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American Education Statecraft and Educational Alternatives L'éducation américaine : gouvernance politique et alternatives pédagogiques El estado Estadounidense y el gobierno de la educación como contexto a las prácticas alternativas

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This work investigates novel primary sources drawn from AERO's online archive of the AERO-GRAMME Newsletter and its successor, The Education Revolution magazine, the network's main publications from 1989-2011. This study examines how, on one side, AERO's members opposed neoliberal policies that were key in increasing federal power over education within the USA such as the case of standardized testing. On the other side, AERO supported some neoliberal policies, like school choice reforms, which weakened the power of local public schools and inadvertently paved the way for the centralization of education at the federal level. At the core of my argument is the contention that AERO was a reaction against the consolidation of the education state, as can be seen by AERO's entanglements within the USA. I analyze extensive archival material and document AERO's connections within the United States of America to understand the paradoxes and intentionalities displayed by AERO.

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American Education Statecraft and Educational Alternatives

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Abstract

This article focuses on the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO), the primary hub of alternative education internationally, and its relationship to policy movements within the USA. Started by Jerry Mintz in 1989, AERO was a nexus for educational alternatives across the world including democratic, Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, free, holistic, and virtual approaches used in public, private, and homeschools. This transnational advocacy network brought together innovative educators from Canada, the USA, Ukraine, Russia, Palestine, Israel, Guatemala, India, England, Australia, Japan, and North American Indigenous communities. AERO was invited to consult for the governments of Japan, Israel, Russia, and Ukraine in educational reforms, as well as NGOs like Dayanand Anglo Vedic in India. Moreover, the organization played a key role in sustaining and organizing the International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC).

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Keywords: alternative education, AERO, neoliberal policies, educational reforms

El estado Estadounidense y el gobierno de la educación como contexto a las prácticas alternativas

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en la *Alternative Education Resource Organization* (AERO), el principal centro de la educación alternativa a nivel internacional, y su relación con las políticas, en particular educacionales, de los Estados Unidos. Fundada por Jerry Mintz en 1989, AERO fue un nexo para las alternativas educativas en todo el mundo, incluyendo los enfoques democráticos, Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, libres, holísticos y virtuales utilizados en escuelas públicas, privadas y en el hogar. Esta red de defensa transnacional reunió a educadores innovadores de Canadá, Estados Unidos, Ucrania, Rusia, Palestina, Israel, Guatemala, India, Inglaterra, Australia, Japón y comunidades indígenas de América del Norte. AERO fue invitada a brindar asesoramiento a los gobiernos de Japón, Israel, Rusia y Ucrania en materia de reformas educativas, así como Organizaciones no Gubernamentales como Dayanand Anglo Vedic en la India. Además, la organización desempeñó un papel clave en el sostenimiento y la organización de la Conferencia Internacional de Educación Democrática (IDEC). Este trabajo investiga nuevas fuentes primarias extraídas del archivo en línea de AERO del Boletín AERO-GRAMME y su sucesora, la revista *The Education Revolution*, las principales publicaciones de la red entre 1989 y 2011.

Este estudio examina cómo, por un lado, los miembros de AERO se opusieron a políticas neoliberales que fueron clave para aumentar el poder federal sobre la educación en los EE. UU., como el caso de las pruebas estandarizadas. Por otro lado, AERO apoyó algunas políticas neoliberales, como la elección de escuela, (*school choice*), que debilitaron el poder de las escuelas públicas locales y, inadvertidamente, allanaron el camino para la centralización de la educación a nivel federal. Argumento aquí que AERO representó una reacción contra la consolidación del estado de la educación, como se puede ver en los enredos de AERO dentro de los EE. UU. Para navegar en las aguas híbridas de las paradojas e intencionalidades de AERO, analizo un amplio material de archivo y documento las conexiones de AERO dentro de los Estados Unidos de América.

Palabras clave: educación alternativa, AERO, políticas neoliberales, reformas educativas

L'éducation américaine : gouvernance politique et alternatives pédagogiques

Résumé

Cet article examine « l'Alternative Education Resource Organization », ou AERO, le principal centre d'éducation alternative à l'échelle internationale, et ses liens avec les mouvements politiques aux États-Unis. Fondé par Jerry Mintz en 1989, l'AERO était un point de convergence d'alternatives pédagogiques mondiales, y compris les approches démocratiques Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, gratuites, holistiques et virtuelles utilisées dans les écoles publiques et privées, ainsi que dans l'enseignement à domicile. Ce réseau transnational de défense des droits a réuni des éducateurs novateurs du Canada, des États-Unis, de l'Ukraine, de la Russie, de la Palestine, d'Israël, du Guatemala, de l'Inde, de l'Angleterre, de l'Australie, du Japon et des communautés autochtones d'Amérique du Nord. Les gouvernements du Japon, d'Israël, de la Russie et de l'Ukraine, ainsi que des ONG tels que Dayanand Anglo Vedic en Inde, ont invité l'AERO à les conseiller en matière de réformes pédagogiques. De plus, l'organisation a joué un rôle clé dans le maintien et l'organisation de la Conférence internationale de l'éducation démocratique (IDEC).

Cette étude examine de nouvelles sources primaires tirées des archives en ligne de l'AERO, du bulletin *AERO-GRAMME* et de son successeur, la revue *The Education Revolution*, les principales publications du réseau de 1989 à 2011. D'une part, cette étude analyse comment les membres d'AERO se sont opposés aux politiques néolibérales qui ont joué un rôle clé dans l'augmentation du pouvoir fédéral sur l'éducation aux États-Unis, par exemple dans le cas des tests standardisés. D'autre part, l'AERO a soutenu certaines politiques néolibérales, par exemple les réformes liées au choix des écoles, qui ont affaibli le pouvoir des écoles publiques locales et, par inadvertance, ont ouvert la voie à la centralisation de l'éducation au niveau fédéral. Mon argument central est que l'AERO fut une réaction contre la consolidation de l'État pédagogique, comme en témoignent les enchevêtrements de l'AERO aux États-Unis. J'analyse de nombreux documents d'archives et je documente les connexions de l'AERO aux États-Unis afin de comprendre les paradoxes et les intentionnalités affichés par l'AERO.

Mots-clés : éducation alternative, AERO, politiques néolibérales, réformes éducatives

Introduction

In 2012, Stephen J. Ball noted the “enormous lack” of research on global education policy.¹ To help close this gap, this history focuses on the Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO), the primary hub of alternative education internationally, and its relationship to policy movements within the USA.² Started by Jerry Mintz in 1989, AERO was a nexus for educational alternatives across the world, including democratic, Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, free, holistic, and virtual approaches used in public, private and homeschools. Through an investigation of novel primary sources drawn from AERO’s online archive of the *AERO-GRAMME Newsletter* and its successor, *The Education Revolution* magazine, its main publications from 1989-2011, this study examines how, on one side, AERO’s members opposed neoliberal policies that were key in increasing federal power over education within the USA such as the case of standardized testing. On the other side, AERO supported some neoliberal policies, like school choice reforms, which weaken the power of local public schools and inadvertently paved the way for the centralization of education at the federal level. In order to navigate the hybrid waters of AERO paradoxes and intentionalities, I analyze extensive archival material and document AERO’s connections within the United States of America. This article starts by defining and then tracing the development of the US education state, allowing for an analysis of AERO’s relationship to it. Afterwards, it will establish how the AERO’s members rejected high stakes standardized tests, which was critical for the expansion federal government’s role in education. At the core of my argument is the contention that AERO was a reaction against the consolidation of the education state, as can be seen by AERO’s entanglements within the USA.

Defining the US Education State

In his work, *Building the Federal School House*, Douglas S. Reed describes the *education state* “as the set of resources and institutions—generally, but not exclusively, composed of local, state, and federal actors—that organizes and conducts the public schooling of children in the United States.”³ Reed relates the term to the idea of the welfare state, but whereas the welfare state focuses on a wide array of issues related to the well-being of its citizens, the education state caters to more exclusively to their educational needs.⁴ Furthermore, he emphasizes the relatively recent nature of the

¹ Stephen Ball, *Global Education Inc.* (Routledge, 2012).

² Mike Muir, “Research Brief Alternative Schools,” Engaged Learning (Education Partners Inc., November 22, 2004), 1–4, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED538252.pdf>.

³ Douglas S. Reed, *Building the Federal Schoolhouse: Localism and the American Education State*, Oxford Studies in Postwar American Political Development (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴ Reed.

reorganization of local and state education systems within a federal framework.⁵ He has dubbed this federal apparatus the *federal schoolhouse*, which he describes as “a federally defined, yet locally operated educational system.”⁶

AERO Within the Historical Context of the US Education State

A Brief History of the US Education State

The slow and gradual processes that led to the development of the US education state can only be understood using a long-term historical approach. Only then can one grasp the significance of education policies from the 1990’s to the early 2010’s, as the significance of AERO’s response to them. These policies granted the federal government unprecedented de facto control over education.

Local Colonial Schooling

Up until the last five decades, the education system in the United States was extremely decentralized. As a colony of the British Empire, the education system of the United States was modeled off the English system of education whereby municipal governments had power over their own school systems.⁷ This system reflected the diversity of predominantly Protestant sects, as well as the absence of larger educational governance structures.⁸ Each region developed unique educational features across this decentralized system of education. In the Northern New English Colonies, Puritans mandated basic education as a means to raise basic literacy, knowledge of religious tenets, and arithmetic skills.⁹ In the Middle Colonies, which were relatively more culturally diverse, religious denominations established urban schools for tuition-paying male students.¹⁰ Lastly, in the rural and predominantly Anglican Southern Colonies, tutors and boarding schools emerged, accommodating the low-population density that made urban schooling too difficult.¹¹ From the Colonial era to the 1860s, education for African slaves was almost non-existent, even less than poor white farmers who

⁵ Reed.

⁶ Reed. xiv.

⁷ Louis L. Warren, “The Governance of Public Education in the United States of America,” *Journal of Power, Politics & Governance* 6, no. 1 (2018): 1, <https://doi.org/10.15640/jppg.v6n1a1>.

⁸ Sylvia L. Mendez, Monica S. Yoo, and John L. Rury, “A Brief History of Public Education in the United States,” in *The Wiley Handbook of School Choice*, ed. Robert A. Fox and Nina K. Buchanan, 1st ed. (Wiley, 2017), 13–14, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119082361.ch1>; Maris A. Vinovskis, “History of Testing in the United States: PK–12 Education,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 683, no. 1 (May 2019): 23–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716219839682>.

⁹ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, “A Brief History of Public Education in the United States,” 14.

¹⁰ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 14.

¹¹ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 14.

themselves had very few educational opportunities.¹² In the North, many African American schools came under the authority of local school boards, often remaining segregated and chronically underfunded.¹³ Even in the early years following the American Revolution, attempts at state-financing for universal elementary school education for boys and girls was rejected on the grounds that it was an over-stepping of the responsibility of state-governments.¹⁴

Dawn of the Common School

Sharing the ideals of Thomas Jefferson's vision of universal tax-funded education, the senator for Massachusetts Horace Mann pushed for the establishment of "common schools."¹⁵ In the late nineteenth century, educational leaders were also inspired by advancements in industry, using industrialization as a model for the developing school system.¹⁶ The creation of these common schools across the nation were intended to foster national unity and prepare children for democratic citizenship.¹⁷ To supply staff for the growing number of these schools, teacher education programs also rose in the last half of the nineteenth century, modeled after the *Écoles Normales* or French professional schools.¹⁸ Although Massachusetts became an educational leader—with elected school boards, taxes levied to support schools, and compulsory attendance laws by 1867—the rest of the country did not install these measures until 1930.¹⁹

The identities of Indigenous communities clashed with the assimilationist currents of the US federal government. This can be seen by The Indian Civilization Act of 1819, which established a system of boarding schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and state-sponsored Christian missionary groups.²⁰ With the goal of assimilating Indigenous communities, the schools were disastrously lacking in teaching standards and rife with abusive behavior towards the children.²¹ Overall, Indigenous education has a very complex relationship with the US education state, especially when one considers the "government-to-government relationship" between Indigenous groups and the US

¹² Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 14.

¹³ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 17.

¹⁴ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 15.

¹⁵ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 15.

¹⁶ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 15; Vinovskis, "History of Testing in the United States," 25–26.

¹⁷ Deeptha Thattai, "A History of Public Education In The United States," n.d., 2.

¹⁸ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, "A Brief History of Public Education in the United States," 16.

¹⁹ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 16.

²⁰ Michael C. Coleman, "The Symbiotic Embrace: American Indians, White Educators, and the School, 1820's to 1920's," *History of Education* 25, no. 1 (1996): 2–4; Robert Kim, "Under the Law: The (Mis)Education of Indigenous Students," *Kappan* 106, no. 4 (2024): 52.

²¹ Coleman, "The Symbiotic Embrace: American Indians, White Educators, and the School, 1820's to 1920's," 9–10.

federal government.²² Although Indigenous communities are inexorably tied to US history, these communities have stood both within the preview of, yet outside, the jurisdiction of the federal government. This is demonstrated by Obama's Executive Order 13592, whereby the President reaffirmed tribal sovereignty, while at the same time stressed the government's commitment to protect the well-being and unique rights of the "Nation's tribes."²³

U.S. Education in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s

In the 1950s, high schools rose to an almost universal status across the nation, which included increased schooling for Black Americans. It was not until after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), where the Supreme Court declared segregation unconstitutional and inherently inequitable, that Southern states started improving financing and integration for African American education.²⁴ This led to a spike in rates of education amongst African Americans. Educational integration in the urban North suffered as a result of the "white flight," whereby White Americans moved into suburbs taking the urban tax-base with them.²⁵ It was this deterioration of urban funding that spurred President Johnson's federal initiative to finance schools via Title I funding in 1965.²⁶

The 1960s witnessed many developments in education that worked to build the education state. To start there was a large rise of the postsecondary enrollment by the baby boomers.²⁷ This tumultuous period witnessed a surge in the federal government's involvement in the education sector. In 1965, the Johnson administration signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).²⁸ This act legislated the distribution of federal funds to public schools serving students in poverty with the hope of tackling economic inequality, with the classroom framed as "the frontlines" in the war against poverty.²⁹ These modest funds were provided to almost every congressional district with minimal guidance or oversight.³⁰ Shortly after, in 1972, the federal government financed the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which would eventually aggregate, analyze, and release data on education at the state level.³¹ The rise of state

²² Kim, "Under the Law: The (Mis)Education of Indigenous Students," 52–53; Brayan M.J. Brayboy et al., "Sovereignty and Education: An Overview of the Unique Nature of Indigenous Education," *Journal of American Indian Education* 54, no. 1 (2015): 4.

²³ Brayboy et al., "Sovereignty and Education: An Overview of the Unique Nature of Indigenous Education," 4–5.

²⁴ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, "A Brief History," 21; Vinovskis, "History of Testing in the United States," 27.

²⁵ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, "A Brief History," 20.

²⁶ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 20.

²⁷ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 19–20.

²⁸ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 20.

²⁹ Vinovskis, "History of Testing in the United States," 29.

³⁰ Vinovskis, 29.

³¹ Vinovskis, 29.

centralized control at the state-level accompanied the growing powers of the federal government, often at the expense of school boards, local administrators, and teachers.³² Another important development at the state-level was the pivot from low-stakes testing to high-stakes testing, resulting in the use of testing to hold educators directly accountable for the scores of their students.³³

The Emergence of Free Schools

This history will now take a moment to discuss the rise of the American alternative education movement in the 1960s, not only because of its broad influence but also because of its deep connection to the educators of the AERO network.

The alternative school movement originated with the free school movement in the late 1960s, which was fostered by A.S. Neill's work *Summerhill*, outlining the democratic principles of his Summerhill School.³⁴ In free schools, students had exceptional freedom in their education: attendance in classes was voluntary; the curriculum was shaped by students' interests; and independent learning was promoted. Teachers served more as guides, and disciplinary matters were handled by joint student-staff committees. School policies were made in all-school meetings where each student had a vote, and students had the power to hire or fire teachers.³⁵ Educators also broadened the idea of academic success to include students' well-being, emphasizing a therapeutic and humanizing approach for a more holistic education. In addition to Neill, the writings of John Holt, which championed independent learning,³⁶ were also highly influential to homeschool educators and free schoolers.

In 1968, Jerry Mintz founded the Shaker Mountain School in Vermont,³⁷ which operated under a democratic model inspired by A.S. Neill's *Summerhill*, and was shaped by the philosophy of Mohawk Elder Thomas R. Porter and the idea of "Iroquois Democracy."³⁸ Many of the prominent members within the AERO network were part of the 1960s education movement, such as: Mary Leue and Chris Mercogliano of Albany Free School; David Gribble of Sands School; Ron Miller, a leader in the holistic education movement; Zoe Redhead, the daughter of A.S. Neill and principal of Summerhill; and Albert Lamb, a middle school student of John Holt, Summerhill graduate, and A.S. Neill scholar. In addition to A.S. Neill, Mintz was inspired by

³² Vinovskis, 29–30.

³³ Vinovskis, 30.

³⁴ Richard Neumann, "Emergence of a Movement," in *Sixties Legacy: A History of the Public Alternative Schools Movement, 1967-2001* (P. Lang, 2003), 74.

³⁵ Neumann, 97–98.

³⁶ Notable examples of John Holt's work include his books *How Children Fail* (1964) and *How Children Learn* (1967), as well as his newsletter *Growing Without Schooling*.

³⁷ Jerry Mintz, "Democratic School Governance," *Education Revolution*, n.d.

³⁸ Ibid Mintz.

intellectuals, educational practitioners, activists, and social critics such as Arthur Morgan, John Holt, Paul Goodman, Ivan Illich (who subscribed to the AERO-Gramme Newsletter in 1992), and Johnathan Kozol.³⁹ AERO was born out of the Long 1960s and embodies an educational current originating from that era.

US Neoliberal Reforms and Increasing Federal Power

A conservative turn followed the liberal 1960s and 70s in the history of US education, especially after the release of *A Nation at Risk*, a report by Secretary of Education Terrence Bell under the Reagan administration. The report rang the alarm that the American education system was in crisis. It framed US education as filled with incompetent teachers failing to uphold rigorous standards, preventing students from developing the competencies needed in the new technology-centered workplace.⁴⁰ The report expressed concern over American students being outperformed by other nations on international tests, claiming US test scores were in a state of historic decline.⁴¹ After President Carter established the Federal Department of Education in 1979,⁴² Reagan had promised to replace it with a system of school choice. But this new “crisis caused Regan to withdraw his initial plans.⁴³ In effect, the report justified the need for federal intervention to raise standards. As opposed to dislodging the state from education, the crisis justified its expansion.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, there was a mass consolidation of school boards by state governments, with the number of school districts dropping from over 117,000 in 1940 to just over 15,000 in 1990.⁴⁴ When Republican George H. W. Bush, Reagan's former vice-president, became president, he organized the National Education Goals Panel (1990), which was tasked with outlining the goals for education at the federal level.⁴⁵ This culminated with the *America 2000* strategy, a long-term national plan for the establishment of national standards through the adoption of outcomes-based education.⁴⁶ After defeating Bush in the 1992 election, Democratic President Clinton continued the work of his predecessor by passing the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994).⁴⁷ This encouraged states to voluntarily develop and

³⁹ Jerry Mintz studied under Arthur Morgan, and he recounted his meetings with Royce S. “Tim” Pitkin, Paul Goodman, Porter Sargent, John Holt, Saul Alinsky, Morris Mitchel, George Dennison, and Edgar Z. Friedenberg, to his readers. Mintz..

⁴⁰ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, “A Brief History of Public Education in the United States,” 21.

⁴¹ Thattai, “A History of Public Education in The United States,” 3.

⁴² Vinovskis, “History of Testing in the United States,” 30.

⁴³ Vinovskis, 30; Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, “A Brief History of Public Education in the United States,” 21.

⁴⁴ Thattai, “A History of Public Education In The United States,” 3.

⁴⁵ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, “A Brief History of Public Education in the United States,” 21.

⁴⁶ Vinovskis, “History of Testing in the United States,” 31.

⁴⁷ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, “A Brief History of Public Education in the United States,” 21.

implement national standards via standards-aligned assessment.⁴⁸ Critically, Clinton managed to tie Title 1 funding to a state's demonstration of "adequate yearly progress" through the passage of the Improving America's Schools Act (1994).⁴⁹ This gave the federal government de facto power to regulate the education goals of state governments.⁵⁰ Furthermore, it worked towards the neoliberalization of state education, granting Title 1 funding to states which allowed students to enroll outside their catchment areas, and permitted charter schools to apply for federal funds.⁵¹

Through No Child Left Behind (2001), President George W. Bush pushed the enforcement of the federal government's educational standards through standardized testing and the utilization of fiscal rewards and punishments. Schools that narrowed the achievement gap were financially rewarded, but schools which failed to meet their expected "annual yearly progress" for over five years were reviewed for closure.⁵² The legislation was framed as a way of combating inequality by making sure that school standards were maintained for students with lower socioeconomic status.⁵³ As a result, No Child Left Behind passed with almost 90% of the votes in the House and Senate, demonstrating its bipartisan support.⁵⁴ This neoliberal reform placed "accountability" as one of its core values, and invited testing companies to produce and evaluate standardized tests.⁵⁵ Parents' perception that schools were failing their children, as indicated by "impartial" standardized tests, stimulated interest in alternative schooling options and school choice.⁵⁶ Endorsing Bush's No Child Left Behind, President Obama carried on much of the same policy approaches into the late 2000s and early 2010s.⁵⁷

The Status Quo of the Early 2010s

Despite the preservation of some local educational autonomy, the US education state had undergone a major federal consolidation by the early 2010s, establishing a new status quo. Constitutionally speaking, public education ultimately remained the responsibility of state-governments, whose state boards of education continued to legislate education laws, control school finances, regulate the hiring of teachers, and set

⁴⁸ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 21–22.

⁴⁹ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 21–22.

⁵⁰ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 22.

⁵¹ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 22.

⁵² Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 23.

⁵³ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 23.

⁵⁴ Vinovskis, "History of Testing in the United States," 29–30.

⁵⁵ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, "A Brief History of Public Education in the United States," 22–23.

⁵⁶ Mendez, Yoo, and Rury, 23.

⁵⁷ Vinovskis, "History of Testing in the United States," 31.

the curriculums.⁵⁸ Moreover, the legacy of localization continued, with many local school districts still relying heavily on local property taxes to finance schooling. As a result, schools often reflected the socio-economic qualities and educational values of their local communities.⁵⁹

Nonetheless, a gradual yet substantial shift had taken place: namely, the financial and institutional consolidation of the education state. For the first time in the history of the US education state, federal authorities had the means to set curriculum, measure whether it was being learned, and enforce the adherence to national learning goals. Discussing this financial transition, Vinovskis explains how in 1959 “4% of K–12 revenues were from the federal government, 39% from the states, and 57% from local sources. By 2013, federal revenues made up 9%, the state share increased to 46%, and local contributions dropped to 46%.”⁶⁰ Institutionally, I have outlined how the adoption of neoliberal policies, such as standardized testing and school choice, were critical to facilitating this transition. In the next section, I will discuss AERO’s entanglements within the US and examine its relationship to these key policy movements, arguing that AERO was a reaction against the centralization of the education state.

AERO’s Entanglements in the US

After establishing AERO’s connections to public educational alternatives within the United States, I will analyze the network’s relationship to policies connected to the adoption of high-stakes testing and school choice. As outlined above, both of these neoliberal policy movements were instrumental in catalyzing the concentration of federal power over the US education system. AERO’s opposition to standardized testing and its general sympathy towards school choice was rooted in the network’s desire for the decentralization of state power over education, which its members believed would allow for a greater diversity of pedagogical approaches and increased learner autonomy.

AERO’s Relationship to Public Educational Alternatives

One of the most striking connections AERO had was its relationship to public school alternatives across the United States, which has never been documented within the scholarly literature. Although it was a transnational institution, the network was most deeply connected to alternatives within the United States. Moreover, AERO was based in New York City and many of its notable educators were part of the alternative education movement that arose in 1960s America, including those within the public sector.

⁵⁸ Thattai, “A History of Public Education In The United States,” 2; L. Warren, “The Governance of Public Education in the United States of America,” 1–3.

⁵⁹ Thattai, “A History of Public Education In The United States,” 2–3.

⁶⁰ Vinovskis, “History of Testing in the United States,” 28.

In addition to being composed of self-identified American alternative educators found within the private sector, AERO had key ties to the International Association of Alternative Schools Associations and Personnel (IAASAP), the successor to the International Consortium for Options in Public Education (ICOPE). ICOPE, formerly the National Consortium for Options in Public Education (NCOPE), was established in the early 1970s at the University of Indiana. The network of alternative educators worked to create a directory of alternative schools and issued a newsletter titled *Changing Schools*.⁶¹ Their first conference was in 1973,⁶² which would later become known as the International Alternative Education Conference (IAEC) with a notable portion of alternative educators from Canada. The organization continued to hold conference into the 2000s, with the organization using its newsletter to communicate with public educational alternatives and coordinate their annual conference.

In the late 1990s, AERO adopted the *Changing Schools* magazine from ICOPE, incorporating *The Education Revolution Magazine* as a special section.⁶³ This allowed AERO to publish articles that went into greater depth on educational issues and expand its readership. *Changing Schools* was in circulation in many state alternative education associations, including the Learning Alternatives Network (LAN).⁶⁴ At the time, LAN represented twenty-five state alternative education associations across the US.⁶⁵ *Changing Schools* was influenced by the Coalition for Essential Schools, which grew out of the Essential Schools movement inspired by TedSizer's book, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*. Sizer's "Nine Common Principles" were central tenets of the *Changing Schools Magazine*, but a "Tenth Principle" was added after the magazine was adopted by AERO: Democratic School Governance.⁶⁶ The magazine defined this new principle as follows:

By democratic school governance we mean the genuine and meaningful involvement of students -- as well as parents, teachers, and principals -- in the day-to-day governing of our high schools. We do not mean the facade of student government that currently exists in most US high schools. As Ted Sizer points out

⁶¹ Richard Neumann, "The Alternative Schools Movement Goes Public," in *Sixties Legacy: A History of the Public Alternative Schools Movement, 1967-2001* (P. Lang, 2003), 118–21.

⁶² Neumann, 118.

⁶³ AERO, "Special Changing Schools Section," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 32 (2001): 28.

⁶⁴ AERO, "Mail and Communications," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 13 (1994): 1,

⁶⁵ Ibid, AERO, 1.

⁶⁶ The original Nine Common Principles for the Coalition of Essential Schools were (1) learning to use one's mind well; (2) less is more: depth over coverage; (3) goals apply to all students; (4) personalization; (5) student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach; (6) demonstration of mastery; (7) a tone of decency and trust; (8) Commitment to the entire school; (9) resources dedicated to teaching and learning. AERO, "International Alternative Education Conference," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 22 (1997): 30.

in Horace's Compromise, few students take that kind of school government seriously.⁶⁷

The adoption of this tenth principle shows AERO's influence on the *Changing Schools* magazine, and a route by which it worked to spread its democratic values to alternatives within the public education system. The Coalition of Essential Schools kept this tenth principle until they ceased operations in 2016, but added the value of "equity" into the tenth principle before doing so.

In 2002, AERO stopped hosting the *Changing Schools* magazine but continued to serve the International Alternative Learning Association (IALA) by setting up and hosting IALA's listserv on the AERO website. As a result, AERO played a key role in IALA's communications and the continuation of the International Alternative Education Conference.⁶⁸

The existence of these connections establishes the relationship between AERO and educational alternatives within the US public sector. Furthermore, these entanglements reflect AERO's commitment to learner autonomy, underscored by its promotion of democratic education within the public system. The network's mission to "[focus] on the interest of the child rather than on an arbitrary curriculum," frequently restated on the second page of *The Education Revolution*, placed it on a collision course with federal efforts to standardize and consolidate the education state.⁶⁹

AERO's Relationship with American Neoliberal Reforms

AERO has a unique relationship with America's neoliberal reforms, positioning itself as vehemently against the standardization of testing and curriculums, yet generally sympathetic to school choice. Both standardized testing and school choice were pillars of neoliberal education reform and played a foundational role in the consolidation of the education state. AERO's response to these policies reveals its relationship to neoliberalism and the centralization of the education state.

AERO and Standardized Testing

Perhaps no other issue united the alternative educators of the AERO network more than their opposition to high stakes standardized testing. Throughout the 1990s, and especially after the passage of No Child Left Behind, members of the network staunchly criticized standardized testing, levying an array of criticisms. AERO provided an extensive list of criticisms of high stakes standardized tests, stating that tests: were an

⁶⁷ Ibid, 30.

⁶⁸ AERO, "IDEC in Japan," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 30 (2000): 11.

⁶⁹ AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 2.

inaccurate measure of a school's performance and quality;⁷⁰ encouraged students to cram, memorize, and then forget information as opposed to learning it for the long term;⁷¹ assessed for knowledge that was disconnected from what learners needed to know outside of school;⁷² assumed the acquisition of knowledge was or should be synchronous amongst students;⁷³ harmed student well-being;⁷⁴ were elitist and promoted the practice of disregarding learners who were struggling;⁷⁵ increased drop-out rates;⁷⁶ incentivized cheating;⁷⁷ demotivated learners and educators;⁷⁸ disrupted self-directed learning;⁷⁹ stunted or failed to foster creativity amongst learners and teachers;⁸⁰ forced teachers to teach to the test;⁸¹ encouraged "monomania" (the focusing in on a particular knowledge set, at the expense of other subjects) and the

⁷⁰ AERO, "IDEC at Summerhill," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 28 (1999): 60; AERO, "Special Changing Schools Section," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 32 (2001): 29; AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 21.

⁷¹ AERO, "The Anti-Testing Movement Broadens," *The Education Revolution Magazine: Spring/Summer 2001*, no. 32 (2001): 3.; Ibid, 29; AERO, "Taught to Remove All Thought," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 33.

⁷² AERO, "IDEC at Summerhill," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 28 (1999): 60; AERO, "Summerhill Court Victory," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 29 (2000): 9; AERO, "Mail and Communications, etc.," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 31.

⁷³ AERO, "IDEC at Summerhill," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 28 (1999): 60; AERO, "Special Changing Schools Section," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 32 (2001): 3; Ibid, 29.

⁷⁴ AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 26.

⁷⁵ AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, (2003): 22; AERO, "The Greats Speak in our 2005 Roundtable Discussion," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 41 (2005): 11.

⁷⁶ AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 21-23.

⁷⁷ AERO, "The Greats Speak in our 2005 Roundtable Discussion," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 41 (2005): 11.

⁷⁸ AERO, "Report on International Alternative School Conference at Summerhill," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 4 (1990): 15 ; AERO, "Summerhill Court Victory," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 29 (2000): 34; AERO, "Special Changing Schools Section," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 32 (2001): 29; AERO, "Mail and Communications, etc.," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 33; AERO, "The Greats Speak in our 2005 Roundtable Discussion," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 41 (2005): 11.

⁷⁹ AERO, "Mail and Communications, etc.," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 33.

⁸⁰ AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 21-23.

⁸¹ AERO, "Stork Family School," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 31 (2001): 60;

AERO, "Special Changing Schools Section," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 32 (2001): 3; Ibid, 29; AERO, "Standardized Testing," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 34 (2002): 5; AERO, "Mail and Communications, etc.," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 30; Ibid, 34; AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 21-22; AERO, "The Greats Speak in our 2005 Roundtable Discussion," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 41 (2005): 11.

narrowing of the curriculum;⁸² assumed that all learners should possess the same extensive body of knowledge;⁸³ took away local autonomy from the hands of schools, teachers, and students;⁸⁴ destroyed or curbed the uniqueness of alternative programs both inside and outside of the public sector;⁸⁵ would lead to increased privatization⁸⁶; and distracted from real reform of educational funding.⁸⁷ The network stressed how a standardized tests failed to identify, let alone measure, the diverse multitude of educational goals held by educators and learners, especially when many of these goals were intrinsically unquantifiable.

The Education Revolution heavily criticized No Child Left Behind, but the magazine also publicized criticisms of state-level standardized tests. For example, the network often criticized the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS),⁸⁸ the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS),⁸⁹ and the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP).⁹⁰ The publication would post excerpts about grassroots movements involved in resisting these exams, such as boycotts and local advocacy groups.⁹¹ The Regents Exams was a local issue for the founder and director of AERO, Jerry Mintz, who was based in New York City. In 2000, he wrote a letter to the editor of the New York Times rebuking Commissioner Mills' decision to deny students the ability

⁸² AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 21-22; Ibid, 21. ; Ibid, 26. ; AERO, "Growing Without Schooling: John Holt's First Ten Issues," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 42 (2005): 5.

⁸³ AERO, "IDEC at Summerhill," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 28 (1999): 59-60; AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 8.

⁸⁴ AERO, "IDEC at Summerhill," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 28 (1999): 20; Ibid, 60; AERO, "Stork Family School," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no.31 (2001): 17; AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 21-23; AERO, "Growing Without Schooling: John Holt's First Ten Issues," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 42 (2005): 5.

⁸⁵ AERO, "After Columbine," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 27 (1999): 19; Ibid, 42; AERO, "Stork Family School," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 31 (2001): 16.

⁸⁶ AERO, "Growing Without Schooling: John Holt's First Ten Issues," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 42 (2005): 5.

⁸⁷ AERO, "Frank Bluestein Given Disney Award," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 20 (1997): 30; AERO, "Summerhill Court Victory," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 29 (2000): 14; AERO, "The Greats Speak in our 2005 Roundtable Discussion," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 41 (1999): 11; AERO, "Growing Without Schooling: John Holt's First Ten Issues," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 42 (2005): 5.

⁸⁸ AERO, "After Columbine," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 27 (1999): 11; AERO, "IDEC at Summerhill," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 28 (1999): 60; AERO, "IDEC in Japan," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 30 (2000): 14; AERO, "Mail and Communications, etc.," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 32-33; AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 22.

⁸⁹ AERO, "Mail and Communications, etc.," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 33-34; AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 21.

⁹⁰ AERO, "Mail and Communications, etc.," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 45.

⁹¹ AERO, "Mail and Communications, etc.," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 32-33; AERO, "Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 21-22.

to opt out of the exam in favour of a portfolio assessment instead.⁹² He posted a draft of his letter to AERO's subscribers:

There are two opposite movements going on now in education. One, in reaction to the ineffectiveness of the current system, has led to a million and a half people nation-wide choosing home education, and has also led to the charter school movement, which has gone from the first charter in 1991 to [a total of 1800 charter schools in 2000]. This movement also includes the new public alternative schools in New York City. The opposite movement, coming from within the bowels of the educational establishment, fostered by those who simply cannot see outside the box, is the "standardization movement." It is from that source that springs the requirement for all students to take the Regents. It comes from these same bureaucrats who can only think that if things are bad that they simply need more homework, more teaching to the test, more Regents, something that never worked, and will never work.⁹³

He went on to draw a parallel between the "Standardization Movement" and the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s, writing, "This 'movement' will be dead in a few years, just as the 80s 'back to basics' idea ran aground, for the same reasons. The only question is how much damage it will do before it runs its course."⁹⁴ Later that year, AERO's *The Education Revolution* magazine covered a protest against the Regents Exams, attended by the students and staff of Albany Free School (even though they were exempted from the exam), Alfie Kohn, and Jerry Mintz.⁹⁵

By the 2010s, Mintz would also speak out against Obama's Common Core State Standards Initiative, which he described as "the state's regime of testing and the imposition of the, possibly unconstitutional, Common Core Curriculum."⁹⁶ Like No Child Left Behind, Mintz spoke very harshly about this reform, writing, "The Common Core is not an educational upgrade. It does not make education more rigorous except in the sense of rigor mortis."⁹⁷

Although AERO's staff was concerned with local and national policies, they did not lose sight of global trends towards standardization in education. AERO worked with educators in England, Japan, Canada, Ukraine, and Russia to resist the growing

⁹² AERO, "Summerhill Court Victory," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 29 (2000): 39-39.

⁹³ Ibid, 38.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 39.

⁹⁵ NOTE: This event was on the front page of *The Education Revolution*.

AERO, "Special Changing Schools Section," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 32 (2001): 4.

⁹⁶ <https://www.educationrevolution.org/store/draconian/>

⁹⁷ <https://www.educationrevolution.org/store/draconian/>

“standards movement,” which this article argues can be understood as the consolidation of the education state.⁹⁸

AERO and School Choice

Members of the AERO network were very sympathetic to school choice reforms as a means of carving a niche for educational alternatives, allowing learners to break free from what the network perceived as the monopolization of education by the state. Pieces within AERO’s *The Education Revolution* echoed the sentiment that the public education system was in a state of crisis, ideas first popularized by *A Nation at Risk*. Increasing the number of educational alternatives was espoused by members of the network as a means of improving the state of education, and as a means to move past this perceived crisis.⁹⁹ In his 1997 editorial published in *Newsweek*, Mintz wrote, “If we want to have a better education system, we have to break up the monolithic monopoly of the public school system and allow families to choose what is best for their children, and not make criminals out of those parents who want to make those choices.”¹⁰⁰ At the first AERO conference, held in 2003, the featured keynote speaker John Taylor Gatto discussed his new book *Weapons of Mass Instruction*, where he rails against the disconnect between state schooling and the lived experiences of its students.¹⁰¹

Stemming from their efforts to foster a greater diversity of educational alternatives and promote increased learner autonomy, members of the network expressed a general sympathy, if not support, for school choice reforms. These included policies promoting charters, vouchers, and homeschool learning centers. Charter schools are schools that are given public funding under the conditions of an agreement (or ‘charter’) between the public system and the school receiving the funds. If the school violates its mandate, or fails to renew its charter, it may be defunded by the public system. One of the fathers of the charter school movement was Joe Nathan of the University of Minnesota’s Center of School Change, an educator who was often featured in *The Education Revolution*.¹⁰² In

⁹⁸ AERO, “Issue 27 – Summer 1999: After Columbine,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 27 (1999): 43; *Ibid*, 48.

⁹⁹ AERO, “Handbook to Appear in Paperback,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 16 (1995): 12; AERO, “Frank Bluestein Given Disney Award,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 20 (1997): 15; AERO, “AERO Seminar for Czech Ministry of Education,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 23 (1998): 3; *Ibid*, 43; AERO, “Democracy Demonstration for a New Charter School,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 24 (1998): 7; IDEC at Summerhill,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 28 (1999): 29.

¹⁰⁰ AERO, “International Alternative Education Conference,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 22 (1997): 17.

¹⁰¹ AERO, “Kid’s Corner” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 39 (2004): 40.

¹⁰² NOTE Ted Kolderie is considered the other intellectual father of the charter school movement. AERO, “Special National Alternative Education Conference Issue,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 6 (1991): 1-2; AERO, “A French-American Alternative Summer Camp,” *The Education Revolution*

an interview with Mintz, Nathan discussed why charters, which he considered a form of public schooling, were superior to other form of school choice, such as vouchers.¹⁰³ Mintz and Nathan knew each other for a long time, having met when Mintz was running his free school in Vermont.¹⁰⁴

Educational vouchers were another form of school choice that interested the AERO network. In a voucher system, the state supplies families with a voucher which can be redeemed at a school of their choice. In this system, the state finances but does not administer the schooling of its citizens. The voucher system was popularized in Milton Friedman's "The Role of Government in Education," and was supported by Ivan Illich and Paul Goodman, two educational thinkers favoured by the AERO network.¹⁰⁵ Amongst the members of the AERO network, the issue of vouchers was quite polarizing. Sparked by the Supreme Court Decision to allow families to use their vouchers to pay for religious education in 2002, *The Education Revolution* compiled the thoughts of notable alternative educators on vouchers in an article titled *The Voucher Issue*. The article describes vouchers as "one of the most controversial issues among alternative education professionals."¹⁰⁶ The opinions of AERO members could be roughly categorized into three camps. In the first camp were those who favored vouchers as a means of destroying the "state monopoly" on schooling, a position voiced by John Taylor Gatto. The second camp, which included Jonathan Kozol and David Bly, opposed vouchers because they would siphon funds away from public education and they would "rip apart the social fabric of the nation." Joe Nathan also rejected vouchers in favor of public charter schools because charters were "more accountable" than vouchers.¹⁰⁷ The third camp was also opposed to vouchers, but on radically different grounds. They believed government money would come with strings attached that would corrupt educational alternatives, an opinion voiced most by the founder of the Alliance for the Separation of School and State Marshal Fritz, and by Chris Mercogliano, the founder of the Albany Free School.¹⁰⁸ AERO's Founder and Executive Director Jerry Mintz's opinion was notably absent from the compilation. Three years later, AERO's editor of *The Education Revolution*, Albert Lamb, wrote a comment in a section of the magazine regarding recent voucher news, writing: "School vouchers are one issue where conservatives are in agreement with many alternative educators, as they could provide a simple way of funding kids in alternative schools. They are also feared as a

Magazine, no. 19 (1996): 19; AERO, "AERO Seminar for Czech Ministry of Education," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 23 (1998): 32-35; AERO, "After Columbine," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 27 (1999): 17-18.

¹⁰³ AERO, "Standardized Testing," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 34 (2002): 48.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 42.

¹⁰⁵ Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (Harrow Books, 1971), 5. ; *Firing Line with William F. Buckley Jr.: Are Public Schools Necessary?*, 2017, 26:00 - 30:00 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65mffxiEd00>.

¹⁰⁶ AERO, "Standardized Testing," *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 34 (2002): 11.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 47-48.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 12.

Trojan horse that could bring in corporate run monoliths in the place of public schools.”¹⁰⁹ The comment captures the general sympathy educators felt towards neoliberal school choice reforms, while also fearing and rejecting the consolidation of corporate power over education.

Small is Beautiful

It would be a myopic mistake to simply categorize AERO as strictly “for” or “against” neoliberalism, and it is more accurate to understand AERO in terms of its opposition to the centralization of the education state. On the one hand, it is true that the organization shared some of the rhetoric expressed by neoliberal reformers. AERO and the neoliberal reformers both agreed that the public system was in a state of crisis; that school choice was desirable; and that the government, teachers’ unions and the “educational establishment” stymied educational innovation.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, educators in the AERO network tended to find themselves at odds with “conservatives,” and described the 1980s as a dark time for the American alternative education movement.¹¹¹

In many ways, AERO’s rhetoric stands in sharp contrast with conservative neoliberals in the 1980s. AERO members have expressed a deep skepticism towards the growing emphasis on education accountability,¹¹² a rejection of the “back-to-basics” and outcomes-based education movements,¹¹³ and a weariness towards rising corporate power and influence over education.¹¹⁴ As mentioned above, many of AERO’s members were children of the 1960s, and were influenced by the educational reformers of that time. Like 1960s reformers, they emphasized a more holistic approach

¹⁰⁹ AERO, “Growing Without Schooling: John Holt’s First Ten Issues,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 42 (2005): 4.

¹¹⁰ AERO, “Handbook of Alternative Education Get Rave Reviews,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 15 (1995): 6-7; AERO, “Summerhill Court Victory,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 29 (2000): 38-39; AERO, “Mail and Communications, etc.,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 40-42.

¹¹¹ AERO, “A French-American Alternative Summer Camp,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 19 (1996): 11; AERO, “Summerhill Court Victory,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 29 (2000): 38-39; AERO, “Mail and Communications, etc.,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 27.

¹¹² AERO, “IDEC at Summerhill,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 28 (1999): 85; AERO, “Special Changing Schools Section,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 32 (2001): 29; AERO, “Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 15.

¹¹³ AERO, “IDEC at Summerhill,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 28 (1999): 58; AERO, “Summerhill Court Victory,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 29 (2000): 39; AERO, “Mail and Communications, etc.,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 27; *Ibid*, 41-42.

¹¹⁴ AERO, “AERO Seminar for Czech Ministry of Education,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 23 (1998): 4; AERO, “After Columbine,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 27 (1999): 11; AERO, “Summerhill Court Victory,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 29 (2000): 21; AERO, “Special Changing Schools Section,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 32 (2001): 3.

to educating children by stressing a more humanistic psychology,¹¹⁵ in addition to prioritizing the rights of the children and the need to help those of lower socio-economic status.¹¹⁶ As one might expect, AERO members also placed a strong emphasis on democratic education.¹¹⁷ They did not disdain hippies; they were hippies.

Neoliberalism was not the primary concern of these educators, but the consolidation of centralized state and corporate power over education. Mintz was highly influenced by anarchistic educators and made a point of attending the annual reunion of graduates from the New York Modern School, and he even interviewed the prominent anarchist educator, Nellie Dick.¹¹⁸ He saw these educators as “the historical forerunners to what we [now] call alternative education.”¹¹⁹ AERO’s staff and members shared the anarchist educators’ emphasis on the need to decentralize education. As Albert Lamb mentioned in the preface of his educational creed:

We can’t hide from those two potential enemies: Big Education and Big Business (we could add a third: Big Government). The thing to do is to hang in there with your kids and not get caught up in all the lies and half-truths. And remember, you don’t have to do everything for your kids, you just have to be there for them as much as they want and need you.¹²⁰

Concluding Discussion

Neoliberalism has been described as the denationalization of the state, yielding governance, the delivery of services, and production to non-state actors.¹²¹ Yet, this narrow description of neoliberalism fails to capture neoliberalism’s role in statecraft;

¹¹⁵ Neumann, “Emergence of a Movement,” 76–77; AERO, “New Almanac of Education Choices,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 17 (1996): 11; AERO, “Democracy Demonstration for a New Charter School,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 24 (1998): 14; AERO, “The Greats Speak in our 2005 Roundtable Discussion,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 41 (2005): 11.

¹¹⁶ AERO, “IDEC at Summerhill,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 28 (1999): 5; *Ibid*, 44; AERO, “Special Changing Schools Section,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 32 (2001): 3; AERO, “Changing Schools,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 33 (2002): 3; AERO, “Standardized Testing,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 34 (2002): 23; AERO, “Mail and Communications, etc.,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 22; AERO, “Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 8; AERO, “Growing Without Schooling: John Holt’s First Ten Issues,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 42 (2005): 5.

¹¹⁷ AERO, “Special Changing Schools Section,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 32 (2001): 42–43; AERO, “Mail and Communications, etc.,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 36 (2002): 18–19; AERO, “A Day in the Life of an AERO conference,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 39 (2004): 25–26.

¹¹⁸ AERO, “Report on International Alternative School Conference at Summerhill,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 4 (1990): 9.

¹¹⁹ Mintz, “Democratic School Governance.”

¹²⁰ AERO, “Say No to High Stakes Testing for Kids,” *The Education Revolution Magazine*, no. 37 (2003): 39.

¹²¹ Ball, *Global Education Inc.*, 2.

especially in relation to what Jessop described as neoliberalism's *metagovernance*: "the organization of the conditions for governance in its broadest sense" whereby the state yields to and then governs "policy networks."¹²² This seemingly paradoxical phenomena of the capitalist privatization in conjunction with the expansion of state-power is articulated by Noam Chomsky's conception of "state-capitalism," whereby governing elites form a network of public-private partnerships. This conception of the status quo challenges the existence of a truly free market. Allegedly formed for the enhancement of "accountability," these private-public partnerships are too often unaccountable to the general public and diminish the authority of local governments.¹²³

School choice reforms, which had previously been conceived as means of limiting state power over education, had paradoxically paved the way for the consolidation of the education state. As Douglas argued, "the realities of educational localism in the United States [meant] that the task of building the education state [required] federal policy initiatives to dislocate and disrupt existing local arrangements, without assuming the responsibilities of actually operating schools."¹²⁴ And that is precisely what the school choice movement did. This is especially true of charter schools, public-private partnerships between school boards and privately administered schools, all of which ironically intended to promote public education.

Perhaps the most foundational reforms for the construction of the federal schoolhouse were those establishing uniform outcomes-based educational standards. These were critical for granting federal authorities the de facto power to set curriculum, measure whether it is being learned, and enforce the adherence to national learning goals. Moreover, these goals continued to undercut decision-making power of educators and local school districts. But did these reforms actually improve the back-to-basics skills they purported to champion? As Douglas notes, not really.¹²⁵ The historical complexities of the education state's formation, and the stories of those who resisted it, is critical to understanding the present state of education, both inside and outside of the United States. Both President-elect Donald Trump and his pick to lead the new "Department of Efficiency," Vivek Ramaswamy, ran on a platform of abolishing the Federal Department of Education.¹²⁶ Trump's pick for Education Secretary, Linda MacMahon stated "I believe in local control. I am an advocate for choice through charter schools" on her campaign website.¹²⁷ If we do not understand the forces that led to the popularity of these positions, we have no hope of maintaining the education state. We must ask what direction we are heading regarding the creation

¹²² Ball, 5,17.

¹²³ David A. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 47.

¹²⁴ Reed, *Building the Federal Schoolhouse*, 4.

¹²⁵ Reed, 1–2.

¹²⁶ Blackburn and Pellish (2024); Faguy (2024).

¹²⁷ Alfonseca, 2024

of an education state, or if it is even favorable to create one? If it is, what form would such an institution take, and what are the reasonable limits of its power?

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