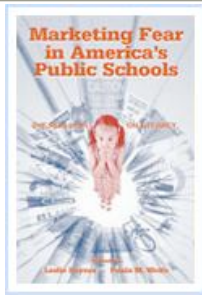


***Marketing Fear in America's Public Schools: The Real War on Literacy***

<b>Author:</b>	Leslie Poyner and Paula M. Wolfe (Eds.) (2005)		
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Have American schools been hijacked by a conservative agenda? The collection of essays *Marketing Fear in America's Public Schools: The Real War on Literacy* edited by Leslie Poyner and Paula M. Wolfe seeks to give voice to the opinion that this is the case. The collection as a whole puts forth thorough and convincing arguments on a number of topics relating to how fear is utilized by the conservative right to control teachers, parents, students, and administrators, and how the media has perpetuated the often misleading, if not outright fallacious, claims of conservative think tanks and congressional representatives.

The first section of *Marketing Fear* provides a comprehensive analysis of how corporate and government interests' attack on and subsequent control over pedagogy and testing have used fear as a tool for dismantling public education. This section clearly lays out who the major players are and what they stand to gain from commandeering America's educational system. Chapter 3, entitled *The Push of the Pendulum*, by Bess Altwerger, provides a comprehensive chronology of events, and is valuable in that it lays out the framework for understanding many subsequent chapters. Altwerger organizes her chapter around the denigration of whole language in the push to install phonics programs. In the following chapter, *Who Gets to Play? How and Why Reading Researchers Were Left Out of the No Child Left Behind Act*, Sharon Matthews continues the discussion about the how the choice to leave out reading researchers, and instead solely give special educators the voice to define reading was definitive for the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. Matthews highlights "the commonalities between who is given voice and who profits financially" and the need to "closely examine [this] in order to discern why decisions affecting the lives of our children are being made" (p. 52).

Of particular interest is Chapter 5, *Warning: Education Policy May Be Hazardous to Your Health*, by neurologist Steven Strauss. Strauss synthesizes research to argue that "there are side effects of too much phonics" and that stress associated with high-stakes testing and accountability is a "risk factor for headaches, asthmas, depression, and many other problems" (p. 68). Strauss provides many instances when the medical metaphor was misused by the government to mask the "real, behind-the-scenes agenda that is the driving force for the current changes in education [that] would likely be unacceptable to the public" (p. 71). Strauss does loosely draw connections between the military recruitment clause in the No Child Left Behind Act with higher rates of stress and grade retention as a tool to build up the military, but these assertions, however plausible, are not backed up with any concrete evidence.

In the second section Joanne Yatvin discusses her experience on the National Reading Panel and how whole language was made to disappear. Then Ellen Brinkly and Constance Weaver, in *Phonics, Literalism, and Futuristic Fiction: Religious Fundamentalism and Education Policy*, describes how the Religious Right has used fear as a tool to dismantle whole language because of the Right's fear that it could lead to individuals straying from a strict reading of the Bible. This chapter's analysis of how "fundamentalists view phonics as the route to accurate word identification, and accurate word identification as the route to uniform understanding of texts" strikes a chord of real fear that the Religious Right is manufacturing a nescient populace through contemporary education policies (p. 96).

In *Not in the Script: The Missing Discourses of Parents, Students, and Teachers About Success for All*, Shanton and Valenzuela state that "[w]hat is at issue, however, is neither a teaching nor learning problem. Rather it is a problem of power of how teaching, learning and literacy are defined" in the Success for All program "in terms of the script alone, not in terms of real human beings and their endeavors" (p. 130). These authors use narrative to give voice to parents, teachers, and children who have been silenced by the politics of fear.

The third section diverges from the text's previous focus on literacy to concentrate on the media's role in supporting a conservative and corporate literacy agenda. Eric Hass in *Unelected Policymakers: Conservative Think Tanks and Education* provides both an interesting read and some startling information regarding how conservative think tanks, in particular the Heritage Foundation, have been producing "research" authored by individuals without a reading and/or teaching education or background.

Arguably the most prescient chapter is *Bilinguaphobia in the New Millennium*, by Christian Faltis and Cathy Coulter, who inquire into how the current educational policies have promoted a culture of fear surrounding the acquisition of a second language, especially Spanish and Mandarin. For a country with such a wealth of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the United States, since the waning of Civil Rights era, has progressively moved toward bilinguaphobia due to the disinformation spread that "bilingualism is responsible for school failure" (p. 156). This chapter should have expounded more upon the benefits of bilingualism for the individual, the community, and the nation.

Throughout the text the reader is made aware that a great many of those who author the

studies behind the No Child Left Behind Bill (NCLB) have little or no experience with education and literacy. In a political environment of patronage the parent, educators and children, the experts on education, have been left out of the equation. Why are America's children 'failing?' The contributors to this text answer that it is the newly mandated programs which are operating with a deficit in common sense, real-life understanding, and flexibility. These attributes are especially important in a country with a diverse population, where education needs to serve a wide variety of children.

*Marketing Fear* is both a highly instructive text and a good read for educators, parents, and other parties interested in the process by which America's educational system has been hijacked through the collusion of the government, politicians, corporations, conservative think tanks, and the Religious Right. The editors' choice to frame the collection of essays with resistance saves the book from becoming a compendium of what is wrong with education while leaving the reader to wonder what has been done and what can be done to contest the culture of fear promoted by political and corporate actions. Especially useful is the final chapter *Where Do We Go from Here?* by the editors, which contains a literature review of useful sites where the reader can get more up-to-date information about current developments and research related to the topics which contained in this text.

The comprehensive examination of the current educational situation in the United States makes *Marketing Fear in America's Public Schools* a multi-faceted read on how literacy programs are suffering due to conservative corporate, political, and media manipulation. This text ably covers a range of topics that provide the reader with an understanding of the connections between events and their affects on the school system, administrators, teachers, parents, and, most importantly, students. *Marketing Fear* paints a disturbing picture of how the public is manipulated into accepting literacy programs that ultimately harm the public. The text eloquently provides an instructive starting point for understanding the often intricate and obscure(d) history of the United States' educational system, and, in doing so, carries out an act of resistance.

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