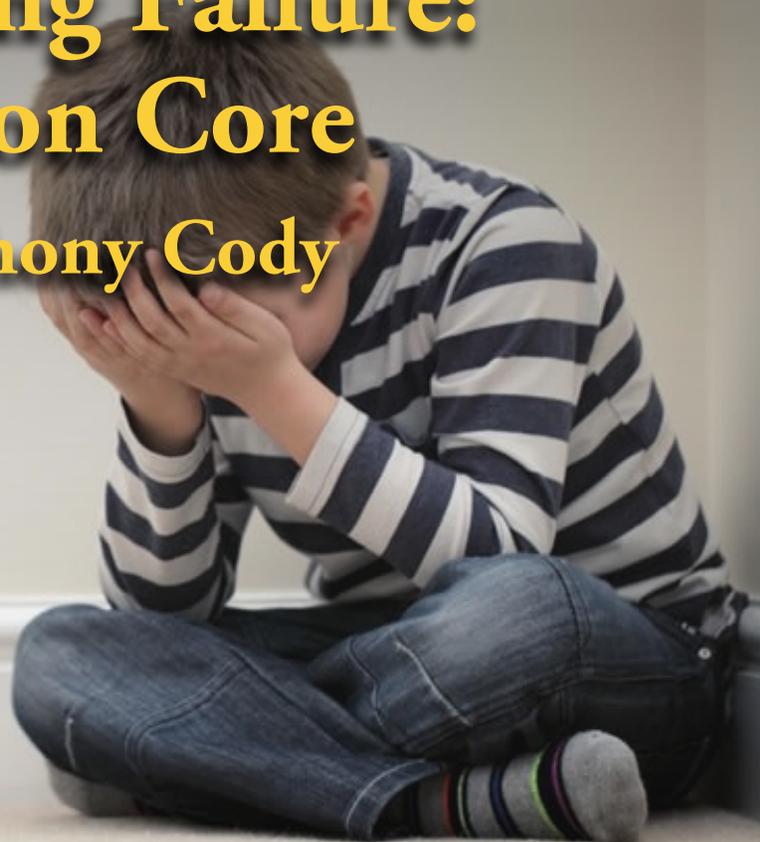




The Solari Report

MAY 14, 2015

**Engineering Failure:
Common Core
with Anthony Cody**





Engineering Failure: Common Core

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C. AUSTIN FITTS: Ladies and gentlemen, it's my privilege and pleasure to welcome to The Solari Report a very excellent educator and author, Anthony Cody. He's the host of www.LivingInDialogue.com, a wonderful website following education that I recommend highly. He's the co-founder of the the *Network for Public Education*. He'll tell us more about that. And he's the author of a book you must read. It's reviewed up on the blog called *The Educator and the Oligarch: A Teacher Challenges the Gates Foundation*.

So, Anthony Cody, thank you for joining us on The Solari Report.

ANTHONY CODY: Thank you for having me.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: If you could walk us through, once upon a time you're a highly successful teacher, remarkable career in education in Oakland, California. You're minding your business. How did you go from that point to writing what is arguably one of the most important books explaining to us why Common Core is not something we want? Take us through the evolution.

ANTHONY CODY: Well, I started my career in 1987 teaching at a middle school in Oakland, and really loved the work there. But one of the things that I noticed was that Oakland is a very high poverty community, and the schools there – even before No Child Left Behind – were really under the gun to raise test scores. This idea that before No Child Left Behind nobody was aware of how the schools were performing is really nonsense. We were hyperaware of performance issues, and there were successive waves of reform.



What I did is in 1997 or 1998 I read a book written by Linda Darling-Hammond called *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools that Work*. In that book she emphasized the importance of the teaching profession, and she talked about National Board Certification as a really important way for teachers to plant a flag regarding our own professional capacity.

I convinced another colleague in Oakland to join me, and we started driving down to Stanford on Saturdays to get some support in a program that was run by Linda Darling-Hammond, and we ended up being the first National Board Certified teachers in Oakland. I think that was in the year 2000 that we got our certification.

Then in 2001 George W. Bush comes in, and we get No Child Left Behind as sort of a bipartisan education accountability thing. That really threw a monkey wrench into a lot of the work that we had underway – my school and the district.

We had been doing a lot of really excellent professional work at my school, and we were in fact leading science work across the school district. We were hosting curriculum sessions, developing hands-on activities to share with other teachers, and really doing some great work. But when No Child Left Behind came along, it really deep-sixed the morale at the school and across the district as well because constantly we were being told that we were failing and that if we didn't improve our test scores we were going to be shut down. In fact, a lot of schools in the district were shut down or turned over or reconfigured or whatever.

So I started writing op-eds. I created a website. I just started doing a lot more activism, and then in around 2007 I was drawn into some national policy work with the Center for Teaching Quality. We were trying to get ahead of what was coming in terms of Pay for Performance and the evaluations based on test scores.

We released a report about performance pay which I don't entirely agree with anymore because it does make room for paying teachers based on test scores. At that time we weren't quite aware of how devastating this



would be.

Then things sort of went from bad to worse with the election of President Obama. In 2009 we got the Obama Administration and Arne Duncan, and we got Race to the Top. I sent an open letter to President Obama in November of 2009, basically explaining why the policies that he was following were really doomed to fail, and from the perspective of a classroom teacher they were really devastating.

That led to a rather unsuccessful dialogue with Duncan himself. We actually ended up having a phone conversation with Duncan – he and a bunch of other teachers. We ended up collecting over 100 letters that we sent to the White House and to Secretary Duncan.

“I sent an open letter to President Obama in November of 2009, basically explaining why the policies that he was following were really doomed to fail, and from the perspective of a classroom teacher they were really devastating.”

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Duncan was the Secretary of Education, correct?

ANTHONY CODY: Yes, and he still is. From that we got a little ticked off and some of us organized a Save Our Schools march in 2011 which brought about 5,000 – 6,000 people to the National Mall in front of the White House to protest the Department of Education’s policies and the Obama Administration’s policies.

The other thing that was happening around that time was really a full-scale assault on the teaching profession. In the fall of 2010 we saw something called *Waiting for Superman* which hit the movie theaters, but it didn’t just hit the movie theaters. It was also the focal point of an NBC News extravaganza called *Education Nation* which took up almost a whole week of showcasing people like Gates and Michelle Rhee and various charter school promoters who were intent on really discrediting public schools, saying that the teaching profession was really not working, that public education was broken, and that radical change was needed.



When I noticed that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was spending millions of dollars promoting *Waiting for Superman*, that they were sponsors of *Education Nation* on NBC, and that Bill Gates himself appeared on Oprah – they had two consecutive shows on Oprah devoted to this – I really started paying attention to the Gates Foundation. What I discovered was that the Gates Foundation was really funding not just this visible propaganda effort but also was funding research, think tanks, advocacy organizations, and a whole range of political and academic activities all focused on advancing a very well-defined agenda that was built around market-driven reform. It was built around the idea that so long as schools were government institutions funded by taxpayers, they lacked competition. Competition was the only way that you could get innovation.

They were promoting charter schools, and soon thereafter they started promoting Common Core and an emphasis on test scores and teacher evaluation and teacher pay.

These were all things that I found deeply disturbing. Even though I had been a very innovative educator, I hadn't needed competition in order to drive me to lead my colleagues in Oakland to innovate. I really knew that there was something flawed in their whole approach to pursuing excellence.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Or excellence is the cover story for achieving what they want.

ANTHONY CODY: Yes. Excellence is supposedly what they're all about, and they have this whole theory of action that places teachers as the most important factor in achieving that excellence, but then the way that excellence is defined is based on student test scores. This is really a flawed way to define excellence.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Anthony, if you could just take a minute – because not everybody understands Common Core and what the curriculum is and how it works and how it's different than what was happening in our schools prior to Common Core – and define it for us.



ANTHONY CODY: Alright. As I mentioned before, even before No Child Left Behind we had standardized tests that gave us information. We also had the National Assessment for Educational Progress that allowed us to compare one state to another. So we've had the capacity to know what students are learning.

When I was in school in the 1960's and 1970's we had standardized tests even. We had the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills that we took every year. But what Common Core does is it creates the same set of testable objectives for every student in a Common Core adopted state, and the idea was to have it in every state in the country. Their goal was to have national standards.

The reason that is important is that it allows you to then create common tests that also are given across multiple states, and then you can truly compare performance from one state to another on those tests. The reason this is so important is I have come to believe that it's actually not so important in terms of individual students or even in comparing schools. I think the main reason that the people who have been promoting it, like Bill Gates, are so interested in it is that it allows for market competition for learning systems – computer-based learning systems – that are outside of the school system.

I think if you think about how the internet and computers have transformed business and commerce over the last two decades, I think people like Bill Gates look at education and they see something that is ripe for that same revolution.

One of the things holding it back is it's difficult to compare. Let's say that I invent the Wizbang Computer Tablet Curriculum System, and I sell it to a school. Well, how do I know that my Wizbang System is better than Rupert Murdoch's Amplify System unless the students are taking the same tests aligned to the same standards?

So the common standards are an essential part of allowing for the development of effective competition between competing learning systems. In the mind of Bill Gates, you don't get technological



innovation without a profit motive, and you don't get competition without comparable outcomes where you can see which system is doing better.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Well, if you look at the economics of this – because the economics are something that I've tried to understand – I think there are a couple of things. One is if you standardize the children in their education and you use the test to help do it as the standard, then you can get an explosion of innovation in the online systems and software that will be immensely profitable for the software industry.

The profit is more than just the software products and the online systems because then you can reengineer the education process to basically dramatically decrease labor costs.

ANTHONY CODY: Yes. That is the other part of the computer revolution. I mean, there are two reasons that the computerization of business and commerce has been beneficial. Obviously the companies like Google or Microsoft that are directly involved in those commercial uses are reaping billions, but also there are huge efficiencies.

Amazon can sell a product and deliver it to your door overnight for much less money than JC Penney can deliver that same pair of pants to your neighborhood store. So there are big efficiencies if you can successfully automate or computerize large parts of the educational process.

For example, Silicon Valley engineers who are moving into education, their first ventures are experimenting with very large class sizes – like Rocketship charter schools have students working part of the day in computer labs where there is maybe one or two credentialed teachers, there are 150 students, and maybe three or four \$15 an hour tech assistants who will help the students make sure that their systems are working. If you can do that for half of the school day, you've just saved about a third of the labor costs that go into running a school.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right. And what that means – because this is where the



bigger profit is – once you can cut out the teachers in a variety of ways, then you can corporatize the school. So you can start to have schools...

ANTHONY CODY: Right. It's more profitable. You can save the taxpayers money, which then makes all the wealthy people who pay very few taxes in the first place, but they can cut the education budgets further.

When you listen to Bill Gates talk about this stuff, he talks about needing to justify everything based on whether or not it produces higher test scores. He'll call them 'student outcomes' or 'student achievements'. He won't call them 'test scores', but inevitably what they are are test scores. That's the objective of every learning system on the market right now – to effectively raise student test scores.

“When you listen to Bill Gates talk about this stuff, he talks about needing to justify everything based on whether or not it produces higher test scores.”

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Think of it this way: There is the software money, then there is the corporate profits from running a privatized system. I'm not so sure that any taxpayer's money is going to be saved here. I'm a skeptic about that, but there is the corporate money.

ANTHONY CODY: That's certainly not the driving imperative.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right, and finally they are going to be able - from these computers and online systems – to build a treasure trove of data that they can use in many different ways. One could argue that the databases and the knowledge that they can get and build are even more valuable than privatizing the schools.

I've done a lot with the county level. You know America breaks down to 3,100 counties and what the cash flows are in places, but the reality is in many counties around America healthcare and education are the biggest economic activities going.

ANTHONY CODY: Yes.



C. AUSTIN FITTS: If you look at the privatization that is happening with Obamacare and then you add in where this is clearly going in terms of economics, you're talking about basically wiping out the last standing economic health within counties.

ANTHONY CODY: And it's not a coincidence that it's not the last realm of public government other than fire protection and police and military.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right, which brings us to the fourth way you can make money on this, and that is one of the biggest pools of capital in this country – the teacher pension funds.

ANTHONY CODY: Yeah.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: And if you throw the entire educational system up into fluid reengineering, then there is always the possibility that you're going to have more influence on how that capital is managed.

ANTHONY CODY: Well, and we're already seeing systems leaders who are seeking to shift the workforce. As we deskill the workforce we shift to a system that doesn't need experienced people.

If you're to demand that every employee be justified and their pay be justified on test scores, a lot of the things that experienced teachers bring to the table are not necessarily reflected in their test scores – at least in their individual test scores. So you get this thinking that says, “Well, if we look at the test score achievement of students plotted against the experience level of teachers, we see that brand new teachers have low test scores – maybe their first and second year. Then after the fourth or fifth year test scores don't really significantly improve that much.”

So then you're actually investing if you think about your pension costs. If somebody doesn't stay past five years, they don't even vest in their pension. So you have zero pension costs if teachers leave within the first five years. So it's not a coincidence.

Here's what Paul Vallas said in 2010, and he was brought in to manage



the New Orleans schools after Katrina. He said, “I don’t want the majority of my teaching staff to work more than ten years. The cost of sustaining those individuals becomes so enormous between retirement and healthcare and things like that. It means that you are increasing class sizes and cutting programs to sustain the cost of a veteran workforce.”

So the vision of the teacher workforce is that of teachers who work for five to ten years at the most, and then you don’t have to pay for healthcare, you don’t have to pay for pensions, and you can put your available resources into technology or other things – management organization fees or administrative salaries or whatever.

You have charter management organizations where the executives are earning \$500,000 and have far fewer students under their supervision than superintendents who earn a third or a half of that amount.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Anthony, if you look at the design... I’m interrupting you, and I don’t want to skip ahead.

You’ve explained Common Core. Let’s keep going. What happened next?

ANTHONY CODY: Well, a lot of what I write about in the book is I attempted to critique Bill Gates’ approach to education because I started seeing the pivotal role that his money was playing and that his ideas were playing because of his money. So, for example, in 2012 there was a big scandal in New York because the *New York Post* decided that it was going to release all the teacher test scores, and it was going to decide based on that who the worst teacher in New York was.

They declared that this particular individual named Pascale Mauclair was the worst teacher in New York. It turned out that she was teaching mostly immigrant kids who were English learners, and that was why her test scores were so poor, but the *New York Post* didn’t really care about that. They sent reporters to her door. They sent reporters to her parents’ house, “How does it feel that your daughter is the worst teacher in New York?”



It was just ridiculous. Well, Bill Gates, bless his heart, wrote an op-ed saying, “We don’t want to humiliate teachers on an individual basis. This isn’t the way to fix things.”

So I wrote a response to that where I said that teachers face good cops and bad cops in this whole push for teacher evaluations, and that essentially Gates was functioning as a good cop in the sense that the *New York Post* could beat up on the teachers and Bill Gates would come to the rescue and say, “Hey, don’t hit them so hard!”

The fact of the matter was that these value-added systems were the direct result of advocacy paid for by the Gates Foundation and advocated by the Gates Foundation. So it was a little bit rich for him to come along and say, “Oh, don’t name and shame them,” when, in fact, the reason the data was there to begin with was because he and his foundation had pushed for this approach to evaluating teachers.

As a result of that particular post, I was contacted by someone from the Gates Foundation who wanted a dialogue with me. I don’t know what their purpose was – whether it was to convince me that they were actually benign or whether they were truly interested in my perspective – but what happened was I started out going back and forth with this individual, sharing with him the research on value-added – which was quite extensive at that point.

Eventually I suggested that if they were serious about a dialogue that I would come up to Seattle and speak with them directly. In the summer of 2012 I flew up to Seattle to their headquarters and had meetings most of the day with various representatives of their education team. They were very anxious to show me that they had real former teachers working for them and that they were sincere, and I was equally committed to trying to show them where they were off track.

Following up from that, we ended exchanging perspectives through our blogs. We went back and forth. They let me select the topics, and I developed posts that really were an attempt to document what was wrong with their policies in terms of how should we really be developing



the teaching profession, how should we evaluate teachers, how should we evaluate data from student performance in that context, and what is the role of markets in education reform and the profit motive? All these big questions, including what is the role of poverty in education reform? Can we just ignore poverty and get schools to improve no matter what?

That took over a month to go back and forth that way. At the end of that month, they kind of concluded, unfortunately, that in their view because I was so fixated on the role of poverty I must be of the belief that students who lived in poverty couldn't learn. That was sort-of their takeaway. They accused me of having low expectations for students, which should be very familiar to teachers who have suffered from this indictment since No Child Left Behind. That was the central theory of No Child Left Behind – that we need to raise expectations and that will raise performance.

“They accused me of having low expectations for students, which should be very familiar to teachers who have suffered from this indictment since No Child Left Behind.”

So we didn't end up achieving any sort of meeting of the minds as a result of this dialogue. It kind of more or less ended there in terms of my interactions with them. I did succeed in bringing one of them down to Oakland to visit a school with me where a really excellent teacher inquiry had been taking place for the last six years, and they've had tremendous results.

He visited and witnessed it, but that was the end of that. It apparently didn't fit with their model for how we improve schools, so they really weren't very interested in it.

I've continued to follow the Gates Foundation, continued to write about them, and I pulled a lot of this work together in my book, *The Educator and the Oligarch: A Teacher Challenges the Gates Foundation*, which really tells the story of my efforts to engage with the Gates Foundation and my critique of their approach to education reform.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I think that the beauty of your book and one of the reasons



why it's so powerful is I was impressed with the sincerity and willingness to work hard in your dialogue with them. It feels to me like you're highly competent at what you do, and you've really tried to sincerely engage with them about: How could we be excellent - not just the way you do it or the way they do it, but we share a goal of excellence.

My prejudice after trying to understand this for about a year or two is that I think the goal is to centralize control and ownership of education in a model where you don't feel that for economic reasons you only need a very small percentage of the kids as labor. It's really being engineered to run for a society at your convenience and how you want to take it. They couldn't care less about the education.

I mean, the children are really a natural resource to be mined in this vision, and it's the equivalent of going into a country and getting the oil and gas or the diamonds or the gold or whatever else. You're simply mining the natural resources to extract what you need and want. It's a very clear-headed vision, but your goal and their goal are very different.

ANTHONY CODY: Yes. Well, the thing that is really tricky about this whole dialogue and this whole issue is that the architects and the promoters of education reform, their whole emphasis and their rhetoric is all about success for all. No Child Left Behind. It really takes the progressive rhetoric. The Gates Foundation's slogan is 'All Lives have Equal Value', but at the same time, they insist that the purpose – if you read all of the Common Core promotion – it's all very driven by economic need.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right.

ANTHONY CODY: "The economy demands the workforce of the future." It's all about workforce preparedness for the future needs of corporations.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I'll tell you, Anthony, the thing that first confused me about Common Core – interestingly enough, one of my first introductions to it was talking to teachers and parents and kids who were dealing with it. One of the things that struck me was the extraordinary percentage of their time that was being wasted, that was keeping them



from doing the learning they needed to be relevant in the culture as it will be, whether it's culture economically.

In the meantime, I was looking at kids in the emerging market and I was thinking, "Wait a minute. If I'm in Outer Mongolia and I have internet access, I can dial in and get the best curriculum in the world, and I can teach my kids." Kids and people in many other areas of the world are going so much faster because they're not loaded down with all sorts of requirements and stuff that really wastes their time.

What I realized is if you look at the time handicap that is being loaded down on these kids, they're never going to make it. They're going to get slaughtered in the global competition. I thought, "Why in the world would we engineer a system like this?"

ANTHONY CODY: The idea that there's a global competition for education is really vastly overstated. I actually think the kids in Mongolia are probably screwed. India has more people getting engineering degrees than anywhere in the world, and China does as well, but they're not necessarily getting any real economic advantage. You aren't seeing engineering firms move to India, although they will outsource a lot of low-paid work there.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right.

ANTHONY CODY: So I think the economic benefit to the students is really overstated. The other fundamental thing that really caused me to start to connect some of the dots with economic trends is when I read some economic forecasts that showed that the economy doesn't need very many workers going forward.

When I read this report from Oxford University last year and they looked at trends in the economy, they looked at things like the driverless car. People are starting to realize that there's a real advantage. You look at things like 3D printing. I don't think people are aware of how those two things are going to change the way that our economy operates.



There are two million people in this nation of the United States who make their living driving vehicles. If you perfect the driverless car, maybe a quarter of those people will work maintaining driverless cars because I don't know what it will take to maintain them, but nothing like the two million people who are currently employed driving those cars and trucks and buses and so on.

If we perfect 3D printers, all sorts of parts that currently are being manufactured in small plants across the country, you'll just be able to pay a little copyright fee for that part that you need, and your home or neighborhood 3D printer will give you exactly what you need.

These researchers at Oxford predicted – based on these trends, these innovations – that in the next 20 years we will need approximately 45% fewer workers in the United States. So we only have about 140 million full-time workers in this country. If you chop that by 40-50%, you're down to 75-80 million people working out of more than 300 million.

So how do you balance that with this rhetoric that we're going to prepare all of our students for successful careers? It just doesn't make sense. But then when you see that actually the percentage of students who are being allowed to succeed on the new Common Core tests is only about 30%. Those tests are designed. They set the cut score. They know exactly what proportion of students will succeed and will fail. They know. They are intentionally designing tests that will yield a failure rate of approximately 70%.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right.

ANTHONY CODY: If you can wrap your mind around those two pieces of information, there's an obvious connection there. I think what it's all about is the economy of the future needs fewer people employed, and we need to somehow convince the people who are unemployed or who are going to be unemployed that they were unworthy of careers due to their own deficiencies.

Our education system becomes one that exists – and to some extent it



has always been this – but it becomes one that even more drastically rations opportunity and ranks and sorts individuals in order to justify hierarchies and the caste system.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right, but look who gets called out of that 30%. They're the ones who're needing employees. You've basically done everything you can to kill off all the entrepreneurs.

ANTHONY CODY: Well, you know, our economy is very highly monopolized. You don't get competition for labor. You don't get competition in the marketplace except between the very largest corporations.

“You don't get competition in the marketplace except between the very largest corporations.”

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right. So it's a very dark picture – what they're doing. One of the questions I wanted to bring up – and I don't know much about it; I've just been reading it in the news – I've been watching the prosecution of teachers in Atlanta who were accused of failing to administer the test properly and are accused of cheating in a variety of ways. We've had a series of trials, but twelve have just been convicted and are apparently going to prison.

There's an old saying that if you wanted the monkeys to behave, kill a chicken in front of them.

ANTHONY CODY: Sure.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: It looks to me like it's sending a message to teachers: If you're not unbelievably obedient, we will put you in prison.

ANTHONY CODY: Yes, and meanwhile Michelle Rhee who presided over cheating at the highest levels at the systemic level walked away and is still raking in big money as a reformer of some sort.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: To the extent that I've talked to teachers, parents, and students, the people who are the most adamantly opposed to this are the kids.



I've seen kids go from loving school to simply despising it, and they're so angry because they know that whatever is happening is anti-them. They are being forced with a great deal of their time to do things which are horrible for them, and they know that the adults know what they're doing.

They feel and see the intention behind it. So why has the implementation succeeded so far?

ANTHONY CODY: Well, I would have to trace it back to where we are in history in terms of the lack of a coherent social movement across the country, the lack of any very well-organized progressive movement. I don't know if you've listened to Chris Hedges much, but he wrote a book called *The Death of the Liberal Class*. What he points out is that in the absence of a major social movement that really threatens the ruling class, the ruling class operates as if it can do whatever it wants and arranges things for its maximum convenience and profit.

That's what we've seen. When the banking crisis happened and they were successful in hijacking and destroying the economy and raking in billions and they paid no price for that, they are pretty much unleashed. They're going to do what they want for their convenience.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Here's what's interesting, and this is one of the reasons it was so important to me to talk with you and to get you to get everybody on The Solari Report network listening to you and reading your book. When you look at when they failed to get their way, there are about four or five examples of where they've hit a wall and failed. All of it came down to the health and protection of people's children.

It's when people see their kids are at stake that they will walk through fire. What I have to tell you is I absolutely believe that basically what you're saying is that large corporations and the NSA and Silicon Valley can have intimate access to everybody's children with no guardianship or protection of teachers and parents.

ANTHONY CODY: We're in a historic process and that has been completely



decided. I think there is a growing opt-out movement. There's a growing consciousness around this. I wouldn't quite lower the flag.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Oh, no. I'm not lowering the flag, but I'm a great believer that you have to pick your shots. This is one where I think we can win. I think the people can win. You know, I live in the Bible Belt in Tennessee, but I spend a lot of time out in California. I think whatever place in the political spectrum you are, this one is over the top and nobody's kids have a chance if this goes down.

ANTHONY CODY: The thing to remember is that these things may succeed in imposing this the Common Core tests this year, but students spontaneously develop consciousness around this because they're intelligent. The students in New Mexico, the union is not terribly strong there, but the students figured out that the PARCC tests were going to totally screw them over, and they walked out by the thousands.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: That's fantastic! I've been reading about the Seattle strikes, but I haven't heard anything about this. What happened in New Mexico?

ANTHONY CODY: The students just walked out.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Fantastic!

ANTHONY CODY: It's our job to really provide some coherent explanations so that when people start waking up they have some resources to understand what's going on.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I agree. Here's step one. I think that before this can boomerang into something effective, people simply need to understand we need consciousness raising in education. That's why I want everybody to buy your book and read your book and pass your book around.

Why don't you just walk us through. I'm listening to this. I'm listening to you right now. I'm a citizen, I'm a parent, I'm a grandparent. Maybe I'm not a parent but I'm an uncle or an aunt. What can I do? I listen to



this, and I hang up the phone. What is the list of actions I should take?

ANTHONY CODY: Well, the actions that you can take really depend on where you're positioned. I think teachers have a particularly important role to play. I wrote a piece on my blog called *Will the Teaching Class Take the Lead* that sort of suggests that teachers have this pivotal role in educating not only their students but also educating the broader society as to what is going on because I think teachers are particularly aware of the effects these reforms are having on their children.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right, and I just have to interrupt you and say one thing that has certainly been true in my experiences. It's very hard to buy teachers with money. They're hard to buy.

ANTHONY CODY: Yes. Teachers are facing a lot of suppression and a lot of fear and a lot of overwork that prevents them from speaking out, but where they have spoken out, I think it's had a really profound effect.

This whole 'Teachers of Conscience' movement where they have publicly issued statements of conscience that they will not administer the high stakes test, and there are teachers in the state of Washington who have really had a big effect. There are teachers in New York who are doing this as well.

If you are a parent or a student, you can have your student opt out from the high stakes test. There is an organization called United Opt Out that shares information about this.

If you're a citizen and you're not directly connected to the schools, you can start right now – and now is a very good time – to let your senators and your congress person know that you oppose annual testing and high stakes testing.

The ESEA, the law that provides the funding for No Child Left Behind which is really the enforcement mechanism for high stakes testing at the state level, that law is being rewritten right now in Congress. It's possible that we will move away from some of the federal mandates for high



stakes testing.

The Obama administration is pushing really hard for continuation of that, but ironically republicans are pushing against it. So we have some unlikely allies in this. It's not like they're going to deliver to us the progressive vision of education that we would pursue, but certainly moving away from annual testing would be a great step forward because it would prevent things like value-added from being used to rank and sort teachers.

There is an organization called Fair Test that has a lot of good information about all of this, and there is an organization that I work very closely with called the Network for Public Education, and we've been organizing people to send letters to Congress. Our website is www.NetworkForPublicEducation.org.

We're also hosting a conference at the end of April – April 25th and 26th – in Chicago. If you're really motivated to find out what's going on, that will be a really extraordinary place. In fact, there are people from Tennessee coming up, talking about what they're doing and organizing. Of course, in Chicago itself there has been a lot of organizing done with the teacher's union as well as parents and community leaders.

We'll have activists from coast to coast who will be coming together to kind of strategize and learn from one another, and it's a big boost for our connections. Connections are really valuable when you start doing this work and our ability to learn from one another and find out what are the tactics being used in different communities – tactics against us and tactics we are using which are successful.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I think the hardest thing for coming up with a coherent response to all of this is it's hard to fathom that the agenda of people like Gates is as lacking in empathy as it is.

“The Obama administration is pushing really hard for continuation of that, but ironically republicans are pushing against it.”



ANTHONY CODY: Well, yes. The problem is if you go to the Gates Foundation, their website is dripping with empathy. It's dripping with goodwill towards all men, but the bottom line is they believe that in order for philanthropy to be successful, it has to be profitable. Really, ironically, the Gates Foundation invests millions of dollars in Monsanto, in private prisons. They believe in GMOs, and a lot of their philanthropy in Africa is connected to requirements that governments allow GMOs to be used in their countries.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: To me, the empathy is simply marketing. In other words, I used to work in Washington and Wall Street. What you watch is when you're trying to centralize something, what you do is you take the language that people want to hear and you basically say what they want to hear, and then you do the opposite. It's simply a marketing tactic.

ANTHONY CODY: Through my dialogue with them, I think that they sincerely believe that in order for healthcare to be widely available in Africa, it has to be made profitable. I think that's their belief. I don't think they have a lot of evidence to support that. It's the same with education. I think they sincerely believe that students will benefit if technology is leveraged to "personalize" their education.

I don't want to get into an argument with them that the foundation to which accuses them of being greedy bastards who are trying to make money because I have no way to prove that.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right.

ANTHONY CODY: I can say that that's where their policies lead, but they will turn that around and say, "No. We simply believe that in order for these good projects to be sustainable they have to be profitable. If they're not profitable, then they constantly require more money from government, and that is very unsustainable."

So from their point of view, they have a rationale to be profitable.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Except for this. If you look at the fundamental economics



of the ‘making it more sustainable,’ you’re still going to have a lot of students. Those students are either going to pay a tuition or property taxes are going to pay.

ANTHONY CODY: True. It’s kind of strange, but I find myself making their arguments for them. What they would argue is that technology has a huge benefit to students that has yet to be seen, and the only way to get that engine roaring is to get the whole feedback mechanism working that ties profits to that.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right, but Anthony, the power of technology is that you can put tools in the hands of individuals that make them much more effective, and technology in a market economy would decentralize. What would happen is you would allow people to be complex as they are, and you make it individual and let the software and all of that do the complexity, and the economics – in fact – would allow millions of entrepreneurs to make millions of different kinds of software. You wouldn’t standardize it whatsoever; you would do the opposite.

In other words, standardizing the people doesn’t serve the profits; it serves central control of the profits, which is less profits than if you let it be decentralized.

So their argument – and I’m just talking as an investment banker and an investment advisor – is not true. It’s just not economically sound.

ANTHONY CODY: Here’s the full-fledged argument from Gates. He has several times used the analogy of electric sockets. What he says is that we have a myriad of electrically powered appliances that plug into the same standardized socket. By the same token, if our classrooms are standardized, we will get a myriad of software and computer developers and device developers – technological innovators – who will likewise produce a myriad of products that will plug into those standardized classrooms.

So that’s his argument.



C. AUSTIN FITTS: There are two problems with it. One is that, again, if you want to centralize the equity value that can be created, you want the level of standardization he is promoting. That's number one.

ANTHONY CODY: Right.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Number two, humans – living creatures, whether it's plants or people – are very different than electrical, mechanically-engineered systems. So whereas standardization is economically efficient for something like an electrical-mechanical system, it's highly inefficient for living systems.

ANTHONY CODY: You're right, and this is the fundamental flaw. What's interesting is there was a report that was carried of an interview with Bill Gates in Los Alamos about a year ago. What he said in this interview was that he was getting frustrated with education.

It was about the time he said, "We won't know for ten years whether our education stuff works." In this particular interview, he was asked about their work in education. In particular, he was asked what was happening with education technology.

He said, "Well, it isn't working as well as we had hoped. What we're learning is that technology works really well with highly motivated students." He said, "One thing we have a lot of in the United States is unmotivated students."

So that was really telling on a whole lot of levels because first of all, it sort-of gave lie to this idea that they are successfully personalizing education for students. If you were truly personalizing, then you would think they would be highly motivated because they're getting lessons delivered just to them. That's one thing.

It also suggested that Mr. Accountability has sort-of a double standard when it comes to the accountability that he's willing to impose on his own innovations compared to the rest of the education field.



C. AUSTIN FITTS: I will tell you, because I was a government regulator, if you said to me, “Catherine, you are the dictator of the world. Your goal is to reengineer US education so it will create the most stock market value for the S&P, whether it’s companies that run charter schools or build the school facilities or whatever,” I would build something that would obviously take as much advantage of technology as possible, but would end up with a highly decentralized thing where the software industries are competing to totally optimize in something that would be very market-based and corporations would be very much in the thick of things. But, you would have very strong parent-teacher local influence in terms of control.

ANTHONY CODY: Yes. Here’s the critical thing. In your model you would, I assume, make the local teachers the purchasers of the competing solutions.

“In your model you would, I assume, make the local teachers the purchasers of the competing solutions.”

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Absolutely!

ANTHONY CODY: Well, that’s not what he wants.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right.

ANTHONY CODY: What he wants is he wants – because he doesn’t fundamentally trust teachers to make those decisions – we have to have tests to tell us how students are learning to be able to compare and have outputs that are comparable to a bottom line in a retail setting.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Here’s one of the things that I loved when I looked at your history as a teacher and I think is the key to a design of an excellent system. You clearly invested a lot of time and effort into best practices. In other words, if you take investment in the investment world and you initiate a process where all the professionals are required to look at, learn, and study best practices – what’s working, where is it working, and why is it working – and are subject to taking some time to learn that input and look at themselves in that light, but you leave it to them to decide what they’re going to learn from this, in fact a living system is intelligent.



By and large people veer towards success because that's what they want for a variety of reasons.

I don't think you need to engineer that in; I think through a best practices process you can get to where you want to go.

ANTHONY CODY: You get back to human motivation and Daniel Pink's work where he studied all the research on motivation. His summary was that for complex tasks people are motivated by three things: autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right!

ANTHONY CODY: For teachers that couldn't be more true. It's one of the most purpose-driven professions. People enter teaching because they want to make a difference. Once they've entered, they want to get better, they want mastery of their own profession, and they want autonomy. They don't want to be micromanaged.

If you want to destroy motivation, then you remove autonomy, you insist that people are incompetent and incapable of achieving mastery, and you pervert their purpose by making their institution all about test scores instead of about the well-being of their students.

You're creating demotivation of both students and teachers.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Right. So what you're doing is creating mass incoherence on the theory, and I will tell you whatever stock market value you're going to get out of the thing is going to depend totally on taxpayers putting up continual amounts of money. That is going to get very expensive because with those kinds of productivity, you're going to destroy productivity. As that productivity gets destroyed, it's going to get harder and harder for the taxpayers to pony up the money.

You're talking about a system that's like all the other systems we've watched. You're going to centralize wealth, but you're going to shrink the total pie.



ANTHONY CODY: Yes.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I don't buy any of Gates' rhetoric. I don't know the people at the Gates Foundation so I'm ignorant of that, but the thought that you're going to get a profitable system out of this is incorrect.

ANTHONY CODY: The only way you can believe it is I think it's akin to a religious belief. To be honest, we have belief that is somewhat faith-based as well – that when humans cooperate they can produce much more.

I think we have a lot more evidence to support that belief, especially in an educational setting, but it's really difficult to argue against faith-based beliefs. As a science teacher I learned that if you're coming up against someone's beliefs and it's faith-based, you can argue until you're blue in the face. And this is part of the extended debate that we've had over all sorts of things, including things where there is abundant evidence like climate change. People who have an ideological and religious perspective are incapable of absorbing information that doesn't conform to their belief system.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Well that one gets more complicated because you might find me on the other side of that, but it's not based on that; there's competing evidence. Anyway, it's another conversation.

ANTHONY CODY: Alright. Well, we only have an hour here.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I know. I've taken us way over time. You've been very generous with your time. Again, give us your website again.

ANTHONY CODY: Sure. My blog is www.LivingInDialogue.Com. The book is *The Educator and the Oligarch*. It's available by order at independent booksellers or online in various formats – electronic and paper. The Network for Public Education is probably the largest grassroots network across the country that's bringing people together physically. We're gathering in Chicago April 25th and 26th. The conference registration is affordable, and there are great speakers. Yong Zhao is going to be



speaking, and Diane Ravitch will be interviewing Lily Eskelsen Garcia who is the new President of the National Education Association, and also Randi Weingarten, who is the long-time President of the AFT. So that's going to be an interesting conversation. Karen Lewis will be speaking who is the President of the Chicago Teachers Union. So it's going to be an exciting chance to see them.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: I hope you have a great conference. I just want you to know if there is anything I can ever do to support you in doing what you're doing, I think there is nothing more important in this country than what you're up to. I wish you Godspeed.

ANTHONY CODY: Thank you for having me.

C. AUSTIN FITTS: Have a wonderful day, Anthony.

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