, 2009, p. 53). On this front they placed their

faith in Horace Mann, who was the leading proponent of public education in the United States at the time.

Incidentally, Mann was antagonistic towards the capitalists of his time. He wrote in 1850 that "there is no equity in the allotments which assign to one man but a dollar a day, with working, while another has an income of a dollar a minute, without working" (Mann, 1850, p. 62). Mann believed that "vast [private] fortunes are a misfortune to the State" because "they confer irresponsible power" that "is not a whit less formidable than the feudalism of Force". "The millionaire", Mann charged, "is as dangerous to the welfare of the community, in our day and age, as was the baronial lord of the Middle Ages" (Mann, 1850, p. 62). Mann championed universal public education on the grounds that it could assuage class relations:

> "Nothing but universal education can counter work this tendency to the domination of capital and the servility of labor. If one class possesses all of the wealth and the education, while the residue of society is ignorant and poor... the latter in fact and in truth, will be the servile dependents and subjects of the former" (Mann as quoted in Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 24).

Along these lines, Mann famously conceived of public education as "the great equalizer". He believed that schools were uniquely positioned to prepare the masses for capitalist employment and "moral citizenship" (which, to note, precluded disruptive labor actions such as strikes) (Garrison, 2009). For Mann, the purpose of instruction was to impart the skills and knowledge required of economic and moral advancement. Naturally, Mann's advocacy intrigued his industrialist contemporaries. In 1837, a prominent industrialist in Springfield, Massachusetts helped to persuade the state governor to choose Mann as the first

Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education (Bowles & Gintis 1976, p. 165). In his capacity as secretary, Mann administered the first standardized tests to school children in Boston in 1845. Under Mann's leadership, the newly formed Massachusetts Board of Education used "test results to harshly criticize the teachers and the quality of education students were receiving" (History of Standardized Testing, 2013). Based on their test scores, Mann argued that the city's existing schools were failing to deliver a fair and equitable education to all students. "With these charges, Mann targeted the legitimacy of organization and administration of the schools. Standardizing assessment would solve this legitimacy problem, according to Mann" (Garrison, 2009, p. 69). Mann, well intended though he may have been, used and justified the use of standard tests in much the same way that the state uses them today, namely as a means to control and monitor educators by holding them accountable for student performance, on the premise that tests are objective and valid measures of teaching and learning. Although Mann conceived of state power as public power, private interests have influenced state and federal education policy in the U.S., especially in the domain of standardized testing (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). For these reasons, Mann has been referred to as both "the Father of Public Education" and "the Father of Standardized Testing in the U.S." (Kober & Rentner, 2020; History of Standardized Testing, 2013). Before Mann, children were not systematically divided by age or ability into separate classrooms. Teachers, by and large, held students to flexible standards and proctored individualized oral examinations in order to monitor each student's progress independently of his peers. It was in an effort to scale up and universalize education that Mann perceived the need for common standards and assessments.

High-stakes, standardized tests are assessments, which ostensibly measure student mastery of predetermined curricular content, whose publicly reported results factor into decisions pertaining to district, school, administrator, teacher, and/or student evaluations; promotions and demotions; graduation; receivership; and funding (Au, 2007). Modern-day, high-stakes, standardized testing can be traced back to "A Nation At Risk" (ANAR), which was a report, released in 1983, alleging on the basis of test scores that a failing U.S. education system posed a risk to national and economic security (Au, 2022; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report spurred the "accountability movement" that is inextricably tied to standardized testing in its contemporary, high-stakes form. ANAR was occasioned by the activities of The Business Roundtable. Formed in 1972, the Business Roundtable brought together "a powerful group of billionaires, philanthropists, and foundations" to the end of advancing private, for-profit interests (Baltodano, 2016). These businesspersons created tax-subsidized "venture philanthropy" foundations in an effort to advance charter schools and other private ventures in the undercapitalized sphere of education. Using the same blueprint as Mann, twenty-first century capitalists with very different objectives—to privatize and subsequently profit from public education—have relied on standardized testing to manufacture educational crises that venture capital is primed to "solve" for profit. This phenomenon is conceptually accounted for in the literature under the heading of the "Testing Industrial Complex",

> "which [refers to] a system (and at the same time a cycle) in which high-stakes standardized testing fuels neoliberal education reforms and vice versa. These 'reforms' and cycles have monetized for profit the public education system in which curriculum, students, and teachers have been packaged and sold for corporate profit" (Del Carmen Unda & Lizárraga-Dueñas, 2021).

What's more, Pearson Education, a multinational corporate publisher of standard assessments and accompanying materials, internally reports that

> "the movement toward standards-based education and assessment that began with A Nation at Risk 'went national' with the passage of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) [which required states to implement] content and performance standards; assessments aligned with those standards in one grade of each of three spans: 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12; and an accountability system to identify schools that were not helping all students perform as expected on those assessments, (i.e., schools whose students could not achieve the standards)... [As a result] test publishers found themselves in the business of developing content, manufacturing tests, and scoring and reporting on assessments that were not part of their proprietary inventory..." (Jorgensen & Hoffmann, 2003).

In 2001, following the Improving America's Schools Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), first introduced in 1965, was reauthorized. Amendments were contained in a bill called "The No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB), which passed congress with bipartisan support. Dozens of organizations registered to lobby on the bill (Open Secrets, 2024). The list of lobbyists includes the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, the Traditional Values Coalition, State Farm Insurance, and the American Council of Education[1]. NCLB required each state to define its own achievement standards and to administer annual state-standardized tests to 3rd through 12th graders, tripling the frequency of high-stakes tests in U.S. schools. NCLB redefined an earlier provision to ESEA called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which was a measurement used by the U.S. Department of Education to determine progress on the basis of test scores. AYP defines minimum growth requirements with respect to test scores. Among other mandates related to graduation and attendance, AYP requires of each state that students are tested in reading and math, and that at least 95 percent of students "take the state tests, and

each subgroup of students must meet or exceed the measurable annual objectives set by the state for each year" (Education Week Staff, 2004). The law specifies that the objectives must be uniformly applied to the entire subset of public school students across each grade and state, and that progress towards the objectives must be measured via standard tests. That is, virtually all subgroups of students (e.g., low-income, English Language Learners, "gifted", etc.) are required to meet the same annual objectives so long as they are in the same grade and state (Education Week Staff, 2004).

NCLB also specifies that all states must publicly identify which schools and districts fail to meet AYP. When a school falls short of AYP for two consecutive years, it is required to develop and execute a two-year improvement plan, the substance of which can vary from one state and/or locality to the next (Education Week Staff, 2004). Title I schools—or schools with low-income student populations that receive extra financial assistance, such as the one I taught at—that do not meet AYP are subject to a series of increasingly severe penalties. When a Title I school fails to meet AYP for a second consecutive year, it must give students the option to transfer, coordinate transportation for students who do transfer, and use Title I funds for relevant professional development courses (offered by private companies in the business of education). After three years of failure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress, schools must provide students with tutoring services and after-school programs. A fourth year short of AYP means schools must fire relevant staff, restructure management, adopt new curriculums, and/or hire external advisors. Finally, after five years of failing to meet AYP, a school must take one or more of the following courses of action: become a charter school; replace staff including the principal; contract a private management company; give the school up to the state; or "restructure governance" within the school by merging with

another or by eliminating some grade levels and concentrating on others (Education Week Staff, 2004). The logic of NCLB is unambiguous on the question of institutional survival: the life and death of a school and the professional reputation and job security of its faculty and staff depend on students' standardized test scores. As I will illustrate in the forthcoming section, this fundamentally transforms the relationship between the teacher and the student in such a way that entrenches social relations that mirror those in the capitalist workplace.

In 2011, the Common Core State Standards Initiative was implemented by the federal government with the support of the business community and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (McArdle, 2014). Common Core specifies the math, reading, and writing content knowledge and methods that K-12 students are to be held accountable for each year. Around this time, the deadline by which NCLB needed to be reauthorized was fast approaching. This incentivized the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to spend more than $17 million on educational lobbying during the first quarter of 2011. The Business Roundtable spent roughly $2.6 million on quarter-one lobbying for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education in the U.S. (Ronayne, 2011).

By 2014, the deadline by which high-stakes testing of the Common Core standards was to be introduced, all 50 states mandated standardized tests in accordance with NCLB, and the average public K-12 student took 8 of them (Lazarín, 2014; Hart et al., 2015), implying that approximately 400 million standard tests were administered. That is twice the number of tests administered in 1980, six years before the publication of ANAR. These tests, purchased with public funds, are produced by Pearson, McGraw-Hill, The Educational Testing Service, and other for-profit corporations. Pearson, which became the largest corporation in the

testing market following NCLB, spent close to $700 thousand on lobbying efforts in 2011 and made more than half of its $9 billion profit in 2013 in the U.S., after "playing a role in crafting the new Common Core State Standards" (Figueroa, 2013; Simon, 2015). In 2015, NCLB was replaced with the Every Student Succeeds Act, which upheld the program of state-standardized testing in the United States. More recently, "in evaluating the need for improved human capital development around the world" in 2018, the World Bank, "explicitly call[ed] for expansion of student evaluations and conclude[d] that 'there is too little measurement of learning, not too much'" (World Bank, 2018). The ascendency of testing also owes, in no small part, to the ideology that tests are neutral in moral standing and valid in scientific measurement (Au, 2022). Those in favor of testing maintain that we need to measure learning in order to ensure that teachers are performing the duties that taxpayers sponsor them to perform. They also maintain that tests are in fact measures of learning. In his capacity as one of the key architects of the accountability paradigm, President George Bush declared that "If you test a child on basic math and reading skills, and you're teaching to the test, you're teaching math and reading. And that's the whole idea" (Reese, 2001).

On page 200 of *Schooling*, B&G summarize their take on the history of educational testing in the U.S.

> "That a school system geared toward 'moral development' and toward domesticating a labor force for the rising corporate order might readily embrace standardization and testing—to the benefit of the leaders as well as the led—seems in retrospect to have been almost inevitable."

B&G chronicle the history of testing in *Schooling in Capitalist America* from a Marxist perspective. Wayne Au (2022; 2023) has since taken up and expanded

upon this history from a Neo-Marxist perspective. Omissions notwithstanding, the foregoing survey suggests that educational testing is no more separable from political economy than public education itself. First, since their coextensive implementation with the onset of public schooling, standardized tests have always been used by the state to manage education in service of economy. Second, private corporations have historically profited from standardized tests in the U.S. both monetarily—in virtue of producing and selling them—and ideologically—in virtue of using them to evidence supposed failures of public schooling. A final comment is in order. It has long been the consensus view in education policy studies that the use of high-stakes, standardized testing as an accountability mechanism has failed to deliver what it has promised in the way of proficiency and achievement (Au, 2022, p. 40; Garrison, 2009). And yet, standardized testing continues to shape the educational experiences of countless public school students and teachers in the U.S. In the next and final section, I make the argument that, short of failing as a bulwark against unequal outcomes, tests are a bulwark against anticapitalist teaching practices. As previously stated, the unique affordances of the classroom, as opposed to those of the workplace, provide teachers and students with innumerable opportunities to dilute the correspondence that would otherwise obtain between the social relations of education and those of capitalist production. Teachers and students are, at an abstract level, free to relate to each other and to their work more democratically and less exploitatively than managers and workers are. However, my thesis is that high-stakes, standardized tests secure the reciprocation and reproduction of capitalist social relations in education by way of exerting acute pressures on teachers to alienate students.

6. Achieving Correspondence With Tests

In their preface to Cole's (1988) volume, *Bowles And Gintis Revisited*, B&G restate their theory of correspondence. Namely, that educational relations reproduce economic relations to the extent that the social relations and organizing principles characteristic of the capitalist workplace correspond to those that characterize classrooms. My experience, as both a student and a teacher, allows for me to grant this principle. The appropriate question to ask at this level of theorizing, then, is how this correspondence is secured in the face of student and teacher resistance. By force of circumstance, teachers and students resist, reproduce, and are reproduced as workers, on different planes of the educational hierarchy. In all of this, it is evident that teachers occupy a crucial position. For one thing, teachers have greater power against the process of social reproduction (such as the ability to refuse to enforce rules, for example) than students do in virtue of their relative positions on the educational hierarchy. More to the point, within the confines of the classroom, next to nothing in principle prevents teachers from imbuing their students with inexpedient (read anticapitalist) privileges, such as the right to have a say in what is to be learned and when. Likewise, teachers reserve the right to renege any one or all of the various privileges that come with their position on the educational hierarchy. All of this is to say that, at least in theory, K-12 teachers in the U.S. public school system can democratize their classrooms. The reality, at least in my experience, is more complicated. I found that high-stakes, standardized testing was used to reign in my autonomy to the end of ensuring that there remained social parallels between my classrooms and capitalist workplaces[2]. Simply put, the regime of testing requires teachers to facilitate alienating educational experiences. Following Marx's original formulation of the concept, B&G offer their own definition of alienation on pages 71 and 72 of *Schooling*. I will return to Marx in search of a definition that rises to the present occasion.

"Marx's theory of alienation" refers variously to all or any part of a patchwork of insights collected from multiple publications written over several decades and published over the course of a century. As such, it is difficult to formulate a comprehensive version of Marx's theory of alienation. This is not a problem that is unique to his commentary on alienation. Tracing any one thread through Marx's oeuvre poses a challenge. One of the ways in which Marxists have made this challenge more manageable is by separating Marx's early writings from his mature writings. It is particularly useful to distinguish between the two in the case of alienation. For the purposes of this essay, I draw on Marx's approach to alienation as set forth in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* under the heading of "Estranged Labor". This is counted as a contribution of the "young", rather than the "mature", Marx. No matter, it remains generative.

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx takes preexisting theories of alienation as his point of departure. It is relevant that he encountered the concept of alienation in Hegel's writings. In general, "alienation" describes any state of separation that obtains between a subject and an object that rightfully belong together. However, Hegel offers a more precise definition of alienation. For Hegel, the major difference between human labor and labor as it is carried out by nonhuman animals lies in the fact that humans produce in material reality that which exists beforehand as a mental image (Marcuse, 2000). Correspondingly, Marx writes in *Capital Volume I* that

> "a spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of her honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we

> get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement" (1867, pp. 344-345).

Hegel refers to this process as "externalization" and extrapolates from it to the conclusion that human labor is inherently alienating because it is predicated on the separation of an idea from its beholder (Marcuse, 2000). As against this idealistic explanation of alienation, Marx argues that alienation is not coterminous with the labor process itself but rather that it is coterminous with specific social and economic conditions. More specifically, for Marx, "the object which labor produces—labor's product—confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer" (1844, p. 71) because it enters the market as a commodity that the worker does not own or control. Although it would seem natural that workers exercise power over the objects they labor to produce, in fact the objects produced come to dominate those who produce them in consequence of the social relations of capitalist production and exchange. Even when we, as workers, invest considerable time and energy into the production process, we relate to the objects of our efforts as hostile externalities because they are immediately expropriated by capitalists who retain the right to exchange them for profit so long as they pay subsistence wages to us, or those of us who produce them. Instead of laboring to meet social needs and realize creative impulses, workers labor for wages under the direction of superiors. As a result of this arrangement, labor is transformed from an expressive mode of fulfillment into a compulsory activity required for survival, and it is on this basis that it becomes an alienating activity. For, "it is only as a worker that he can maintain himself as a physical subject and that it is only as a physical subject that he is a worker" (Marx, 1844, p. 73). Marx brings this point into stark relief in this famous passage.

> "First, the fact that labor is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague" (1844, p. 74).

Marx takes his argument two steps further than this. Not only are we, as workers in a capitalist economy, alienated from the objects of our labor and form productive activity in general, but, Marx maintains, we are also alienated from our human nature and from one another. Each of these interrelated forms of alienation plays a unique role in the analysis of high-stakes testing. For this reason I will go on to describe what he means in the latter two cases, beginning with the penultimate one. As already set forth, humans are essentially creative for Marx because we have, and cannot help but act upon, the capacity to shape matter according to our conscious needs and desires. The capitalist mode of production instrumentalizes this capacity in a way that is inimical to our nature. Namely, it denies us the opportunity for self-realization through work. In Marx's words "conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity... [but under capitalism] it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life activity, his essential being, a mere means to his existence" (1844, p. 76). Our labor is not expressive and autonomous. It is a means to the end of survival and it is dictated by the capitalist. The more we work, the less opportunities we have for self-directed activity. It is in this sense that capitalism alienates us from our nature. And it is a short step from here to the conclusion that we are also alienated from

one another, seeing as we don't cooperate to produce and distribute things in accordance with social needs and desires. Instead, our interactions are premised on the desire to win personal advantage at each other's expense as we compete in the labor market. There are clear parallels in education to which we now turn.

In various places B&G theorize alienation, in addition to hierarchy, as necessary prerequisites for social reproduction in schools, much as I intend. On page 130 into 131 of *Schooling*, for instance, B&G state the following.

> "To reproduce the social relations of production, the educational system must try to teach people to be properly subordinate and render them sufficiently fragmented in consciousness to preclude their getting together to shape their own material existence. The forms of consciousness and behavior fostered by the educational system must themselves be alienated..."

Hierarchy is "reflected in the vertical authority lines from administrators to teachers to students" (p. 131). Likewise, "alienated labor is reflected in the student's lack of control over his or her education, the alienation of the student from the curriculum content, and the motivation of school work through a system of grades and other external rewards" (p. 131). What's more, B&G concede that "alienated labor is a social [rather than merely structural or organizational] phenomenon" (1976, p. 74). As such, the most important similarities between schools and workplaces are social in nature. Teachers and students must be made to relate to one another in such a way that reinforces alienation. But, as already set forth, it does not follow from the existence of a structural correspondence between schools and workplaces that teachers foster relationships with and between students commensurate with the task of social reproduction. Just as B&G

acknowledge that “the case that alienated labor in the United States is the product of capitalist organization cannot be made quite so simply” (p. 73), they would agree that the case that alienated learning is straightforwardly the product of correspondence is untenable. They do not, however, advance an argument to the contrary. Instead, they treat educational hierarchy and alienation as mutually constitutive of correspondence. Each supposedly reinforces the other in the classroom. However, as we have seen, teachers can in principle renege arbitrary authority, refuse to punitively discipline students, and refrain from coercing students to complete alienating tasks. However, since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, state-standardized tests have been inextricably tied to teacher performance. Resultingly, teachers are forced to enter social relationships with their students that guarantee alienation. In connection with this thesis, Au (2022) recognizes that high-stakes, standardized tests “alienate students from the process of learning” (p. 72) and separately that “high-stakes tests constrict the kinds of pedagogy, content knowledge, and form of knowledge that gets taught, and this constriction is validated through bureaucratic power” (p. 86). What is essential is the link that is established between testing as a mechanism of “pedagogic control” and the alienated experiences of students.

Tests confront students and teachers as alien objects. “The product of [the] labor [of learning] is labor which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. Labor’s realization is its objectification” (Marx, 1944, p. 71). When used to measure student learning and teacher performance, high-stakes tests don’t merely objectify teaching and learning, they effectuate behavioral changes. The alienation of the student and the teacher in the test “means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it

becomes a power on its own confronting him" (Marx, 1944, p. 72). More to the point, because teaching is objectified in the form of aggregated test results, and teachers are subsequently evaluated against them, teachers can either strive to meet the expectations associated with "adequate yearly progress" or prepare to face discipline and ridicule. Tests objectify learning and alienate students from the outcome of their efforts. As a result, teachers must require students to take tests and complete attendant assignments. Most students don't submit to tests voluntarily. That is because tests do not affirm students; they deny them. The students' "lack of control" over their education and alienation from its contents is realized in the procedures associated with tests, which teachers are forced to administer. In the absence of testing for accountability, teachers can pursue organic lines of inquiry and invite students to co-determine the contents, and influence the direction, of their education. In the context of testing for accountability, teachers must either conform to whichever patterns of behavior appear to be necessary for achieving test results, or resign to the possibility of producing inadequate scores at a professional cost to themselves. At the very least, the teacher must legitimize the test, alienating though it may be, and labor to ensure that all students submit to it.

While working at a low-income school, I was required to teach and assign work from a premade "tested-standards-aligned" curriculum, which was property of the Pearson corporation. I was made aware of the precise standards that my students were supposed to master, as well as the deadlines by which they were to master them. My colleagues and I met with "instructional leadership specialists" (ILSs) who planned our lessons for us down to the minute and even suggested that we use timers in the classroom in order to stay on track. Through a battery of "low-stakes", standard tests and attendant meetings with ILSs, we were persistently informed of fluctuating "areas for improvement" respecting class and individual

student performance, in anticipation of high-stakes tests. During these meetings we were recurringly exposed to a document titled “Six phases of adopting data-driven instruction” in which “Challenging the test” was situated at the bottom of a pyramid as the least mature disposition and “Changing teaching practice and improving student learning [in terms of test scores]” was situated at the top of the pyramid as the most mature disposition. Our mid-year evaluations were based primarily on the trajectory of our students’ scores on “low-stakes” tests. I was furnished with mass produced posters to hang up in my classroom, and when I displayed handmade posters on the topic of thinking and reasoning in their place, I was instructed to remove them and replace them with the ones supplied to me because mine were “not relevant to the [state-standardized] test”. I was not permitted to practice a classroom community building and inquiry exercise called philosophy for children (p4c), even though I am a licensed p4c facilitator, because, I was told, we did not have time to spare in the day or even the week due to the demands of post-COVID testing. In fact, because “we had catching up to do on tests”, the elementary aged students in the school were allotted only 15 minutes for recess, which amounted to 10 in practice as that window included whatever time it took to walk to and from the classroom silently and in a straight line. Importantly, students at the school had not historically performed adequately on state tests since, among those who showed up to class on a regular basis, some were habitually hungry, others were tired, emotionally distraught, or even unhoused. No matter, since scores were down following COVID, everything came secondary to standard assessments, each of which was conceived in the image of the state-standardized Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). I was instructed to skip Unit 5 of the English Language Arts curriculum and to spend an entire month teaching MCAS test taking strategies to my students in its place. Because my students were not tested in history or science, they spent at most

twenty-five minutes in a given week on these subjects. Naturally, my students were alienated from the product and process of education. I could hardly afford them any influence over either, since I myself had little. If not for tests, I could have allowed my students to pursue their own interests in connection with learning objectives; deadlines could have been more flexible than they were rigid. But, due to the pressures of testing, I rarely found space to provide students with opportunities for democratic participation in their schooling. The situation in my classroom was, therefore, much the same as it is in the capitalist workplace in terms of alienation from productive labor and its objects, but it was so because—or that it was so is mostly due to the fact that—high-stakes tests were used as performance measures and organizing principles, not merely because I stood in a hierarchical relationship to students and administrators to me. Conforming again to Marx's terms,

> "just as he [the student] creates his own production as the loss of his reality, as his punishment; his own product as a loss, as a product not belonging to him; so he creates the domination of the person who does not produce over production and over the product. Just as he estranges his own activity from himself, so he confers upon the stranger an activity which is not his own" (1844, pp. 78-79).

After all, "if the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, then this can only be because it belongs to some other man than the worker" (1844, p. 78). In schools, the teacher gains satisfaction from student activity materialized in the form of test scores, though not by the force of the teacher's own will but as against it. Although many students believed that their performances on tests bear on their economic prospects later in life, they did not labor in exchange for a means of survival. Even as students are required by law to attend school, they are free to resist alienating school work and, as happened in my

classroom, to varying degrees they do. Whenever students refuse to engage with tested materials, however, it falls upon the teacher to force them into compliance, and the teacher will do this if they are concerned in any measure about their job quality and security. This puts teachers who object on principle to coercion in a difficult position. I entered the profession intending to model behaviors other than those I was trained to model by administrators concerned to achieve passable test scores. The demands of high-stakes testing compelled me to guarantee, in some measure at least, my students' alienation. In consequence, as a teacher I was impelled to utilize my hierarchical position in furtherance of social reproduction. It is primarily due to the test, and in consequence the teacher, that there exists a correspondence between the social relations of schooling and working under capitalism.

But that is not all. Tests, by way of the pressures they exert on teachers, don't just alienate students from the products and processes of learning, they also alienate students from themselves and each other. The more time and resources teachers spend preparing students for tests, the less time and resources students have to practice self-actualizing forms of learning. What's more, testing forces students to compete with one another for class rankings and attendant opportunities, as B&G recognized. These are the kinds of circumstances that give rise to the educational and economic correspondences that engender the forms of consciousness which must be reproduced under capitalism. These forms of consciousness and social relations are anything but natural. After all, maximizing test scores is incompatible with genuine teaching and learning: the former begets alienation; the latter is unalienated by definition. When the two come into conflict, teachers are compelled by the objectification of teaching and learning in test scores to relate to students in ways we would rather not, but which serve the requirements of social reproduction.

In the comparative wealthy school that I taught at, my students consistently produced adequate test scores, due at least in part to socioeconomic advantages. In this educational context, test scores were treated as secondary, as opposed to primary, objectives. The prospect of the test did not affect my pedagogy or influence my practice[3]. Accordingly, my students were not subject to the same conditions that high-stakes tests, and my relationship to them, engendered for my classes of comparatively under-resourced, nonwhite students. This is in keeping with the predictions of correspondence theory. In fact, Bowles and Gintis gesture towards this analysis far in advance of the "accountability movement". On page 131 they state that "fragmentation in work is reflected in the institutionalized and often destructive competition among students through continual and ostensibly meritocratic ranking and evaluation" (p. 131). And yet, despite the fact that the publication of their essay Schooling in Capitalist America Revisited coincided with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act, B&G ironically focus their commentary therein on the empirical validity of standardized intelligence tests which they problematically operationalize in *Schooling*, eschewing the essential relationship between educational testing and correspondence theory. What B&G missed in *Schooling* and in their revisitations of, is perhaps something they couldn't have seen from their vantage point in the academy. Namely, the relationship between testing and teacher autonomy. The system of testing plays a pivotal role in preparing students for an economy of alienated and stratified work relationships, and it does so by delimiting the teachers' capacity to resist the imposition of capitalist social relations, structures, and principles in their classrooms. This analysis points a clear way forward. If it is correct, or wherever it applies, it is well within the realm of possibility that teachers can regain significant control over their pedagogy and expand possibilities for resistance by taking political positions, and focusing their political actions, against high-stakes,

standardized tests. It is warranted, then, to conclude this article with an optimistic tone. The practice of testing for accountability is as old as the public school system itself. Thus, the inegalitarian correspondence between schooling and working in the U.S. may not be quite as intractable as Bowles and Gintis theorize it. Should *high-stakes, standardized* testing be eliminated, then, all else equal, it can be expected that the correspondence between schools and capitalist workplaces will weaken, exacerbating already stark contradictions in both arenas.

Notes

1 The American Council of Education, which was funded by the Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations, created the Cooperative Test Service, a precursor to modern testing companies, in 1930 (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 198).

2 Undoubtedly, the professionalization process, the proletarianization of teachers and the Taylorization of teaching by way standardized curriculums, various modes of administrative surveillance, hostile political climates, and other factors serve also as counterweights to teacher autonomy. But the argument presented in this article is that tests, when used as measures of teaching and learning performance, are uniquely effective on this score (see Carlson, 1988).

3 Non-tested subject teachers and special education teachers may not directly experience the same set of test-based constraints that are imposed upon math, science, reading, and writing teachers. The non-tested-subject teacher may therefore find that she has greater control over the content and process of education in the confines of her classroom. However, in practice, music, physical education, and other non-tested subject teachers end up conforming to the hierarchical patterns of socializing that students have been habituated to respond to in the general education classrooms wherein they spend most of their day.

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Author and Correspondence

Tyler Poisson is a doctoral student in Communication at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in Amherst, Massachusetts, USA.

Email: tpoisson@umass.edu