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Dialectical Constellations of Progress: New Visions of Public Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

Neoliberalism is in the process of transforming higher education from a social good into a market good. For neoliberals, all social institutions, including education, should be subject to the market. Yet this market vision can have detrimental effects on higher education because it negates all critical and humanistic aspects of it. The Virginia Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2011 is a state policy that aims to restructure higher education into a market good and is a direct reflection of neoliberalism. This paper will argue that scholars and educationalists must not only fight neoliberalism and return education to a social good, but also help higher education progress to something totally new. Dialectics entails the simultaneous preservation of what is beneficial and the destruction of what is oppressive in state affairs. It is the hope that a dialectical critique of the Virginia Higher Education Opportunity Act can transform higher education from its current state as a market good into a rich and complex entity that can contribute to true progress for the state of Virginia.

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In Defense of the Public

Public higher education has been under attack for forty years (Giroux, 2011; Newfield, 2008; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004; Washburn, 2005). It has been labeled as backward, inefficient and overly bureaucratic (Giroux, 2011; Newfield, 2008; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004). Entities such as for-profit universities and corporations are already beginning to divvy up the spoils of this forty year assault. Public higher education however, may be one of the last sites of democracy because it allows for civic education and development (Giroux, 2011). In the widest sense, public higher education represents a commitment to enhance society and the standard of living for all individuals in society (Bowen, 1996; Giroux, 2011; Goan & Cunningham, 2006; Greenwood, 1997; Hill, 2012). This is why public higher education must be re-envisioned for the twenty-first century.

The theories of neoliberalism are responsible for this attack. Neoliberalism is a complex term, but neoliberals generally believe that virtually all social institutions, such as education and healthcare should be privatized (Giroux, 2011; Hill, 2012; Peet, 2009; Rhoads & Torres, 2006; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Neoliberals maintain that competition in the free market can ensure that these institutions run efficiently and provide the best service for their customers (Plant, 2010). As Giroux (2011) points out, under neoliberalism, citizens are seen as consumers and their civic duty is tied to consumption. Ultimately, in neoliberalism, the market is the best measure of success (Fowler, 2009; Giroux, 2011; Peet, 2009; Plant, 2010; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004). Any communal notion or visions of social or economic justice are thought to be coercive of individual pursuits because they detract from individual accumulation of wealth (Giroux, 2011; Plant, 2010). As a result, public education, with its emphasis on liberal arts, humanism and civics is in the cross hairs of neoliberalism.

The erosion of the public sphere may lead to a type of moral degradation where any notions of community and concern for others are stunted, and where citizenship is reduced to consumption of material goods. Giroux (2011) argues that public education is one the last democratic institutions in contemporary society because it is a site where critical thinking and questioning can occur. Public higher education is democratic because it allows students to become politically active and equips them with tools to understand the society around them (Giroux, 2011). Public education is also democratic because it is based on the notion of equality; it is open for all students (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Newfield, 2008).

Now however, public higher education is under attack by policymakers, business-minded college administrators and many other influential people informed by neoliberalism (Giroux,

2011; Newfield, 2008; Washburn, 2005). I hope to use the notion of the dialectic, as derived from critical theory, to regenerate the notion of public higher education. The dialectic will be applied to a state policy in Virginia, specifically the Virginia Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2011. It is also known as the Top Jobs Act of the 21st century (TJ21). This policy was chosen because it is the embodiment of neoliberal theory as it views higher education solely as a means of economic development for the state and individuals. The policy completely neglects any sort of civic or humanist dimensions to higher education. The legislature, which passed the Virginia General Assembly in June of 2011, has the potential to erode the public sphere further and reduce any concept of the public to capitalistic activity and consumption. While this dialectical critique is a small act of resistance, my hope is to lay the ground work for future resistance against neoliberalism and the erosion of the public sphere. There are similar bills in state capitols across the United States, and similar neoliberal policies are transforming higher education into a market good globally (Rhoads & Torres, 2006; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Ultimately, this act of resistance can begin to elucidate a new vision of public higher education for the twenty-first century.

No scholar or activist can ever take a truly neutral position in regards to their work (Creswell, 2013). I am no exception. I have been a public educator at both the secondary and post-secondary level for over 10 years. Thus, I have a vested interest in public education. More than this, I see myself as a fighter for and a defender of public education. That is why I have written this work.

Perspectives/Theoretical Framework

In the Western philosophical tradition, the dialectic is described as a process by which higher levels of reality are brought forth through contradictions that are inherent in the existing state of affairs (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1969; Jay, 1996; Kellner, 1992). The dialectic is most closely associated with the German thinkers Hegel and Marx. Marx specifically saw a dialectical movement in history. Existing contradictions in the present state of capitalism would eventually lead to the destruction of capitalism and the establishment of a communist society (Jay, 1996; Kellner, 1992). The dialectic was almost always thought of as a progressive notion because of its forward movement and its dissolution of outdated structures (Jay, 1996). Hegel and Marx largely saw the dialectic as working outside of human consciousness and eventually leading to some sort of utopia (Jay, 1996; Kellner, 1992).

By the mid-twentieth century however, after the horrors of the World Wars as well as the Soviet gulags, the dialectic as a progressive notion was a hard notion to sustain (Jay, 1996);

some began to rework it. The most influential of the new dialecticians of the twentieth century were undoubtedly the thinkers from the University of Frankfurt. They formed what would later be called the Frankfurt School or School of Critical Theory (Jay, 1996; Kellner, 1992). The most notable critical theorists from the Frankfurt School were Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Jurgen Habermas. Critical theory is a philosophy of emancipation because critical theorists use theory and philosophy to fight for social justice and human happiness (Habermas, 1990; Jay, 1996; Kellner, 1992; Marcuse, 1990).

The concept of dialectical movement is a key component to almost all critical theory (Jay, 1996). I believe that a dialectical critical theory can be applied to public higher education and transform it from its current state as a market good into a true social good for the twenty-first century. If this is accomplished, higher education would be able to promote justice and not just economic growth. I feel that Adorno's (1973) concept of negative dialectics can be used to transform public higher education into this new social good. It must be noted however that Adorno's thought is extremely complex and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Adorno's theories are generally viewed as pessimistic in regards to social progress (Reid, 1977). Despite this, I see much potential in Adorno's theories and their ability to inspire beneficial social change for higher education.

Adorno argued for what he termed "negative dialectics" which do not presume a progressive state of affairs as the Marxian dialect did. The purpose of negative dialectics is to "express the inexpressible" (Adorno, 1973). Adorno (1973) argued that when one attempts to apprehend reality, there is so much the human mind cannot comprehend. Negative dialectics only proceed by this ever elusive attempt to capture what we cannot name, but nonetheless by identifying it and trying to understand it. Adorno stated that when we do try to express the inexpressible, we must not simply equate idea and thing, but rather, see ideas and concepts as part of a much wider constellation of meanings (Adorno, 1973; Jay, 1996).

The term "constellation" essentially means that we as knowing subjects cannot assume to truly understand a phenomenon by simply naming it or classifying it. A name or a classification is really an imprecise placeholder for the true being or essence of a phenomenon (Adorno, 1973; Jay, 1996). Human knowledge of phenomena is fragmentary at best. We also have a limited understanding of how one phenomenon interacts with other phenomena. Adorno argues that most of the time, simple causation is inferred. The mind assumes that 'A' causes 'B' because it is simple and easy to understand (Adorno, 1973; Jay, 1996). Yet events in society transpire due to a multitude of causes. The multitude of causes forms a complex web of actions, motivations and meanings which work off each other (Adorno, 1973; Jay, 1996). What

something is, what it embodies, how it interacts with other phenomena is so vast that our limited human perception can only understand fragments of its true meaning and causation (Adorno, 1973). Constellation thinking is also historical. Any phenomena must be considered in its present context as well as how it transpired historically (Adorno, 1973; Jay, 1996).

Constellation thinking calls attention to the ineffability of a phenomenon and a human being's subsequent attempt to inscribe meaning within that ineffability. This is also the crux of negative dialectics. As a dialectal process, the human mind comes ever closer to ascribing meaning to the ineffable, of understanding the inner workings of reality and how phenomena interact with each other. We as a people or society can never understand phenomena in their entirety. Rather our constellation of meaning expands (Adorno, 1973). When the constellation of meaning expands, we understand new and hitherto unknown or neglected aspects of a phenomenon and their interactions. Thus, negative dialectics is a dialectics of human understanding, and the progression of negative dialectics yields an ever larger constellation of meaning (Adorno, 1973).

This paper applies the term constellation thinking to higher education in order to perform a dialectal analysis. The term "higher education" is taken by policymakers as a simple phenomenon. Under neoliberalism, higher education has been made extremely simple; it is largely equated with economic profitability and vocational training (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The TJ21 Act, as an embodiment of neoliberalism, assumes that public higher education is merely economic. There is the assumption on the part of administrators and policymakers of simple causality; namely, that 'A' (higher education as an economic entity) will result in 'B' (profit for individuals and society). Public higher education however is not a simple concept. Drawing off Adorno (1973), we must situate higher education in a vast constellation of meaning, the majority of which we cannot see in the present. The process of teaching and learning are extremely complex. Higher education has a practical and vocational dimension, but it is so much more. Of course, there is no way to measure this quantitatively.

At present however, there is no concept of constellation thinking on the part of college administrators and policymakers. Far reaching causes, cultural impacts (or lack of them) or anything outside profit and capitalism are neglected. Adorno (1973) argued that a true dialectic can have no original ground, or no predetermined end point. Even the Marxian dialect had a predetermined endpoint, communist society and classless society. Adorno (1973) saw this as constraining and rigid. There is no endpoint in negative dialectics, only a continual advancement and quest to name the unknown. The TJ21 policy has a predetermined endpoint: profit. But what comes after profit? It is a static notion, one that cannot account for the complexity of

existence, for the constellation that is our reality. Profit and economic well-being are absolutely necessary to this prosperity, but not at the cost of everything else. We must progress further. However, as it stands now, the TJ21 policy has no other dimension but profit.

Simple cause and effect thinking is replaced by this much richer concept of a constellation. Reality at any present moment is not the simple reaction to a sole cause of events, but rather a complex set of reactions, motivations, behaviors and causes which interact with each other (Adorno, 1973; Jay, 1996). Negative dialectics can be an extremely beneficial tool by which to understand the notion of public education. If we take the term public not as a simple concept or identifier of a state of affairs, but rather begin to see it as part of this constellation of meanings which are dynamic and fluid, we can begin to truly understand the meanings of public higher education; meanings that we have not articulated yet. By dialectically analyzing the TJ21 Act, I attempt to shed light on this intricate web of meanings. In the process, we can offer a much more powerful and more justified argument to stem the tide of privatization and neoliberalism. The task was to use the information gleaned from various notions of public higher education and integrate this information with the information of the policy, in order to dialectically transform it.

Methodology

The dialectic calls for an intricate understanding of events within their surrounding historical and social context (Jay, 1996; Marcuse, 1990). An event cannot be properly understood until it is viewed in this context. Therefore, prior to any dialectical critique, TJ21 must be placed in its proper historical context.

The second step called for an understanding of what the notion of public higher education actually means. For this step, I read classic and current work regarding the notions of public education. From these readings I created a “public matrix” which allowed me to understand exactly what public higher education entails, or should entail. The notion of “public education” is extremely complex. Due to this I consulted relevant higher education literature and looked for themes and commonalities in order to demarcate a definition of public higher education. The sources chosen represent some of the most recent literature on public higher education, within the last 20 years. Additionally, I chose classic works in the field. Below are the works I consulted to create the public matrix (full citations are in reference list).

The Public Matrix:

Berliner, *Educational research: The hardest science of all*

Bok, *Universities and the future of America*

Bowen, *Investment in learning: The individual and social value of American higher education.*

Brint & Karabel, *The dream diverted community colleges and the promise of educational opportunity in America, 1900-1985.*

Engell & Dangerfield, *Market model university: Humanities in the age of money*

Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*

Goan and Cunningham, *The Investment payoff: A 50-state analysis of the public and private benefits of higher education*

Greenwood, *New Developments in the Intergenerational Impact of Education*

Hill, *Class, neoliberal global capital, education and resistance and fighting neoliberalism with education and activism*

Kiziltepe, *Purposes and identities of higher education institutions, and relatedly the role of the faculty*

Labaree, *Educational researchers: Living with a lesser form of knowledge*

Lewis and Hearn, *The public research university: Serving the public good in new times.*

Maassen and Stensaker, *The knowledge triangle, european higher education policy logics and policy implications.*

McMahon, *Introduction to International Journal of Educational Research*

Newfield, *Unmaking the public university: The forty year assault on the middle class.*

Peekhaus, *The neoliberal university and agricultural biotechnology: Reports from the field*

Rhoads and Torres, *University, state and market: The political economy of globalization in the Americas*

Slaughter and Rhoades, *Academic capitalism and the new economy: Markets, state and higher education.*

Spring, *Research on globalization and education*

Suspitsyna, *Higher education for economic advancement and engaged citizenship: an analysis of the U.S. Department of Education discourse.*

Spring, *Research on globalization and education*

Torres, *Public Universities and the Neoliberal Common Sense: Seven Iconoclastic Theses*

Vestrich, *The academy under siege: Threats to teaching and learning in American Higher Education*

Washburn, *University Inc: The corporate corruption of higher education.*

Wolfe and Zuvekas, *Nonmarket outcomes of schooling*

Vestrich, *The academy under siege: Threats to teaching and learning in American Higher Education*

This list is by no means exhaustive. A search on the Education Resource Information Center database with the key words higher education and neoliberalism yields dozens of works, which grapple with some aspect of neoliberalism. Due to limitations of time and space, I could not include a large number of these works. Each of the works chosen for this paper I felt examined some distinct facet of public higher education and its relation to neoliberalism, blazed new ground or was a landmark study. I summarized the main points of each work then grouped similar points together into themes. The themes became the public matrix, which I used to dialectically critique the static neoliberal view of higher education and to subsequently create a new constellation of meaning for public higher education in the age of neoliberalism. Below is a listing of the related themes I found:

1. Public higher education benefits every member of society (Bowen, 1996; Greenwood, 1997; Vestrich, 2008; Wolfe & Zuvekas, 1997).
2. Public education benefits both individuals and society as a whole. This system of benefits can be described in a four point framework (Greenwood, 1997; McMahon, 1997; Wolfe & Zuvekas, 1997).
 - a. Private monetary benefits
 - b. Public monetary benefits
 - c. Private non-monetary benefits
 - d. Public non-monetary benefits (which are the hardest to measure)
3. Public higher education has tremendous monetary and non-monetary intergenerational benefits (Bowen, 1996; Greenwood, 1997; Goan & Cunningham, 2006; McMahon, 1997; Wolfe & Zuvekas, 1997).
4. Public higher education forms a social contract with society (Lewis & Hearn, 2003, Bok, 1990). Tax dollars are exchanged for social improvement.
5. The public nature of education allows for the free flow of scientific information, in the forms of journals, conferences and research (Peekhouse, 2011; Washburn, 2005).
6. In the information age, higher education is a key player in creating knowledge or information producers (Peekhouse, 2011; Spring, 2008; Washburn, 2005).

7. Public higher education has been the target for wide ranging neoliberal reforms; the goal is to turn higher education into a private commodity conducive to the global market (Rhoads & Torres, 2006; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).
8. Over the last 30 years, there has been a trivialization and neglect of the humanities, yet these disciplines are crucial to a vibrant society and functional democracy (Engell & Dangerfield, 1998; Giroux, 2012; Suspitsyna, 2012).
9. Public higher education is a multiracial, democratic, egalitarian institution (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Giroux, 2011; Newfield, 2008).
10. Public education, in the widest sense has the capability of producing positive social change (Bowen, 1996; Newfield, 2008).
11. Higher Education is a place for critical reflection, civic training and citizenship (Giroux, 2011; Hill, 2006; Torres, 2011).
12. Higher education can be a place of resistance against neoliberalism and as a result, is under attack by neoliberalism (Giroux, 2011; Hill, 2012, Vestritch, 2008)
13. Higher education, as an academic discipline (or field) does not have a solid research base, yet it is also a very flexible discipline able to accommodate many diverse theories and frameworks (Berliner, 2002; Labaree, 1998)
14. Neoliberalism is transforming higher education in the United States as well as the rest of the world (Kiziltipe, 2010; Maassen & Stensaker, 2010).

Coding of TJ21

I then read and coded the TJ21 policy. I tried to determine how the policy represented public education by asking the following question: What words, phrases and terms did policymakers use to describe public education, both its processes and benefits? The answer was exclusively neoliberal terms. In fact, there was not one mention of any liberal or humanist notions of education. The hyperlink to the full policy is: <http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?000+cod+23-38.87C10>; a short title and summary appear in Appendix A. The short summary puts forth 10 aspirations of the policy. Consistent with the literature of neoliberalism, I elucidated five general themes from the stated purposes of the policy and grouped similar propositions together. For instance, there are numerous references made to the “economic impact” of higher education, “revenue enhancement” fostered by higher education, to the fact that higher education is equated with “economic growth” and how higher education is equated with higher earning power. There is also an effort to measure the “economic value of

individual degree programs.” From these and related statements, I created five similar but distinct categories to which that the act can be classified. The classifications were:

- a) Higher education will strengthen individual’s economic earning power.
- b) Higher education will be a revenue enhancer for the state.
- c) Higher education should create more knowledge and information producers for the knowledge economy or information age.
- d) Higher education should foster business partnerships between corporations and universities and higher education should function as a market good.
- e) Higher education should stimulate profitable commercialization of products.

The Dialectical Transformation

The last step entailed the heart of the project, which was a dialectal transformation of the TJ21 policy. Here, I contrasted the information of the public matrix with the themes I elucidated from the text of the TJ21 policy. I used the public matrix to create questions which critiqued the information in the categories. The purpose of the questions was to highlight contradictions, shortcomings and silences in neoliberalism. I wanted to draw on those contradictions to facilitate a dialectical movement of higher education. This dialectal movement is cast as negative dialectics. Public higher education in the twenty-first century must be seen as a constellation of complex meanings, actions and motivations. The ultimate goal of the project was to create a new constellation of meaning for public higher education and to envision a new dialectical phase of public higher education for the twenty-first century.

Historicizing TJ21

The Top Jobs Act of Virginia passed the Virginia General Assembly on June 16th, 2011. I chose this policy because it embodies the central tenets of neoliberal theory. In order to truly understand this policy however, the ideas of neoliberalism must be put in their proper historical context. Historization is a key component of any dialectical analysis (Jay, 1996). No historical event spontaneously happens or is universal. All events are part of a vast historical sequence and this sequence must be understood. By historicizing neoliberalism, TJ21 can be seen as the result of a prior progression of historical events. Further, future trajectories of neoliberalism and its relation to public education can be illuminated.

Prior to the New Deal, the United States primarily operated by *laissez-faire* economic principles (Peet, 2009). These principles originated with the ideas of Adam Smith and eighteenth century liberalism (Overtveldt, 2007). Smith believed in limited government inference in the economy, the ability of individuals to make rational decisions, and above all the idea of the “invisible hand” of capitalism. Smith saw the invisible hand work through individual actions (Plant, 2010). Individuals were motivated by self-interest but through their actions done out of self-interest, individuals would check each other and create harmonic society (Plant, 2010). For Smith, the market was the guarantor of this invisible hand. Competition and customer satisfaction would lead to harmony. Smith’s theories were foundational for the development of liberalism in the eighteenth century, which was a major impetus of the American and French Revolutions, and for global economic policy for the next century and half (Hobsbawm, 2012). By the 1930s and the global depression however, it seemed as if liberalism and *laissez-faire* had run its course (Peet, 2009).

President Franklin Roosevelt inaugurated a new era in American politics with the passage of the New Deal policies in the early 1930s. Meant to counter the economic downturn of the Great Depression, the New Deal brought the government in direct contact with the economy in the form of bank regulation, higher taxes, the creation of government programs, and deficit spending (Overtveldt, 2007; Peet, 2009). The combination of Roosevelt’s New Deal policies and the start of the Second World War boosted the American economy (Peet, 2009). Unlike Smith, Roosevelt and other architects of the New Deal drew on the ideas of the twentieth century economist Maynard Keynes. Keynes distrusted Smith’s theory of the invisible hand. Keynes called for strong government regulation and deficit spending to jump start a stagnant economy. Businessman and bankers reluctantly supported the Keynesian New Deal policies (Peet, 2009).

The most vocal criticism to Keynesian and New Deal policies came from the University of Chicago, and namely its economics department (Overtveldt, 2007; Peet, 2009; Reder, 1982); yet this opposition was weak. Melvin Reder (1982) argued that by the late 1940s, the American conservative party was in shambles. Its two major tenets, *laissez-faire* economics and social conservatism, had been deflated by the events of the Great Depression and Nazism, respectively. Into this void the ideas emanating from Chicago began to jostle for a foothold with conservatives (Reder, 1982).

During the 1950s and 1960s, the radical ideas emanating from Chicago were gaining ground but were still too radical to be accepted by Washington politicians and the general public (Overtveldt, 2007; Peet, 2009; Reder, 1982). The “Chicago School” as they came to be called

embodied two main tenets: the belief that the free market could handle social issues such as education and healthcare and a militant defense of individual freedom against any communal or social notions (Overtveldt, 2007; Plant, 2010). The theorists at the University of Chicago pumped life into the fledgling American conservative movement from the 1940s until the 1970s.

American bankers, businessmen and many on the political right had reluctantly supported New Deal policies and the larger role of the government in the economy through the late 1960s (Peet, 2009; Wolff, 2012). However, by the 1960s after the Johnson Years and the programs of the Great Society, which had changed the focus of policy from economic prosperity (which only aided some) to equality for all, many on the political right began to look for a voice to rebut the political left in United States politics (Newfield, 2008; Peet, 2009). By the 1970s, the battle between left and right had reached a fevered pitch due to the government's direct attack on business in the form of stringent environmental and labor regulations. One example was the creation of the Occupational Safety and Health Agency, which was meant to help laborers and employees from the dominance of management (Peet, 2009). Intellectuals, conservative think tanks, and corporate-funded research teams helped to disseminate the pro-market ideas of the Chicago School on a national scale (Overtveldt, 2007; Peet, 2009). And while it would be an oversimplification to mark one specific date as the emergence of American neoliberalism, the election of former U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1981 sticks out. Reagan embodied the neoliberal theories; his economic advisors even wore lapel pins of Adam Smith (Fowler, 2009). By the early 1980s, neoliberalism had ascended to the fore in American political, economical and cultural thinking (Fowler, 2009; Peet, 2009; Overtveldt, 2007). This time period also saw a truly interconnected global economy, linked by increasingly faster modes of transportation and communication (Bell, 1973; Peet, 2009). Neoliberalism became the dominant feature of globalization (Peet, 2009).

One of the most pervasive aspects of neoliberalism, at least regarding education, is the idea of human capital elucidated by Gary Becker in his 1964 work *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education*. The theory holds that institutions such as education can be viewed like any other monetary investment. People engage in these investments when they receive a high rate of return (Becker, 1993; Overtveldt, 2007). Thus, people will spend more on education if they obtain a high return. The theory of human capital is emblematic of the Chicago School as a whole because it paved the way for the idea that public services could be quantified and treated like financial operations. The kernel of Becker's ideas is the quantification of social institutions. Along with education, Becker attempted to explain divorce rates and racial discrimination among other things by using price theory and market

calculations (Lazear, 2000, Overtvelt, 2007). By the 1970s, the notion of human capital had extended beyond the discipline of economics, and was eventually adopted by such organizations as the World Bank in regard to their funding of educational programs globally (Lazear, 2000, Peet, 2009).

Every president since Reagan, including Barack Obama, has spoken the language of neoliberalism. More than this, politicians, higher education administrators and the general public all look to higher education in terms of human capital, or as a monetary investment in the individual and society. Essentially, human capital is the reduction of education to purely market functions. The TJ21 policy, when seen in historical perspective, is simply another variation (albeit a very forceful one) of human capital theories, as well as neoliberalism in general. Neoliberalism and human capital are usually taken for granted notions (Giroux, 2011). It must always be remembered however that they are actually victorious ideologies which by and large exclude other visions of education (Giroux, 2011; Vestritch, 2008). Adorno (1973) argues that negative dialectics must always seek to include what has hitherto been excluded, what has not been conceptualized. That is why higher education scholars must push for the social and humanistic components to higher education; these have been forgotten and repressed. Further, these insights can help shed light on potentially new and more complex visions of public higher education for the twenty-first century.

The Public Matrix, TJ21 and Dialectical Transformation

Questions can open a new line of thinking or a new critique. Questions leave possibilities open for later transformation, and transformation is the cornerstone of dialectic movement (Jay, 1996; Van Manen, 1990). The dialectical critique and transformation is presented as a series of questions and answers inspired by the public matrix. These questions were put to the themes coded in the TJ21 policy and follow the above historical analysis of TJ21. My answers to the questions that I posed are limited. What I offer are suggestions and new leads to be taken or to be critiqued.

The remedies I propose are not policy driven. As Marx and many later critical theorists point out, good policy cannot fix bad policy if the social and economic system remains exploitive (Habermas, 1990). It may be necessary to circumvent policy and inculcate change in future generations who create policy. This includes future higher education and K-12 administrators, faculty, teachers and others with educational backgrounds that are more directly involved in the legislative process. Most of my suggestions center on education departments at institutions of

higher education. I see great potential in education departments to foster dialectical change because by nature, education as a field is flexible (Labaree, 1998). There are many other methods however that can be utilized and it is up to other scholars who are interested to continue and refine my work.

The Questions

1. Based on the categories coded from the TJ21 policy, the social contract between society and higher education is based on profit; society exchanges tax dollars for revenue enhancement. However, as the public matrix has shown, the non-monetary benefits of higher education are substantial. So, how can higher education scholars dialectically re-conceptualize the social contract between higher education and society to account for the non-monetary potential of higher education in the age of globalization?

It must be demonstrated how public higher education benefits every person in American society beyond the public and private monetary benefits (Bowen, 1996; Giroux, 2011). Some private non-monetary benefits of higher education include increased civic participation, increased tolerance of diversity, increased attendance at cultural events, better health and even happier marriages (Bowen, 1996; Wolfe & Zukas, 1997). It is the public non-monetary benefits however that are the most impactful. The greatest public non-monetary effect is the intergenerational effect (Bowen, 1996; Greenwood, 1997). Of course this is a contentious claim, but the data suggests that children who have parents with a higher education are read to more often, in better health and do better in school among many other variables (Bowen, 1996; Greenwood, 1997). The greatest beneficiaries of higher education may not even be born yet. Of course these non-monetary benefits are extremely difficult to measure (Goan & Cunningham, 2006; McMahon, 1997). This is what is so crucial about higher education; it's most long ranging effects cannot be easily quantified, predicted or classified. Instead, they are evident of a constellation of meaning and complex interactions (Adorno, 1973).

Policymakers, higher education administrators and the general public must be made to understand the complex nature of the benefits of higher education. This is at the heart of the re-conceptualized social contract between higher education and society. Profit and revenue are simplistic benefits. We as a society must demand more from higher education. We must come to a dialectal understanding of the true complexity and rich potential of higher education.

Re-conceptualizing the social contract may mean a re-evaluation of the audience of higher education. Higher education is not simply to educate present students, but their children

as well (Bowen, 1996; Greenwood, 1997). It follows then that the social contract between higher education and society is not only for the present society, but for future generations as well. This must be emphasized. Unfortunately, TJ21, as all neoliberal policies seem to exist in a perpetual present (Giroux, 2011). There is no concept of posterity. This is the key to re-conceptualizing the social contract in regards to higher education; we are obligated to posterity, not only ourselves.

2. Ultimately, how can higher education become dialectical and accurately reflect its true constellation of meaning instead of its current simplistic association as revenue producer as under TJ21?

The rendering of public education by the TJ21 legislation makes public education subordinate to the market; a college degree, as well as the products that colleges produce, must enhance market value of individuals and all outcomes of public education must have market value. Revolution and transformation however, do not have a market value. As Newfield (2008) points out, the society being created by higher education from the 1950s to the late 1970s was egalitarian and able to change the status quo- thus the fear it engendered in the elites. This is an illustration of how higher education is not a simple investment of human capital, but rather a constellation of deeper and more complex meanings. The drive for profit under neoliberalism however has stunted this transformative capability and it must be re-invigorated. What are some ways that scholars at higher education institutions can promote transformation? There are many possible answers to this question. That is what these questions were designed to produce, a multitude of answers and options. The methods that I promote are only a starting point.

One way to re-invigorate the transformative powers of higher education is by re-conceptualizing the role of education departments. Education schools are widely considered at the bottom of the research ladder (Berliner, 2002; Labaree, 1998). Currently, the discipline of education is not considered influential or useful; neither is it well funded (Berliner, 2002). Higher education does not lay claim to a strong and solid body of research as does a more traditional discipline like physics (Labaree, 1998). Democratic and critical education is a threat (Giroux, 2011; Hill, 2012). The advocates of neoliberalism have actively sought to stymie the power of education (Giroux, 2011). Education must be kept weak and subordinate to the status quo (Hill, 2012).

Labaree (1998) argues that the supposed weakness of education as a discipline is actually its greatest asset because the discipline is flexible. Many have argued that education is

not even a discipline, but rather a field because there is no conceptual framework as in disciplines such as economics or history; there is no set way to view the world. Rather, educationalists are free to mix and match, and create their own ways to view the world. Fresh concepts can be pushed through the discipline by creative scholars who are not hindered by cumbersome norms as in the more traditional disciplines (Labaree, 1998). This flexibility must be utilized.

This flexibility is the very heart of constellation thinking. Higher education is a constellation of political, economic and social phenomena and the interactions of these phenomena. The very flexibility of education as a field can be used to match the intricateness of the constellation. It is the interaction between economic, social and political factors that makes higher education so revolutionary and an agent of social change (Bowen, 1996; Vestrich, 2008). In order to seize on this potential, education departments could create a new course offering titled something like *dialectic and revolution* or *critical education*. Professors could actually *teach* the dialectic to education students.

In this course professors could highlight current contradictions and limitations in the present order and the dominant ideology of the social order. This class would be interdisciplinary, drawing together and connecting the knowledge from disparate disciplines in meaningful ways. For instance, it could be demonstrated to education students how neoliberalism is actually a method to stymie political and social change (Giroux, 2011; Newfield, 2008). Neoliberalism gained traction as a backlash against the social turmoil of the 1960s (Newfield, 2008). As the economic theories of neoliberalism took hold, they became a way for conservatives to block what they saw as subversive education, which threatened the status quo (Newfield, 2008; Stanley, 2007). This is one example of the constellation of interconnected actions and motivation of higher education. Students would be better equipped to promote responsible social change by facilitating certain points in the constellation, such as the democratic and humanist potential of higher education, and using this to critique other facets of the neoliberal paradigm. This can help further our knowledge of the constellation and its interactions.

This may be especially potent in teacher education programs. Currently, teacher education programs are largely impotent; they do not teach future teachers any real critical skills. They are mostly made up of sterile methodology and training teachers for standardized testing (Hill, 2006). Social transformation must be made the cornerstone of teacher education. This holds true for future higher education faculty as well. Future higher education faculty can help to transform their discipline into an organ of resistance and revolution. A new course

offering taught by faculty knowledgeable of critical theory and dialectics cannot consist of abstract ideas, but rather concrete analyses of politics, history, economics and current events and a dialectal understanding of these phenomena. Future teachers are essential to neoliberalism because they train the future capitalist order (Hill, 2006). If future K-12 teachers and future college faculty realize their potential, if they are made to understand the role they play in perpetuating the neoliberal order, they can resist it. The occupation of teacher and faculty member must be made revolutionary. Future teachers and faculty members cannot hide in their ivory towers, aloof from the world. Rather they must engage with it, challenge it and attempt to forge new meanings.

3. Dialectical movement calls for a simultaneous preservation and destruction of the present order (Jay, 1996). That which is oppressive in that order is annihilated and what is beneficial is preserved and assimilated into the new, higher order. With this in mind, we must ask: What comes after profit? How can an emphasis on the economic prosperity promoted by TJ21 be retained while broadening our view of the impacts of higher education?

Neoliberalism erodes the social and communal bonds of society in favor of a hedonistic individualism. Citizens are reduced to consumers and profit maximization is the main priority of individuals and nations (Giroux, 2011; Hill, 2006). Giroux argued that since the election of George W. Bush in 2000, this destruction of the social sphere and the pathological elevations of consumerism and greed have reached unprecedented heights. Despite the election of Barack Obama, Giroux maintained that neoliberalism is still accelerating, albeit a little more slowly (Giroux, 2011).

Unfortunately, American higher education is replete with examples of how the profit motive has restricted the mission of higher education. The mission of all colleges, public and private is to serve the public good (Bowen, 1996). As universities seek private partnerships as espoused by TJ21 and neoliberal advocates in general however, this notion of public service is thrown into conflict with the mission of virtually all private sector entities: profit (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Washburn, 2005). Cures for deadly diseases are neglected in favor of consumer products such as cosmetics which have a demand on the market (Washburn, 2005). The results of scientific studies are withheld and manipulated by unscrupulous funders so as to ensure their product hits the market. War chests are deployed by corporations to silence professors who dare to challenge corporate power and ethics (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004;

Washburn, 2005). These and hundreds more examples illustrate the conflict between public service and accumulation of profit.

So, what is beneficial for society in this grim situation? The answer lies partly in TJ21's promotion of consumer products and revenues for the state. Policymakers and university administrators look to the hard sciences, biotechnology and engineering with the hope of patents and profits (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Washburn, 2005). Despite their profit-making potential however, these disciplines have the potential to adequately feed, shelter and clothe every individual on this planet, and overall raise the standard of living for everyone (Marcuse, 1990; Vanderslice, 2013). It is this potential of social justice and equitable distribution that must be seized.

One way to make the neoliberal disciplines just is through the training of higher education administrators. Education programs must view future administrators as gatekeepers of justice. They are the ones who will manage departments and handle the affairs of the institution. Future higher education administrators can help bridge the gap between the disciplines. They can help to foster interdisciplinary ventures between the arts, sciences and education by creating new classes, new fields and new disciplines which produce new forms of knowledge and further highlight the complex interaction of the constellation. Administrators can reach out to faculty in engineering, sciences, mathematics and business who share similar values of humanism and public service. With these like-minded faculties, further cross disciplinary ventures could be undertaken. Potential higher education administrators must not be trained as bureaucrats, but as humanists.

Again, teacher education is crucial as well. Future science and math teachers can be trained not just for content and methodological knowledge, but for promoting justice in their future students. These future teachers must realize the amazing potential that science, engineering and mathematics have to improve the standard of living on earth (Marcuse, 1990). The future teachers of these disciplines must be made to realize they are the primary dispenser of information to students; and we now live in the information age.

4. This is undoubtedly the information age (Bell, 1973; Dare, 2010; Drucker, 1993). Public higher education must evolve. One theme of TJ21 was its call for a workforce that can compete in the global knowledge or information economy. Information in all disciplines has rapidly transformed society but this information is harnessed by neoliberalism for profit. How can scholars re-harness this information and use it to promote a new dialectical stage of higher education for the twenty-first century?

We as a society now live in the post-industrial age (Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1993). The post-industrial age is characterized by the production of information; scientific information, medical information, cultural information, etc. Information, and the control of information, is the life blood of post-industrial society (Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1993). Institutions of higher education play a pivotal role in the production and dissemination of this information.

Higher education allows for the free flow of information (Washburn, 2005). All forms of information such as scientific, cultural, and practical is or should be able to flow freely and be accessible to anyone in society. As stressed before, this is part of the social contract of higher education and society (Lewis & Hearn, 2003). There is hierarchy of information however. Since information that is geared toward profit is valued, many other types of information are neglected. Institutions of public higher education deal with many forms of knowledge and products that the market would not otherwise be involved in. Many types of basic scientific research as well as almost all types of historical, philosophical and certain types of pedagogical research are not profitable. But all of these are vital and necessary for a true understanding of education as a constellation and not a simple concept (Bowen, 1996; Lewis & Hearn, 2003; Washburn, 2005). The potential to truly understand higher education as a constellation has never been greater than in the information age. As long as information is held captive to neoliberalism however, society will never be able to realize the true potential of this information.

One possible way to harness the ever growing amount of information may be the creation of a brand new discipline, or at least to radically transform higher education as it stands. Spring (2008) suggested that this may already be occurring. He wrote of a new discipline that is beginning to emerge: globalization and education. This is the study of an intertwined set of global processes and how they affect education (Spring, 2008). While there are variations of education and globalization, it mainly examined how global neoliberalism is transforming education into a market good (Spring, 2008). Spring stated that this new field “is developing its own, language and conceptual frameworks,” (Spring, 2008, p. 3). A facet of this new language is the capturing of movement; this includes the global movement of ideas, practices, technology, institutions, money and people (Spring, 2008).

Globalization and education serve as a foundation for harnessing and putting to use the vast amount of information in post-industrial society as they examine the challenges and opportunities facing education in global age. Carlos Torres (2011) applied the dialectic to higher education and some of the flows of information in order to determine how information and discourses are produced and disseminated (Torres, 2007). I want to go one step further. As

stated in the question, higher education scholars must harness the vast amount of information and the flow of people, ideas and money for public service and ultimately justice.

Higher education scholars must make the information of post-industrial society dialectical, progressive and emancipatory. Higher education scholars can use the flexibility of higher education scholarship to not only illustrate the constellation of higher education, but to actually create *new* constellations of meaning. Higher education faculty must see themselves as the meeting place of the university. Their scholarship and research by its nature is interdisciplinary. They must seize on this flexibility and promote an interdisciplinary approach within academia. Science, mathematics engineering even business education cannot pursue isolated research and be artificially separated from each other. Higher education faculty must be the bridge of the disciplines. Higher education faculty must bring all the disparate sources of education into conversation with each other to create a new meaning for knowledge in the information age. The disparate strands of knowledge must be weaved together into a coherent body of thought, which can further illuminate the constellation of meaning that is higher education. Some further questions to achieve this could be: What constellation of meaning, ideas, institutions and money can higher education weave together to achieve a more just and beneficial society? What new connections and flows of information are necessary to achieve this monumental task of social transformation in the post-industrial age? How can the sciences, the arts, the humanities, business and engineering schools and all other areas be connected to promote justice and social change?

The Slavic Marxist Georg Lukacs (1971) argued a class of people will remain blind and subordinate to external events of history unless they are awakened to their potential to direct the course of events, as a class. In the post-industrial society, classes will largely be determined by access to and control of information (Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1993). Higher education faculty and administrators are part of a new social class, that of knowledge workers (Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1993). According to TJ21, these new knowledge workers are simply cogs in the new global economy. Their only purpose is to produce profit. Lukacs' ideas shed light on our own situation. Perhaps the role of higher education faculty, as part of this growing class of information workers, is to awaken the class of information workers to their potential for change in post-industrial society. By harnessing the growing amount of not only economic but cultural, historical, philosophical and humanistic information in post-industrial society, by giving it new meanings, roles and connections, the class of information workers will no longer be subordinate to outside forces of history. They will become dialectical. This may be the essence of the new proposed discipline. These awakened knowledge workers will be able to expand the

constellation of meaning for higher education into hitherto unknown regions and possibilities and reach a new dialectal stage for the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

This paper attempted a dialectical movement. The first task was to ascertain exactly what higher education entails. I accomplished this by the creation of the public matrix. Of course, this public matrix cannot reveal all of the meaning of public higher education; rather it can just shed more light on its complex constellation of meaning. The next task pinpointed the neoliberal conception of education. This was done by coding TJ21. The final task entailed using the public matrix to critique TJ21. More than just a static criticism, I desired to draw forth the contradictions encapsulated within the neoliberal conception of public education. I drew on the public matrix and created questions and tentative answers to draw forth the contradictions. These insights hopefully can be a glimmer of what public higher education can achieve in the twenty-first century.

The public matrix is the “purifier”; it put higher education to a rational critique. The public matrix was used here to shed light on what is oppressive, outdated, or harmful in the current state of affairs by showing what higher education is lacking, ignoring or actively oppressing. From these deficiencies, questions were created. The questions can lead to a new constellation of meaning for higher education by highlighting social and public dimensions of higher education, as well as non-monetary and intergenerational benefits. The questions also point to the possibility of higher education as an agent of positive social change. Again, this paper focused mainly on the role of higher education as an academic field, but there are many other ways to carve out new constellations of meaning for higher education.

There is no blueprint for revolution (Alinsky, 1971). There is no savior who will magically fix the ills of the neoliberal order. Nor will the course of history rectify the gross injustices perpetuated by global capitalism (Zizek, 2009). If left unabated, neoliberalism will erode any notions of a public education. The worth of all education and pedagogy in the post-industrial age will be measured solely by how much revenue they generate. Educationalists, faculty members, teachers and anyone interested in true public education must take a stand and take it now. They must become dialectical and bring the fight to neoliberalism in order to supersede it. They must aspire to bring forth a new dialectical vision of public higher education for the twenty-first century.

Appendix A

Summary of Top Jobs Act

The link to the full policy is: <http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?000+cod+23-38.87C10>

This chapter may be cited as the "Preparing for the Top Jobs of the 21st Century: The Virginia Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2011," the "Top Jobs Act," or "TJ21." The objective of this chapter is to fuel strong economic growth in the Commonwealth and prepare Virginians for the top job opportunities in the knowledge-driven economy of the 21st century by establishing a long-term commitment, policy, and framework for sustained investment and innovation that will enable the Commonwealth to build upon the strengths of its excellent higher education system and achieve national and international leadership in college degree attainment and personal income, and that will ensure these educational and economic opportunities are accessible and affordable for all capable and committed Virginia students.

In furtherance of this objective, the following purposes shall inform the development and implementation of funding policies, performance criteria, economic opportunity metrics, and recommendations required by this chapter:

1. To ensure an educated workforce in Virginia through a public-private higher education system whose hallmarks are instructional excellence, affordable access, economic impact, institutional diversity and managerial autonomy, cost-efficient operation, technological and pedagogical innovation, and reform-based investment;
2. To take optimal advantage of the demonstrated correlation between higher education and economic growth by investing in a manner that will generate economic growth, job creation, personal income growth, and revenues generated for state and local government in Virginia;
3. To place Virginia among the most highly educated states and countries by conferring approximately 100,000 cumulative additional undergraduate degrees on Virginians between 2011 and 2025, accompanied by a comparable percentage increase in privately conferred Virginia undergraduate degrees over the same period, and to achieve these targets by expanding enrollment of Virginians at public and private higher education institutions in the Commonwealth, improving undergraduate graduation and retention rates in the Virginia higher education system, and increasing degree completion by Virginians with partial credit

- toward a college degree, including students with ongoing job and family commitments who need access to nontraditional college-level educational opportunities;
4. To enhance personal opportunity and earning power for individual Virginians by increasing college degree attainment in the Commonwealth, especially in high-demand, high-income fields such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and health care, and by providing information about the economic value and impact of individual degree programs by institution;
 5. To promote university-based research that produces outside investment in Virginia, fuels economic advances, triggers commercialization of new products and processes, fosters the formation of new businesses, leads businesses to bring their facilities and jobs to Virginia, and in other ways helps place the Commonwealth on the leading edge in the knowledge-driven economy;
 6. To support the national effort to enhance the security and economic competitiveness of the United States of America, and to secure a leading economic position for the Commonwealth of Virginia, through increased research and instruction in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and related fields, which require qualified faculty, appropriate research facilities and equipment, public-private and intergovernmental collaboration, and sustained state support;
 7. To preserve and enhance the Virginia higher education system's excellence and cost-efficiency through reform-based investment that promotes innovative instructional models and pathways to degree attainment, including optimal use of physical facilities and instructional resources throughout the year, technology-enhanced instruction, sharing of instructional resources between and among colleges, universities, and other degree-granting entities in the Commonwealth, increased online learning opportunities for nontraditional students, improved rate and pace of degree completion, expanded availability of dual enrollment and advanced placement options and early college commitment programs, expanded community college transfer options leading to bachelor's degree completion, and enhanced college readiness before matriculation, among other reforms;
 8. To realize the potential for enhanced benefits from the Restructured Higher Education Financial and Administrative Operations Act of 2005 (§ [23-38.88](#) et seq.), through a sustained commitment to the principles of autonomy, accountability, affordable access, and mutual trust and obligation underlying the restructuring initiative;
 9. To establish a higher education funding framework and policy that promotes stable, predictable, equitable, and adequate funding, facilitates effective planning at the institutional

and state levels, provides incentives for increased enrollment of Virginia students at public and private nonprofit colleges and universities in the Commonwealth, provides need-based financial aid for low-income and middle-income students and families, relieves the upward pressure on tuition associated with loss of state support due to economic downturns or other causes, and provides financial incentives to promote innovation and enhanced economic opportunity in furtherance of the objective of this chapter; and

10. To recognize that the unique mission and contributions of each institution of higher education in the Commonwealth is consistent with the desire to build upon the strengths of the Commonwealth's excellent system of higher education, to afford these unique missions and contributions appropriate safeguards, and to allow these attributes to inform the development and implementation of funding policies, performance criteria, economic opportunity metrics, and recommendations in the furtherance of this chapter's objectives.

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