



**Knowledge & Power in the Global Economy: the Effects of School Reform in a Neoliberal/Neoconservative Age, 2nd Edition**

David Gabbard, ed.; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (a division of Taylor & Francis), 2008

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Earlier this spring, I borrowed a copy of this edited collection from my campus library to review it for possible adoption for an undergraduate course in educational sociology that I'm teaching again this fall. I decided that the book was too long and detailed to hold the attention and enthusiasm of students at this level, but I thought I might like to read it myself during the summer. So I was delighted to see it on Jim Rhem's list of titles available for review just a few days after I returned the borrowed copy to the library. I was even more delighted to receive it in the mail shortly thereafter.

Knowledge & Power in the Global Economy is a hugely ambitious undertaking, running over five hundred pages in length and featuring fifty brief essays written by more than that many contributors. These essays are organized into five sections that have the clear intent of presenting sequential, highly integrated pieces of a story about the ways that capitalism, globalism, and the (as these authors see it) complementary ideologies of neoliberalism and neoconservatism have destabilized public education in the United States and the United Kingdom in particular. Thus, the first part is titled "Political and Social Foundations" and includes essays on democracy, neoliberalism and neoconservatism. The second part is titled "Antieducational Foundations: the Setup" and features essays on topics including assessment and educational research. Part three is titled "Antieducational Foundations: the Trap." Its essays address such topics as charter schools and privatization. The fourth part, titled "Classroom Consequences" focuses on different aspects of a typical K-12 curriculum, such as reading, math and science. Finally, part five, titled "Democracy's Path," offers some alternatives such as critical pedagogy and ecological literacy.

With the exception of part five, Knowledge & Power in the Global Economy is anything but upbeat or optimistic. Even the cover art, a series of three black-and-white photos showing the effect of a wrecking ball on a brick school building, makes a clear statement. The contributors are passionately opposed to all provisions and consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act adopted by Congress in the early months of George W. Bush's first term in office and of comparable policies initially introduced in the UK when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister. Their rhetoric and references offer strong cues that they are post-Marxists with a solid grounding in popular culture. While I have not yet had time to read the book in its entirety, my sampling found editor David Gabbard using the popular Matrix film series to dramatize the urgent need for indigenous people to remember the world apart from the capitalist hegemony; Gabbard and co-author Karen Anijar referring to a Wikipedia definition of the military maneuver known as a pincer movement to suggest an analog to evidence-based education; and Karen Kesson warning readers away from mega-publisher McGraw-Hill, which is evidently awash with revenues from sales of its No Child Left Behind assessment products (first I knew of this, and there I am using a McGraw-Hill textbook in my Sociology 100 class).

A summary list of the contributors, organized alphaname, appears in the book's introductory section. This list includes both their geographic locations (primarily the US and Canada, with token representation from the UK, Australia and Finland) and their affiliations (most are based at public universities). With the exception of Joel Spring, who is the editor of Erlbaum's Sociocultural, Political, and

Historical Studies in Education (of which this book is a part), I did not recognize the names of any of the other contributors. I don't mean to sound like a snob in saying this, but I am reasonably well-read in this field, so I am puzzled. I am also puzzled that there is no explanation anywhere in this otherwise comprehensive volume of how these people came together to undertake this project. The essays were evidently written for this book, and definitely updated from the first edition (published in 2000) to reflect the impact of No Child Left Behind. They reflect a unity of purpose that I find truly remarkable for a work of this sort and a group of people who no doubt pride themselves on their independence of thought. Someone invested a great deal of time and effort in creating this book!

While there is an index to the book as a whole, each essay has its own bibliography, making it a bit more challenging than one might like to find references common to several contributors or to make complete sense of the sources of the ideas presented in the text.

As a post-Marxist sociologist with a 2 X 2 teaching load, I regularly encounter perspectives like these in published texts, student papers, and the assertions of colleagues. To a certain extent, I even share them. On the other hand, as a faculty development professional, I am more likely to read or converse about learning outcomes assessment, integrative learning, critical thinking, reflective teaching practice, and civic engagement. Many of these phrases refer to what I understand to be the current goals of higher education. If K-12 is truly moving in the directions described by these authors, the possibilities for alignment (another current goal) seem remote indeed.



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