

# Chapter 8

## You Gotta Fight for Your Rights: Neoliberalism, Free Speech, and Academic Viewpoint Diversity

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter uses an example of a summer program for gifted students run by the Department of Public Instruction in NC called Governor's School to discuss the recent attacks on education through anti-gay laws, attacks on "wokeness" and "woke education," as well as race and gender as concepts in curriculum and the classroom across the country. Using the author's personal experience as an instructor at the NC Governor's School, the author addresses the attacks on education through a neoliberalist lens, invoking theorist Michel Foucault, surveillance, transparency, and power.*

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*“You gotta fight for your rights: Neoliberalism, free speech, and viewpoint diversity.”*

## **INTRODUCTION**

“We may be witnessing the end of public education in the United States. Not in the sense that public funding of schools will cease, although funding is likely to decrease. Rather, we will see the end of public education in two ways: first, more public funding will go toward privately managed charter schools and less toward publicly funded governed schools. Second, education will be less public because students, teachers, school and district communities, and elected school boards will have less say over education policy. Instead, policy will be made by unelected and unaccountable individuals, corporations, and organizations...” (Hursh, 2016, p.1). Such is the current state of education, that has now been transformed into a market competition model, and “teachers have decreasing input on assessment and curriculum, as those tasks are handed over to corporations” (Hursh, 2016, p.2). Schooling has now been drastically reformed to a sole focus on test scores and fundamentally altered not only curriculum, testing standards, and how we structure education but the very soul of teaching and learning. As education is actively shifted into market capitalism, the Neoliberalism of education has been fully realized. Neoliberalism is “wedded to the belief that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions” and “wages an incessant attack on democracy, public goods, and non-commodified values. Under neoliberalism, everything either is for sale or is plundered for profit” (Giroux, 2005, p. 2). If schools are, at least historically, a place to learn the social and cultural behaviors and values of society, then what are we now teaching students in the current climate of book banning, Moms for Liberty, and the censorship of U.S. history regarding the BIPOC experience? I have experienced this shift first-hand in the summer of 2022 at Governor’s School West in North Carolina when curriculum was censored after a former employee filed a lawsuit claiming that his First Amendment rights were violated in the name of viewpoint diversity. In this chapter, I will discuss what Neoliberalism is, who it impacts, how it infiltrated my experience at North Carolina Governor’s School, when we need to address it, and how we can potentially do so through a politics of withdrawal and creation of counterspaces.

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