

# The Broad Challenge to Democratic Leadership

## The Other Crisis in Education

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### ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the workings of the Broad Superintendents Academy, as a specific illustration of the influence of venture philanthropy in American public education. It introduces the Broad Foundation's agenda for educational leadership training, foregrounding how it frames the problem of leadership and the implications of such training for critical democratic governance of educational systems. As it shapes public consciousness of the "crisis" in education, the Broad Foundation confuses an indicator of equity with the more fundamental construction of an equitable society. The Broad education agenda seeks to disenfranchise local communities by concentrating power in the hands of superintendents bent on engineering district operations to produce "results." This article argues for expanded dialogue about the implications of the Broad agenda for the field of educational leadership and the project of educating critically minded leaders.

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*If schools become the playthings of a handful of billionaires, are they still public schools? (Stager, 2008, p. 38)*

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY TELLS US THAT, IN TIMES OF PERCEIVED CRISIS, groups often look to leaders who promise certainty and solutions (Staub, 1989). The price of such solutions can be heavy: greater concentration of power in the hands of fewer people at the top of a ruling hierarchy. In public education today, foundations funded by corporate money trumpet a crisis in student achievement as a rationale for centralizing administrative control of urban school districts in the hands of powerful superintendents, many of whom have been recruited from corporate and military circles. Leaders coming from outside of education, the argument goes, have what it takes to discipline low-performing systems and raise student achievement, heedless of the cost to local democracy.

Urban schools systems have been appointing "gunslinger" superintendents from outside the education profession since the 1990s (Eisinger & Hula, 2004). Large districts hire "gunslingers" to "ride into town and tame or even replace the school board, challenge the unions, master the bureaucracy, and for good measure,

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galvanize students and their parents to commit to higher achievement” (Eisinger & Hula, 2004, p. 624). Over the past decade, a key tool in the training of such superintendents has been the Broad Superintendents Academy, an initiative of the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and its Broad Center for the Management of School Systems. The Broad Foundation seeks to change the rules of the game in administrator preparation, arguing that the traditional leadership pipeline has produced an oversupply of mediocre leaders. In 2002, the Broad Foundation and the Broad Center instituted the Broad Superintendents Academy, modeled after executive training institutes, to prepare both career educators and nontraditional leaders to head urban school districts. Since then, approximately one-half of the academy’s graduates have been drawn from corporate and military circles (Samuels, 2011a). According to Broad Foundation press releases, the academy’s recent classes have included brigadier generals, major generals, the CEO of a charter management organization, and a Teach for America executive, alongside administrative and academic officers from large urban school districts in such states as California, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Carolina, New York, and Texas.

In this article, I interrogate the leadership discourse of the Broad Superintendents Academy as a specific illustration of the influence of venture philanthropy (defined below) in American public education. I explore the Broad Foundation’s agenda for educational leadership training and the implications of such training for critical democratic governance of educational systems. For one, the Broad discourse of leadership threatens to narrow the scope of the field, reducing it to an exercise in managerialism. As it shapes public consciousness of the “crisis” in education, the Broad Foundation confuses an indicator of equity with the more fundamental construction of an equitable society. What are the costs of leadership driven by a discourse of achievement gaps and limited to the production of efficient outcomes? Employing a strategy of critical discourse analysis inflected with organizational and psychological perspectives, I examine the ways in which the Broad Foundation frames and articulates its response to a presumed crisis in leadership, in order to open questions about the challenge it poses to democratic leadership in public education.

### **“Hostile Generosity”: The Broad Foundation and Venture Philanthropy**

As an entrepreneur, Eli Broad founded two successful companies, one in homebuilding (KB Home) and the other in retirement insurance (SunAmerica). Upon retiring in 1999, he and his wife established the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, now with assets of \$2.4 billion. The greater Broad Foundations work in the arts, sciences, and education. The educational arm, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, funds the Broad Center for the Management of School Systems which houses the Broad Residency in Urban Education<sup>1</sup> and the Broad Superintendents Academy.<sup>2</sup>

The Broad Foundation foregrounds its concern about graduation rates and achievement gaps as a driving rationale for the Superintendents Academy. The foundation seeks to raise the academic achievement of disadvantaged children, particularly in large urban centers. The foundation intentionally targets the

nation’s 100 largest urban school districts, with the rationale that these districts educate a large percentage of poor students. As evidence of its Superintendents Academy’s success, the Broad Foundation finds that two-thirds of academy graduates serving as superintendents for three years or more lead districts to improve student achievement more quickly than other districts in their states (Broad Center, 2010).<sup>3</sup> Now celebrating its 10th anniversary, the academy has attracted a diverse group of leaders. Since its inception, the academy has produced more than 140 graduates (Giordano, 2011) and has become the leading national training program for nontraditional urban superintendents. According to the Broad Foundations’ 2011/12 annual report, graduates of the Superintendents Academy have filled 88 superintendencies and many other executive roles in urban districts across 34 states (p. 24); in fact, 39% of external openings for superintendents in large urban districts from 2008–2010 were awarded to Broad Academy graduates (p. 39). The three largest school districts in the United States now employ Broad-trained administrators, including the superintendent of Los Angeles Unified and the chief executive officer of Chicago Public Schools (Samuels, 2011a).

The training of entrepreneurial leaders for urban districts is one prong in a larger strategy for influencing educational reform. Broad-trained leaders become a conduit for further influence in their districts. According to Maxwell (2006), the foundation has invested in the success of graduates’ reform work by “flying Broad staff members and experienced schools chiefs in to advise and consult, paying for outside audits and studies, and providing special training for school board members” (p. 36). In addition to providing consultants, the foundation funds research studies on key reform issues, including mayoral control of school districts and teacher pay linked to performance.

The network of Broad-trained leaders extends beyond the central offices of key urban districts. The Broad Foundations’ 2009/10 annual report notes that Secretary of Education Arne Duncan hosted 23 Broad residents when he served as CEO of Chicago Public Schools (p. 10). In 2009, a Superintendents Academy graduate was named the country’s assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education (Samuels, 2011a).<sup>4</sup> Such power networks indicate the depth of the Broad Foundation’s influence in educational reform and the penetration of Broad-trained leaders into centers of educational policymaking.

As a potent force in shaping the terms of debate in educational reform, the Broad Foundation stands in elite company with other donors such as the Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation, leaders in the work of “venture philanthropy” (Saltman, 2010; Scott, 2009). Foundations richly endowed with corporate earnings engage in venture philanthropy to advance their reform agendas and orchestrate public consensus on the foundations’ desired direction of educational reform. Rather than supporting enhancements within the traditional public system, major donors often prefer to fund alternative models, such as charter school operators,<sup>5</sup> in a sweeping effort to challenge the “monopoly” of traditional public schools in providing public education (Reckhow, 2010).<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, sympathetic analysts suggest that venture philanthropy is supporting and validating the

kind of innovation necessary to prod (or shock) a complacent public education bureaucracy to change.

Given their emphasis on closing achievement gaps and raising graduation rates, the Broad Foundation and other venture philanthropists typically enjoy media portrayal in a positive light. For example, a full-page photo of Eli Broad in a 2008 issue of *District Administration* magazine shows Broad kneeling to talk with students of color at an elementary school named for Martin Luther King Jr. (Butler, 2008), mirroring the imagery in Broad reports and websites that displays Broad-trained leaders in business suits smiling at minority students—a depiction of corporate beneficence toward children who otherwise would be “left behind.”<sup>7</sup>

While venture philanthropy positions itself as a force of liberatory change in the educational system, critical educators have raised sharp objections to the increasingly oligarchical power of venture philanthropists in driving corporate-oriented reform. Spring (2012) referred recently to the Gates Foundation as the “shadow education government” (p. 162). In his newly edited volume *The Assault on Public Education*, Watkins (2012) decried the power of capital to shape the terms of educational debate: “Barons of wealth, in effect, now make public policy” (p. 2). Giroux (2012) criticized the “hostile generosity” (p. 18) that enables billionaires to gain influence over public education in ways that undermine civic values and close spaces of community engagement. The venture philanthropists, for Giroux, spearhead an “anti-public reform movement” (p. 18). One of the most sustained and thorough critiques of venture philanthropy in education comes from the work of Saltman (2010) who has analyzed the complex ways in which venture philanthropy celebrates “economism” (p. 119), a consumption-oriented vision of education that recasts schools as businesses and the purpose of schooling as the production of competitive workers/consumers. My inquiry in this article follows and continues this line of critique, concerned especially for how the Broad leadership agenda diminishes and marginalizes possibilities for imagining and enacting educational leadership differently.

For Saltman and other critical theorists, the megafoundations guiding educational reform offer no gift to education. Venture philanthropy has advanced an approach that is decidedly more aggressive and less patient with long-term, research-oriented change than that of earlier generations of philanthropists (Saltman, 2010; Katz, 2012). Historically, large foundations have been reluctant to play an advocacy role in public policy, given concerns over potential public backlash against the leverage of institutions founded by the giants of industry (Katz, 2012).

Inspired by the workings of venture capital, venture philanthropy refers to grants as “investments” and donors as “investors” (Saltman, 2010, p. 3). In a 2008 interview, Eli Broad explained his philosophy as a donor: “We want a return on our investment. The return we want is greater student achievement” (as cited in Butler, 2008, p. 36). Referring to philanthropy and the training of educational leaders as an investment speaks of a neoliberal discourse that aims to push public education inextricably into the marketplace. With strategic intent, venture philanthropists work to change structures of policy and shape fields of discourse at a national level, often

by engaging the media.<sup>8</sup> Scott (2009) observed: “In many ways, these new philanthropists have become among the most prominent and influential educational leaders and policy makers currently influencing state departments of education and the leadership within many urban school systems” (p. 107).

With a relentless push toward competition, market incentives, and accountability, the venture philanthropists working in the education sector share much of their reform agendas in common. The major foundations often work in parallel, jointly funding the same organizations and initiatives. By converging their investments, venture philanthropists have been able to define which reforms gain traction, attract headlines, and thus become “real” in public perception (Reckhow, 2010). And, as Reckhow pointed out, the real reformers have become charter management organizations and entrepreneurial service providers (e.g., Teach for America)—not teachers associations or colleges of education (p. 301). Fundamentally, venture philanthropy is restructuring the perceived locus of innovation in American education and gaining a federal platform for its agenda. In fact, the U.S. Secretary of Education chose in 2009 the chief operating officer of the NewSchools Venture Fund—a venture philanthropist investment hub—to head the federal Race to the Top initiative (Reckhow, 2010).

Major venture philanthropists invest heavily in public advocacy and have won the influence they seek. Scott (2009) noted, for example, that the Gates and Broad Foundations spent \$60 million on the Ed in ’08 campaign to raise the visibility of education in the 2008 presidential campaign. The 2009/10 report of the Broad Foundations, celebrating the 10th anniversary of reform work in public education, noted that the “stars have finally aligned” with the election of Barack Obama to president and his appointment of Arne Duncan as education secretary (Broad Foundations, 2009, p. 5). The report applauded the congruence of the Obama educational agenda with the foundation’s investments in charter schools, national standards, and performance pay for teachers (Barkan, 2011). Less sanguine about such alignment, English (2010), a professor of educational leadership, included Eli Broad—alongside Arne Duncan—at the top of his list of the “ten most wanted enemies” of educational leadership, who threaten to diminish the quality and civic character of American public education.<sup>9</sup>

### **Investing in New Leaders for a Failed System**

Rather than starting downstream, with new curricular packages or teacher training, the Broad Foundation focuses its reform efforts upstream, on system governance. As noted in the Broad Foundations’ report of 2009/10, Broad has focused his investments on “governance and management—from school board to superintendent” (p. 9). Influencing the training, support, and thinking of superintendents in large urban districts has become the Broad Foundation’s key strategic lever for reorienting public education toward a corporatist logic of managerial control.

Given the extent of the Broad Foundation’s influence in major urban districts and the U.S. Department of Education, it is useful for those concerned with democratic leadership in education to understand how Broad frames the leadership problem. In 2003, the Broad Foundation and the Fordham Institute<sup>10</sup> copublished *Better*

*Leaders for America's Schools* (Broad Foundation and Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003), a “manifesto” that posits a crisis in educational leadership, as evidenced by the poor performance of American students in international achievement tests. To address the enduring failure of schools to improve, the manifesto argued for radical rethinking of leadership training and selection. It asserted that certification requirements have grown all too cumbersome, blocking effective leaders outside of education from stepping into the education system to deliver change. The kind of change that counts, of course, is that which can be counted: the manifesto stressed that “public education should focus on the only measure worth considering—results in the classroom” (p. 20). In this manner, *Better Leaders for America's Schools* discounted any competing aims of education and reinforced the logic that effective leadership can be exclusively evaluated in terms of quantifiable results.

From a corporatist viewpoint, educational leaders, most of whom are initially trained as teachers, lack business skills necessary to transform underperforming systems. In a 2004 address, Eli Broad argued that:

*We need a wake-up call in the management of our schools. That means we shouldn't just select someone who has been a long-time teacher or a coach or someone who loves children. We have to look outside the system for new talent and individuals who have real experience and training in finance, management, systems and labor relations.*

*So we need to fundamentally rethink who is hired as a superintendent or principal, how they are trained, and what real authority they have to truly impact student achievement. (Broad, 2004, n.p.)*

Here, Broad contrasted “someone who loves children” (with its feminine associations) with those who have “real experience” in the hard-knocks (read: masculine) world of executive leadership. Having “real experience” teaching in public schools becomes a lack, a weakness, whereas strength is presumed to come from work performed outside the education sector. This binary structuring of female/male and educator/executive echoes throughout the Broad leadership discourse, positioning teachers (and colleges of education) on the soft and incapable side of the binary, while the qualities of the corporate CEO—being tough, effective, accountable, relentless—characterize the ideal leader. The manifesto also drew a sharp line between “certified” and “qualified” (2003, p. 17) leaders, arguing that far too many educators gain state certification but lack the practical competencies necessary for effective management. The only way to improve leadership, the manifesto argued, is breaking the “monopoly” (p. 35) of trained educators on the district office. Below, I explore further how the Broad Foundation frames educational leadership to justify corporatized influence.

The academy's website currently describes the program's objective as preparing “experienced leaders to successfully run urban public education systems” (Broad Center, 2012).<sup>11</sup> This message suggests that urban education is an enterprise that

educators have forfeit their authority to operate. By recruiting executive leaders to take over where the educational establishment has failed, the Superintendents Academy offers to education what Saltman (2010) identified as the “gift of corporate and military efficiencies” (p. 83)—a gift to a seemingly disordered, undisciplined, bloated education system that has not been able to manage itself. A gift of accountability from the private sector to the public.

### **Deregulating the Superintendency**

Deregulating leadership training is another dimension of the Broad Foundation's agenda (Saltman, 2010). The Broad Foundation and Fordham Institute's *Better Leaders for America's Schools* manifesto argued for dismantling conventional certification processes, which have become too “insular and linear” (p. 25). University-based training, the manifesto suggested, has become too removed from “the problems that real school leaders face” (p. 26) and contributes little to the practical capabilities of school leaders. Here again, the emphasis falls on a pragmatic, results-oriented leadership—in Saltman's words, an “anti-critical practicalism” (2010, p. 90)—that leaves little space for the more vexing questions of values and purpose in education.

The Broad Foundation advocates for school districts becoming more amenable to nontraditional superintendent candidates. In a 2003 address to policy advisors of the National Governors Association, Eli Broad urged, “You should create an alternative credentialing process for school and school system administrators—as has been done for teachers—so that managerial talent from all sectors can more easily make the transition into public education” (n.p.). In a parallel move, *Better Leaders for America's Schools* (2003) highlighted that several states (including Michigan and South Dakota) no longer required certification for principals or superintendents, while several other states no longer issued certification for superintendents. Broad desires deregulation of school leadership as a key avenue for recruiting leaders from outside of education to provide the hard-nosed management needed for systemic change.

Does lowering the requirements for the superintendency attract the kind of leaders imagined in the Broad Foundation manifesto? Smith (2008) conducted an empirical investigation regarding the outcome of deregulation of superintendency requirements in Michigan, a state that removed any academic requirements for the superintendency in 1993. Using data from search files from 1996–2005 and interviews with recruiters and candidates, Smith found that deregulated searches in Michigan failed to attract a diverse pool of nontraditional candidates: “No cavalry of executives is lined up behind the wall of certification” (p. 56). In fact, applicant pools during the study period declined in size, and only a handful of nontraditional (“out-of-field”) candidates were hired as superintendents. With those few exceptions, “The policy has had no perceptible impact on educational leadership practice or school organizations in the state. The bottom line is that very few people came to the party” (Smith, 2008, p. 49). Interpreting her findings further, Smith suggested that educational outsiders don't want the job of superintendent, due to lower salaries in the public sector, career risk from crossing professional

fields, and realization that public administration involves public deliberation, with its concomitant uncertainties. Smith (2008) quoted a search consultant:

*'Guys from business get a taste of the conflicts that go on and they realize they don't know what the best answer is; they do not have the knowledge or experience to know which way to go. And, they're not used to that, they're used to knowing the answer. They care and they want to do good but it's not their goal to feel confused.'* (p. 52)

This insight speaks volumes to the differences in leadership expectations found in the public and private sectors. Leadership in the public domain necessarily surfaces competing values and claims on the meaning and processes of education. Engaging conflicting values in a constructive manner—the hard work of democratic leadership—is precisely what leaders in public systems are called upon to do. Smith's research indicates that, in Michigan, business leaders accustomed to straightforward goals and top-down command channels do not find public school leadership an attractive proposition.

### **Education with a Purpose, and Only One Purpose**

The managerial orientation favored by the Broad Superintendents Academy contrasts sharply with progressive ideals of democratic leadership in education. For Carlson and Gause (2007), the promise of democratic education involves active engagement with structures of oppression embedded in institutions and modes of thinking. Democratic education also seeks to create and enrich spaces for the practice of a reflective, democratic public life. In an era of neoliberal hegemony, a key step toward the invigoration of democratic education lies in critique of dominant images of educational leadership (Carlson & Gause, 2007).

The leadership discourse advanced by the Broad Foundation centers on accountability.<sup>12</sup> Broad's view of leadership reinforces what Apple (2005) and others have called the "audit culture" in education. As noted above, the Broad leadership manifesto stressed a central tenet of corporatist reform: What matters is what's measured through testing, and the quality of leadership—just as the quality of teaching—can be reduced to the production of higher test scores. Broad's vision of leadership reifies testing as the means of making achievement gaps legible and visible, and testing serves as a necessary mechanism for gauging the impact of strong central office leadership. By emphasizing "gaps" and "gains" as the currency of leadership, the Broad ideology strengthens the power of testing in the system, without concern for the damage it produces—especially for the education of the marginalized groups for whom the foundation espouses concern.<sup>13</sup>

The narrowing of the purpose of education produces a narrowing of the meaning of leadership. Questions about the aims of education become, in the discourse of the Broad and Fordham (2003) manifesto, distractions from "results in the classroom" (p. 20). From this perspective, real leadership has little interest in dialogue about questions of value in education or the social/material conditions of schooling in relation to vibrant civic life and social well-being. For the Broad Foundation, the purpose of the

system is a given; what's needed, then, is more effective and efficient management of the system.

In this respect, the Broad Academy may orient leaders to focus on what Berry (2005) labeled a "bad solution" (p. 33). For Berry, a solution to a problem becomes bad when it harms the larger systems in which it is embedded. Bad solutions proliferate because they appear to produce the desired outcomes, but they do so only within a limited field. For example, when industrialized agriculture expands food production by concentrating more cattle in feedlots or intensifying use of petroleum-based fertilizer, a narrowly focused solution (more beef) results in diffuse (and sometimes delayed) problems in the larger social/ecological system.

In the case of the Broad Superintendents Academy, the singular focus on achievement gaps may produce bad solutions over time. Broad-trained leaders have strong incentive to focus on what they consider results that matter—as they've been trained and hired to do—without necessarily monitoring the systemic effects of such efforts on the well-being of teachers, the quality of community engagement in school governance, or the growth in students' sense of agency. In what ways might the tight focus on achievement undermine the well-being of the educational system and the well-being of the communities in which schools are embedded?

The impact of Broad-trained leaders in urban districts has yet to be systematically analyzed. In their review of nontraditional superintendents, Eisinger and Hula (2004) found that the "gun-slingers" first focused on bringing order "by streamlining, consolidating, and rationalizing, all in the effort to reduce inefficiencies and duplication and to increase accountability" (2004, p. 635).<sup>14</sup> Leaders hired, in Eisinger and Hula's phrase, to "shock the system" (p. 634) are likely to be controversial. In a recent *Education Week* article, Samuels (2011a) cited a case in which a Broad-trained superintendent faced an overwhelming no-confidence vote from district teachers while, in other cases, Broad-trained superintendents have left districts after financial or political turmoil. In a similar vein, blogs such as the *Broad Report* have assembled scathing commentary regarding Broad-related reforms and reformers. At the same time, several Superintendents Academy graduates have been honored as exemplary leaders by professional groups, including a 2009 academy graduate named in early 2012 as the American Association of School Administrators National Superintendent of the Year.

Given the absence of focused research on the impact of Broad-trained leaders in urban districts, a critique of "bad solutions" will remain speculative until further research looks more closely, and qualitatively, at the impact of academy graduates on the structural/cultural/political/financial ecology of school systems. To be fair, this concern for "bad solutions" is not a critique of the Broad Academy or its graduates in isolation but of the larger neoliberal policy discourse of accountability both mirrored and constituted by the Broad Foundation and other venture philanthropists.

In his book, *Teaching by Numbers*, Taubman (2009) advanced a wide-ranging analysis of why educators have been complicit in the ascendancy of an audit culture. He posed a series of haunting questions:

*How did we allow the language of education, study, teaching and intellectual and creative endeavor to transform itself into the language and practices of standards and accountability? How did it happen that we approved the use of pervasive testing that would shock us into compliance? How did we become complicit in the erosion of our own power, and why did we embrace the advice of salesmen, financiers, corporate lawyers, accountants, and millionaires? What led us to think that if we applied practices imported from the world of business we could solve our educational problems, and how did we surrender our right to define those problems? How did we lose our way? (p. 128)*

In addressing these questions, Taubman linked the advance of the audit culture to faith in cognitive psychology and the promise of measurable learning outcomes.<sup>15</sup> Employing a psychoanalytic lens, Taubman illuminated the role of shame and fear in teachers' embrace of accountability. Threats of diminishing resources and hostile takeover of schools have fueled educators' insecurities. Taubman also sees educators struggling with the public shame of failure—heightened by school rankings and teacher-performance measurement—against a narrative of heroic teachers who sacrifice everything to bolster children's learning. Such intensive feelings of insecurity and shame can leave teachers desperate to prove their worth in ways recognized by authority. Taubman suggested that the embrace of measurable learning objectives allows educators, feeling as if they lack cultural status, to robe themselves in the authority of science and the pragmatism of business. Educators "teach by numbers" as a response to deeper feelings of inadequacy and irrelevance—vulnerabilities driven by a constant outcry in public media regarding educational failure that risks national security and prosperity.<sup>16</sup>

Taubman's analysis of teachers' psychic vulnerability to the lure of accountability also applies to educational leaders, perhaps even more acutely. From this perspective, the leaders trained by the Broad Academy, taken from self-assertive, high-performing sectors (business and military) of society may offer a kind of rescue, restoring order and status to wayward and ineffective systems.<sup>17</sup> Broad-trained leaders may fulfill a psychic need for security among those who, as Taubman keenly observed, have been beaten down and disheartened by the very reform agenda of high-stakes testing, accountability, and privatization supported by venture philanthropy.

### **Masculine Leadership Reborn**

What are the leadership qualities so much needed in public education? In describing leadership skills required of superintendents, *Better Leaders for America's Schools* listed the following: "intervening in faltering schools, mediating between school and state, collaborating with business, civic, and municipal leaders, engaging in complex labor relations, making tough decisions about priorities, finding resources . . ." (Broad Foundation & Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003, p. 18).<sup>18</sup> Even with rounded words such as *collaborating* and *mediating*, the masculine tone of leadership here is unmistakable; change leaders must have the muscle and fortitude to run the business of education.

This vision of leadership assumes an already corporatized context of education: The challenges of education themselves come predefined by the imperative for accommodating business interests, slashing budgets, and dismantling teacher unions. The manifesto's discourse naturalizes the Broad educational agenda as the fundamental reality within which leaders must operate. This is a powerful move of defining the *real world* in such a way that strong-armed corporate leadership is a necessary response. In this way, the manifesto conflates a specific ideological agenda with a derivative set of leadership skills. Similarly, the discourse presented in the manifesto diminishes educators who do not adopt the Broad agenda as unqualified or ineffective.

The Broad Foundation argues that strong leaders can lead any organization. One of the most telling sections of the 2003 leadership manifesto is entitled "The School Leader as CEO." In one sentence, the manifesto likened school leaders to "field commanders of an army engaged in conflicts on many fronts" (p. 23)—already foreshadowing the recruitment of military officers into the Broad Superintendents Academy. In another paragraph, the manifesto analogized corporate and educational leadership: Just as the CEO of a pharmaceutical company does not need to be a chemist, a school leader does not need to be a teacher (p. 24). The manifesto argued that the technical and administrative functions in an organization can, and should, be separated.<sup>19</sup>

The framing of educational leaders as corporate executives holds significant discursive ramifications. Conceptualizing superintendents as CEOs naturalizes the recruitment of business leaders and military officers to run the business of schooling and strengthens the credibility of those with business skills and perspectives as the ones who should be thought leaders in education. In short, the metaphor becomes a key leverage point in a struggle over the nature of public education and the meanings of effective leadership. How leadership is framed determines who is fit to lead and, more broadly, whose perspective will dominate the future.

The Superintendents Academy's curriculum foregrounds a managerial focus on effective operations and strategic communications. Although little detailed information about the academy's curriculum is publicly available, a former managing director of the academy highlighted the key strands in the curriculum as leadership, curricular alignment for student achievement (with emphasis on school choice and charter schools), effective relations with school boards and the public, effective operations management, and obtaining and maintaining a superintendency (Quinn, 2007). Under the theme of effective relations, Quinn also noted an emphasis on "navigating the politics of race and class" (p. 27), implying that matters of justice are unfortunate entanglements that might easily derail the change leader's work. Without concern for democratic relations, the Broad Superintendents Academy pays little attention to analysis of power in education. Verbs such as *critique* do not appear in the curricular themes of the Superintendents Academy. The Broad ideology assumes that raising students' skill levels for productive competition in the job market is the primary purpose of education. It takes no issue with the economic/social context of students' lives, with community

empowerment, or with the skewed distribution of resources in American society. As noted earlier, the foundation has a test-centric view of justice: Raising achievement scores in urban districts amounts to positive social change.

### **Breaking the Professional Bureaucracy**

One line of response to the Broad reform agenda is that the agenda misunderstands the nature of educational organizations. I turn here to organizational theorist Mintzberg and his institutional models, in which he differentiates between a machine bureaucracy and a professional bureaucracy (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Mintzberg, 1979). In a machine bureaucracy, top management (what Mintzberg termed the “strategic apex”) has the power to dictate goals and policy to the frontline workers (the “operating core”) since the workers have little autonomy for independent decision making. The advantage of the machine bureaucracy is productivity, especially in stable environments with standard outputs. The voice of the top reaches all the way to the bottom of the organization; the work gets done, quickly, like the boss wants it done. Not surprisingly, the machine bureaucracy serves as an implicit model for the way the Broad Foundation would like to see schools doing business.

In a professional bureaucracy, in contrast, the frontline workers are themselves skilled professionals, expected to make independent judgments. Both universities and hospitals, with professors and doctors working as Mintzberg’s “operating core,” serve as archetypes of the professional bureaucracy. Public schools also function as professional bureaucracies, to the extent that teachers are appreciated as being capable of independent judgment. In a professional bureaucracy, leaders gain legitimacy first by proving themselves as capable members of the profession. College presidents, for example, must inevitably start their careers as faculty members to gain credibility as a professional within the norms of the academic profession. Experience working as a “manager” alone does not grant legitimacy, since it is the norms of the academic profession that give the university its backbone.

Thinking with Mintzberg’s models, we can interpret the Broad agenda as an intentional effort to recast the professional bureaucracy as a machine bureaucracy and, consequently, grant the “strategic apex” greater power. Similarly, changing the professional identity and affiliation of leaders undermines the professional identity of teachers: If leaders don’t need to be teachers first, then the norms of corporate management supplant the norms of the teaching profession as the core operating identity of the organization. The organization gravitates toward a discourse of efficiency and productivity, abandoning social justice and democracy as core institutional values.

### **An Anti-Democratic Agenda**

For the Broad Foundation, the discipline of the corporate sector is a necessary corrective to the failed management of public education. In 2007, Eli Broad argued that “the real issue in today’s public schools is the utter failure, at a systemic level, to create high-performing, well-functioning organizations” (Broad, 2007, p. 75). To address the perceived failure of educational governance, Broad

called for streamlining authority structures. He claimed that school board members are ineffective and overly focused on petty operational details or gaining political points in the community without attending to larger reforms needed to raise student achievement (Butler, 2008). To support deep reform, Broad champions the transfer of power from elected school board officials to strong mayors or governors (Broad Foundations, 2009). Broad suggests that removing power from community hands actually increases the quality of democratic relations by centralizing accountability for educational outcomes in the mayor’s office.

Examining the discourse of the venture philanthropists regarding local governance, Ravitch (2010) pointed out that corporatist thinking sees “local school boards as a nuisance and an obstacle rather than as the public’s representatives in shaping education policy” (p. 27). For Broad, mayoral control of school boards clears space for the exercise of direct power by the superintendent. System-wrenching reforms can be enacted expeditiously, without interference by school boards. In her study of funding and networks in venture philanthropy, Reckhow (2010) found that major donors like Broad tend to focus their investments in large urban districts with mayoral control because such governance provides a perceived sense of stability and coherence in supporting reform. The traditional governance structure of elected school boards, in contrast, is often viewed by venture philanthropists as lacking capacity to sustain innovative change.

Several critical voices have challenged the governance moves of venture philanthropy. Looking across Broad Foundation efforts, Saltman (2010) saw the “neoliberal celebration of the private sector and denigration of all things public” (p. 81). One of the threads running through the Broad agenda, as noted by English (2010), is an antipathy toward “non-commodified public spheres” (p. 8). In his analysis, English observed a pattern in the corporatist discourse: Institutions such as colleges of education, teachers unions, and school boards—groups that might challenge the corporatist agenda—“must be silenced, marginalized or co-opted into submission” (2010, p. 8). The underlying danger of the Broad agenda—emblematic of the larger danger of venture philanthropy—is that the solution to the “crisis” in urban education becomes shuttering democratic spaces and coupling greater concentration of organizational power with diminished community accountability.

### **What’s at Stake?**

At first glance, the Broad Superintendents Academy might appear a niche player, training only a handful of leaders each year. Yet it is an elite crew, on the fast track for powerful positions in large urban districts. Understood in context, the Broad Superintendents Academy is not merely a training ground for urban district management, it is one node in a larger strategy for steering public education in the direction of increased marketization and diminished democracy. As a networking site for high-powered leaders, the academy promulgates a neoliberal leadership discourse. The interests of the venture philanthropists increasingly become the “common sense” of educational thinking, closing space for alternative discourses to gain legitimacy. Critical questions about the distribution of wealth and power—the questions that have

driven the various manifestations of the Occupy Wall Street movement—become “unexamined, undiscussed, and undiscussable in the public dialogue” (Waite & Waite, 2010, p. 92).

In September 2004, Eli Broad addressed the Michigan Governor’s Education Summit, expressing his concern for the continued failure of public schools. Despite federal mandates ostensibly aimed to close achievement gaps (e.g., No Child Left Behind), those gaps remain a threat to future prosperity. Broad framed his concern for the crisis in education in the following terms:

*If student achievement doesn’t improve, and if the ethnic and income student achievement gaps persist, we risk a lower standard of living, a weaker economy and a faltering of our democracy and society. The stakes are unbelievably high. There is the real chance that America will become like many second- and third-world countries, where a bimodal distribution of wealth between rich, upper middle class and poor creates political strife. The health of our democracy relies on bridging the gap between the skills of the middle class and those of the poor. Public education is that bridge. It is the connection that binds our society together. (2004, n.p.)*

Here, Broad suggested that economic inequality is the fault of the educational system, rather than a structural injustice endemic to the underlying system of neoliberal capitalism. The painful irony is that venture philanthropists, the winners of globalized capitalism, invite themselves to rescue a system that, at a deep level, has been struggling to cope with the very consequences of the inequality that capitalism produces.

Ravitch (2010) observed that the discourse of crisis is used to justify strategies for streamlining and centralizing governance. In a move common among neoliberal reformers, Broad links enduring problems of student achievement with anxiety about economic/political security for the United States. By casting educational reform as a national security issue in which there is no time for mistakes, strong-armed leadership becomes a legitimate and necessary turn away from the slow, cumbersome modalities of public governance. (Meanwhile, other crises of globalization, such as climate change, do not appear to be urgent issues—or educational issues at all—in the Broad leadership agenda.) Perversely, Broad positions the work of his foundation as a defense of democracy: Attacks on teachers unions, school boards, and university-based leadership preparation become protection of the common good in a globalized era.

As argued by Saltman (2010), Scott (2009), and others, the venture philanthropists enjoy a highly amplified voice in setting the terms of debate in educational reform. They have gained a platform in part by appealing to American fears of losing our economic/military dominance, of slipping down several notches in an international pecking order. Generally, the Broad Foundation voices a discourse of failure: Schools have failed; educational leaders have failed; colleges of education have failed; school boards have failed. With its emphasis on failure, the Broad discourse pushes certain categories of people, institutions, and ideas to the margins.

While foregrounding concern for disadvantaged students and closing achievement gaps, the discourse of the Superintendents Academy marginalizes the scope of concern for social justice in education, making questions of power and vision largely irrelevant. The Broad discourse asserts that educational leadership is a business venture and, thus, those who don’t teach leaders the hard skills of executive leadership fail the system. From this perspective, university-based leadership programs become increasingly irrelevant artifacts of the preaccountability era. School boards and other mechanisms of local governance become barriers to effective management, barriers that must be dismantled for the sake of improving student achievement.

The Broad agenda undermines structures of community oversight in public education and distracts educators’ attention from matters of public concern, especially in disadvantaged communities. Communities that struggle with economic injustice become objects of corporatist management, in the name of greater educational effectiveness. As critics of Broad have noted, “Keep your eye on Broad and you’ll be watching a sophisticated, many-faceted plan for dismantling the local control of schools” (Emery & Ohanian, 2004, p. 95). Besides shifting institutional power, the Broad discourse of leadership replaces the work of sense making and justice building—the work of creating counter-narratives of social justice in education (Grogan, 2004)—with a simple formula: Good leadership brings higher test scores.

Democratic educators should be wary of the Broad Superintendents Academy and its effects, not only on the actual management of urban districts but also on the terms in which we think about the meaning of leadership. In this respect, the Broad discourse intensifies what Weiner (2004) called “imaginative inertia,” which is “an inability to think beyond the parameters of dominant social structures” (p. 7). The Broad Academy silences questions about the socioeconomic inequities that produce achievement gaps, valorizes standardized testing as a metric that real leaders cannot do without, and conceptualizes leadership as the imposition of managerial authority rather than the creation of dialogic and democratic space. In this sense, the professional backgrounds of Broad recruits—whether previously trained in military bases, in corporate towers, or in colleges of education—matter little. The academy’s discourse reshapes the leading subject as an instrument of efficiency and strong-armed management, recasting educational leadership in bottom-line terms that inevitably constrict the space available for teachers, students, and communities to think or imagine otherwise.

### **A Different Crisis?**

The Broad Academy seeks to open district leadership to educational outsiders with vigor, focus, and entrepreneurial ideas. Ironically, the Broad-funded nexus of policy/training initiatives opens doors for individuals while closing systemic possibilities. When policy trajectories are determined by funders with limitless resources to train their own leaders, fund their own experiments, and offer prizes to districts that achieve their goals, democratic spaces in education constrict. The aims and means of public schooling slowly become a closed system, defined and managed by a richly endowed,

richly connected elite with a narrowly-defined educational agenda. Saltman (2010) warned: “Education philanthropy that appears almost exclusively in mass media and policy circles as selfless generosity poses significant threats to the democratic possibilities and realities of public education” (p. 1). The discourse of achievement gaps has become so strong that it muscles out dialogue about other educational aims and silences questions about social/economic justice (outside the realm of human capital formation). As a faculty member who teaches educational leadership, I am concerned that the espoused goal of closing achievement gaps distracts critical attention from collapsing spaces of civic governance in education.

A critique of the Broad agenda might easily ignore the wider landscape on which it has taken root. The Broad Foundation’s emphasis on strong-armed leadership for results is itself only one strand in a thick discourse of accountability that constitutes conventional wisdom in education today. Taubman’s (2009) book illuminated the expansive networks of policy institutes, accreditation agencies, and professional associations that mutually reinforce a regime of testing and accountability—while fueling the fear and self-doubt that “have led teachers and educators to collude in summoning the night that has fallen our field” (p. 13).

In his most recent essay, Broad (2012) again decried the crisis in public education and framed it as an opportunity to redesign school districts. Indeed, as Apple (2012) noted, the crisis in education for disadvantaged students is real, and is really being used to advance a narrow ideological agenda focused on “international competitiveness, profit, and discipline” (p. xii). Like other agents of accountability-oriented reform, the Broad Foundation offers a solution to one crisis while creating others. The crisis in leadership is not that the system suffers from a lack of commanding officers or CEOs, not that American test scores are lower than South Korea’s. As Taubman (2009) suggested, the crisis is that educators can no longer talk about what really matters in our private and public lives, overwhelmed by a strong discourse of accountability which claims to empower the disadvantaged.

I return for a moment to Berry’s (2005) thinking about systems: A “good solution” improves the balance and quality of the whole system (p. 33). Such a solution arises from a wide-angle vision of systemic patterns and interrelationships. Underneath the concerns about the Broad Superintendents Academy outlined above, my deeper concern is with the stated imperatives of neoliberal audit culture as the starting point and guiding reality in the training of educational leaders—regardless of its location in universities or the training academies of the venture philanthropists. Is data-driven decision making the apex of educational leadership? Can educators reclaim a language of justice, of complexity, of possibility as our own, rather than parroting the language of neoliberalism? How can we reposition matters of justice, dialogue, and democracy as foundational to, rather than a distraction from, matters of effective practice? How can we train “subversive administrators” who can manage complex systems, address racialized achievement gaps, and “carve out some space for alternative practices that affirm students’ cultures and identities” (Carlson & Gause, 2007, p. xii)? How can progressive educators and university

faculty reclaim a legitimate voice in educational policy and enter into constructive dialogue with accountability-driven reformers, in order to reinvigorate the democratic quality of education, to reclaim an educational life beyond the measurable realm of “achievement”?

The crisis of leadership may lie more in the realm of imagination and moral vision than in the capacity to command results. As Taubman (2009) suggested, postaccountability education will require the articulation of alternatives that navigate between the neoliberal order and the counter-discourses that oppose it. Enabling teachers and school communities to imagine and articulate alternatives will require the kind of leadership that sees through and beyond test-driven accountability, while also honoring questions of social justice and democracy as unsettled, as always under construction. Following Taubman, I argue that leadership is tasked to challenge the regime of accountability and reassert educators’ shared agency in negotiating and creating meaningful education—a messy business after all.

## Notes

1. The Broad Residency is a “leadership development program” that places leaders in central office positions in urban school districts, as well as federal/state departments of education.
2. The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation also sponsors the Broad Prize. This \$550,000 dollar prize is touted as the largest award given in education to urban districts, in recognition of increases in student achievement. The funds are given as scholarships to high school seniors.
3. This finding is based on the foundation’s own analysis of achievement data.
4. In the same year, three members of the Broad Foundation’s executive staff were “loaned” to the U.S. Department of Education to assist in the distribution of education funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Broad Foundations, 2009, p. 23).
5. The Broad Foundation has invested nearly \$100 million in charter-school management organizations (Broad Foundations, 2009). A recent report from *Education Week* announced that the Broad Foundation is now sponsoring a prize of \$250,000 to the charter management organization that demonstrates the highest academic outcomes for disadvantaged students (Samuels, 2011b). Only management groups that run more than five schools are eligible; community-based charter schools are not. This prize reflects the goal of advancing entrepreneurial models that, with further investment, can be successfully implemented on a national scale.
6. Other commentators have referred to this movement as “corporate reform” (Karp, 2011, para. 8). Key planks in the corporate reform agenda, as Karp outlined, include linking student test scores to teacher evaluation (and evaluation of colleges of education); weakening teacher tenure rights; reincarnating low-performing schools as privately managed charters; transferring governance by local school boards to mayoral, state, or private management; increasing class size; and implementing Common Core standards.
7. In a review of private engagement in public education, Bulkley and Burch (2011) indicated that large urban districts are the favorite target areas of for-profit firms selling “accountability

commodities” (p. 239). This points to the need for further research into the ways in which the ascendancy of market-oriented leaders in large districts might also expand business opportunities for companies that profit from high-stakes testing, after-school programs, tutoring services, etc. How do the accountability discourses propelled by venture philanthropists enable greater private profit from public schooling, especially in poor communities?

8. The Broad Foundation supported dissemination of the pro-charter school film *Waiting for Superman*.

9. Another of English’s most wanted is Louis Gerstner Jr., former chairman of IBM, who advocates for elimination of school districts. Gerstner sits on the board for the Broad Center for the Management of School Systems.

10. The president of the Fordham Institute is Chester Finn, also named by English (2010) as one of the “top ten enemies” of public school leadership.

11. An earlier version of this webpage read: “Wanted: The Nation’s Most Talented Executives to *Run the Business* [emphasis added] of Urban Education.”

12. An irony in the discourse of accountability, as Ravitch (2010) has pointed out, is that venture philanthropists demand accountability from educational leaders while the public is not able to hold the venture philanthropists accountable for the consequences of their actions and ideological influence.

13. In a critique of corporate influence in education, Emery and Ohanian (2004) argued that the rhetoric of high standards “hides the fact that minority and poor students are being ghettoized into dead-end, underfinanced, drill-and-kill, low-performing schools” (p. 91).

14. This study covered the years 1995–2002, before the advent of the Broad Superintendents Academy.

15. Taubman (2009) highlighted how the learning sciences have been heavily influenced by military interest in a task-specific, measurable training regime. In this light, the Broad Academy’s efforts to recruit military leaders for school districts can be understood within a larger nexus of influence on educational thinking/practice.

16. Taubman (2009) asked, “When was the last time anyone blamed business schools for the failing economy or corporate scandals? . . . Have there been any recent articles blaming medical schools for high infant mortality rates or levels of obesity in the U.S.” (p. 139)?

17. Eisinger and Hula (2004) found that, in districts led by “gunslinger” superintendents, 44% of students were Black. From a more critical perspective, Saltman (2010) deemed it no accident that former generals are being placed in command of urban schools with large populations of Black and Hispanic youths. Military/corporate discipline is expected to correct the assumed discipline deficiencies of minority youths.

18. Ironically, the ability to advocate for increased public support in state education budgets is not considered an essential leadership skill in this framework. Educational leaders are expected to work within the constraints given to them by budget-tightening legislatures, thus further undermining their scope of action as public actors.

19. The manifesto also pointed out that school principals are underpaid, relative to teachers. At one level, this argument implies that teachers are overpaid, linking to the Broad agenda for dismantling teacher unions. At another level, there is a perverse logic at work: The relatively small differential between the pay offered administrators and that offered teachers in public education is cast as problematic, while the large inequalities found in the private sector are upheld as a model. The argument here valorizes excessive executive compensation as a desirable goal in public education in order to lure leaders from other fields and, presumably, motivate higher performance.

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