

EDUCATIONAL VALUE IS NOT PRIVATE! DEFENDING THE CONCEPT OF
PUBLIC EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

The privatization of K-12 education in Canada is not new. The public and private sectors feel like natural elements of the Canadian education system because they have existed side by side since confederation. However, this thesis challenges that tradition and argues that private education undermines collective responsibility for education as a shared, public good by catering to private interests and isolating students from the public realm. Not only does private education reinforce the likelihood of socio-economic stratification, but the concept of a “public good” is increasingly destabilized as social services like education are privatized. Why, then, does the privatization of K-12 education continue to be an insignificant political issue in Canada?

This question is particularly pertinent at a time when neoliberalism is in full swing in the United States, and all the time more apparent in Canada. Neoliberalism’s emphasis on the precedence of economic ideals over concerns for social welfare and democratic participation has transformed the way that we understand “value”. Drawing on a broad range of scholars including Charles Taylor, Richard Pildes, Janice Gross Stein, Henry Giroux, Francois-Lyotard and Michel Foucault, this thesis argues that the values involved in the very concept of private education reinforce, and are reinforced by, neoliberal views about the place of the individual within society, and that these values are detrimental to the concern for education as shared, public good.

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Chapter One

1. 0. Introduction

Marketization, privatization and school choice have been dominant social justice issues in the scholarship of educational theorists and social scientists in the United States, Australia and the UK for several years. In Canada, by contrast, although increased privatization continues to be a popular form of Canadian education restructuring (Shaker, 1999), the negative effects of privatization in the K-12 education system do not appear to be a heightened socio-political concern, and Canadian scholars have paid far less attention than their American, Australian and British colleagues to the issue of private education as a threat to the social welfare system in Canada.

Private schools have a long history in Canada (Barman, 2001), and while some are known for their contributions to education (Johnson, 1968), here, I would like to consider their theoretical effects on social welfare and democratic equality. In this sense, it is important to distinguish between education and schooling. Whereas education might be more widely understood as any process of learning and discovery, schooling is more directly tied to institutional practices that seek to train students in a particular discipline or according to particular moral, social, or pedagogical principles (Schostak, 1999). Both explanations inform the following discussion, but the weight of my argument falls more heavily on the concept of schooling that I have described. However, these terms are used interchangeably in the following discussion because commentaries on schooling and

education are both framed within the context of the K-12 education system, which already predicates the institutional practices related to schooling.

I will analyze the individualistic values driving private schooling, and argue that such values are not acceptable in the context of K-12 education. Thus, whether or not it has become commonplace, the persistence of individualism and private policies in education must be challenged. While the historical evidence shows that Canada's education system has always included a strong private sector, recent national and international scholarship on educational policy directions demonstrates how the private sector is increasingly regarded by policy-makers and by the general public as an example of successful educational structuring. The review of the historical, political and international context(s) of private education in Chapter Two illustrates how Canada's education structuring and reform is largely driven by market-oriented incentives. Thus, not only is private education largely uncontested, but it is actually revered to the point that many want to expand it.

Private sector approaches, such as policies and practices that incorporate neoliberal market strategies into public education, are becoming popular choices among policy-makers in the United States and in Canada. This is attributed to the growing force of the free market in international relations and the resulting pressure on domestic policies to facilitate stronger international competition (Shaker, 1999). Neoliberalism has undoubtedly had a strong influence on all aspects of public policy by its emphasis on the precedence of economic ideals over and above concerns for social welfare and

democratic participation. Neoliberal attitudes aim to transfer educational responsibility to the individual (Molnar, 1996; Shaker, 1999), and they value education as an economic tool more than anything else (Cuban, 2004; Boyles, 1998). Thus, whether or not private education has always existed in Canada, the recent political and economic environment represents a significant change in the way that the goals of public education are envisioned. Ours is an environment that praises private education and the principles that it espouses despite the originally exclusive goals of private education to educate the country's elite and to provide them with an educational mark of distinction (Phillips, 1957).

1. 1. What is private education?

Before I go on, let me specify what I mean by private education. While it is difficult to locate exactly where the public and the private are separated in education, there are fundamental conceptual distinctions between the two domains that characterize their purpose as well as their function within society. The idea and practice of paying for an elite education in a private school reflects the new kind of consumer-citizen and competitive individualism that was born out of the Thatcher-era into current neoliberal practices (Ball, 1997). As such, "the new social markets are framed by a mix of incentives and rewards aimed at stimulating self-interested responses" (Ball, 1997, p. 259). This is also true with school choice, which encourages a consumer-like response to education by ranking school efficiency and consequently pricing school value.

Conversely, the public school, as an institution financed by the government, is regulated by a collective means of support and encourages a communal sense of responsibility for the students at all schools. Theoretically, the public school system does not stratify students according to class, because there are no financial discrepancies between schools, whereas private education necessarily relies on the principle of economic advantage. It is these characteristics, and the philosophical positions that they imply, that illustrate how the public and the private ultimately support rival conceptions of a socially just society. Public education views education as a public responsibility, while private education views education as a private good for personal consumption.

However, this distinction is not always entirely clear, and the public and the private can begin to resemble each other depending on sources of funding. For example, the public system is moving increasingly towards a private model of education due to external sources of funding coming from market involvement in schools. Charter schools are especially susceptible to market involvement (Shaker, 1999). Although they are characterized as public schools because they require no tuition or selective student admissions, charter schools, which are not government regulated, are often criticized for operating as for-profit businesses and for allowing corporate sponsorship to cloud educational goals (Shaker, 1999). Of course, this might also happen in government funded public schools that choose to participate in a privately sponsored reading program, for example.

Restrictions of access are also caused by geographical exclusion whether or not students attend a public school. Students can be stratified according to socio-economic status depending on the general level of wealth within the neighbourhood that makes up their catchment area. Therefore, geographical access can be a significant way of distinguishing an elite school from a less desirable one, regardless of whether or not it is private.

However, the difference between attending a school within the public system and attending a school outside of the public system is significant because of the shared interest in the public system itself. Although student populations may vary among public schools, a shared participation in public education is an integral part of a shared commitment to a pluralistic democracy and democratic citizenship, while the private school capitalizes on the concept of individual opportunity (Labaree, 1997).

Another example of ambiguity between the public and private aims of education is represented in the free school movement of the 1960s. While the free school movement—promoting free independent schools and home schooling—wanted to maintain a liberal democratic vision for education, it also opposed mainstream social institutions on the basis that they inhibited individual liberties (Miller, 2002). Although the free school movement's motives were not linked to economic profit, this counterculture's flight from public institutions actually served to weaken socially democratic forces within the mainstream culture by abandoning public schools and by justifying privatization schemes (Miller, 2002). Neoliberalism has been able to further exploit the tension between social solidarities and individual liberties (Harvey, 2005) as a means of reducing government involvement in the provision of social services and therefore increasing profits for the

private sector. Thus, while free schools have good intentions to serve the public interest, they are invariably implicated in the privatization movement because they undermine the concept of publicly provided education.

The most striking feature of private education is that parents can pay a premium specifically for the education of their children. It raises the question: what is it exactly that parents are expecting from this premium? And what are the motivations that drive parents to make this choice for their children? According to Goodson (2007), a definitive public to private movement is underway, and:

what we may be seeing ... is the beginning of a substantial 'turning away' from one of the major sites of collective purpose and social engagement—the public service workplace. The other side of this movement is a 'turning towards' the individual; the personal; the consumable; the special interest; the private purpose (p. 134).

Thus, parents turning away from public education might have good intentions for their own children, but the greater social implications of dividing the education system according to parental income and class is highly problematic.

Hence I will focus on socio-economic inequality and class divisions in education that become institutionally reinforced by the very possibility of paying for K-12 education outside of mandatory income taxes. I am defining private education as education which is privately funded and which requires the payment of tuition in order to participate, whether or not this tuition is subsidized by the government on an individual basis (as in tuition vouchers) or by the institution itself (by way of a scholarship). In this sense,

competition between schools and students is formally structured in such a way that some students are privileged while others are excluded.

The structure of competition in a private education market is premised on the notion that all parents have an inherent right to privilege their own children. Looking after one's private interests before considering the wellbeing of others comes to be seen as natural where choice is encouraged, and differentiating between schools is necessary in order to make those choices. If education is viewed as a private good according to a market model, then "consumers" of education are expected to behave according to market logic, which encourages consumption based on self-interest and individual opportunity. Thus, the exclusionary effects of the private system are rendered almost incontestable when "the market provides a mechanism for the reinvention and legitimization of hierarchy and differentiation via the ideology of diversity, competition and choice" (Ball, 1993, p. 16). Moore and Davenport (1990) fittingly call this "a more subtle form of discriminatory sorting" (as cited in Ball, 1993, p.16). This form of discrimination is subtle because it is an effect, not an intention; moreover, it is legitimized because it is a product of conventionally *positive* principles such as "diversity" and "choice".

Therefore, my interest is not whether private education in Canada is currently a "better" option for attending students in terms of the quality of instruction, standardized test scores, and so on. Rather, what concerns me about private education is that it allows citizens to "give up" on social institutions that are organized to provide a service to everyone. When citizens can choose to abandon public education because they perceive

private education to offer “better” opportunities in one way or another, this enables people to ignore the educational needs of others, and to withdraw from education as a public good.

1. 2. What is the “public good”?

In this thesis I seek to understand why private education is such an uncontested topic in Canada, and argue that public debate is needed. The permission of private education in Canada erodes collective responsibility for education as a public good, and should therefore be on the political agenda.

Now let me first explain what is meant by “public good”, for it is according to this concept as I have defined it that I will be formulating my argument that education should be regarded and valued as a public good. The particular way in which a public good is defined tells us something about those services that claim to be public goods. In the case of education, for example, we might find out that education does not in fact always operate as a public good given the way the education system is structured. Yet, whether or not this means that education *should not* or *cannot* be a public good is an entirely different question. My argument will demand that *if* education is to be considered a public good, as I believe it should be, then it cannot support a private sector. Hence, I will propose a definition of “public good” that positions education as it *ought to be*, and not necessarily as it currently exists. Therefore, that my definition of a public good is not

congruent with K-12 education as it operates in Canada is a testament to the already widespread withdrawal by the public from education as a public good.

The term “public good” is derived from Paul A. Samuelson’s (1954) economic theory of public goods, which defines a public good as a good which is jointly consumed and non-exclusionary (Holcombe, 1997). This means that “once it is produced, it can be consumed by an additional consumer at no additional cost” (Holcombe, 1997, p. 1), and no consumer can be excluded from consuming it. Therefore, public goods can also be called “collective-consumption goods”. According to this definition, a public good cannot be rivalrous because it is not limited in availability, nor can it be confined to one particular person or group. In this strict economic sense, education is not a public good, as there are additional costs associated with additional students, and students can be excluded from education. However, in Holcombe’s explication of joint consumption, based on a Samuelsonian model, his preoccupation lies with the productive efficiency of a public good; that is, how a public good can be more efficiently produced than a private good. In this sense, much of his argument about the public good relies on the primacy of an economic incentive, from which the state stands to benefit if it produces education. This economic theory ignores the social component of a public good that considers how free access to a public good represents a collective responsibility for public welfare.

David F. Labaree (1997) addresses this point in his discussion about America’s educational goals. His characterization of a public good completes what Holcombe misses, by putting social welfare before productive efficiency. According to Labaree’s

definition, a public good is necessarily free, and a pure public good has much less to do with economic efficiency than it has to do with preparing citizens to be a part of liberal democratic society. For Labaree:

A public good is one where benefits are enjoyed by all the members of the community, whether or not they actually contributed to the production of this good. Police protection, street maintenance, public parks, open-air sculpture, and air pollution control are all examples of public goods that potentially benefit all members of a community, whether or not they paid the taxes that were necessary to provide these services (p. 51).

Here, a public good is not only available to all, but it will also benefit all members of society, whether or not they utilize that particular public good. Labaree uses the examples of a sustainable political system, and competent and informed fellow citizens to represent the collective benefits of a freely distributed public good.

These benefits are not necessarily economic, although they can be¹, but according to the pure public goods theory that Labaree describes, the primary benefits will be social; the non-exclusionary distribution of public goods will create social order. This emphasis on the social component of public goods distribution also underlines collective responsibility as a core feature of public goods. Historically, the common school² founders wanted to develop a sense of civic virtue among its citizens and “felt schools could help counteract the growth of selfishness (arising from a burgeoning capitalist society) by instilling in their charges a personal dedication to the public good” (Labaree, 1997, p. 44). Yet, here we should note that the form of “public good” has changed from a service or product (*a* public good) to a set of principles and beliefs (*the* public good). Although these are not

¹ See Labaree’s description of the second goal of American education: the aim for social efficiency by training workers to improve the economy.

² What are now known as public schools (Labaree, 1997)

entirely distinct terms, the implications of the latter in particular should be considered before arriving at a complete definition of “public good”.

The public good can have very strong ideological implications. When we talk about the public good, there is an expectation that that which is good for the public has already been agreed upon by the public. And of course, who actually constitutes the public is continually debatable. As a result, what ends up happening, according to Alan Reid (2005), is that the public good often comes to represent a dominant standard; therefore, it risks being a totalizing and normalizing construct that understands the community in unified terms with only one representative set of interests. Likewise, when Holcombe (1997) talks about education as a means of furthering government interests by “socializing students to make them better (more compliant) citizens, and by teaching a curriculum that portrays the government as an institution that furthers the public interest” (p. 2), we can see the potential danger in the public good as hegemonic ideology. On the other hand, Holcombe has also located a point of interception between the government and the public that has the potential to unite the citizenry according to a collective vision of goals and interests.

Ideologically, they both serve to unite a community towards a collective set of principles, and in the case of education, one might say—either positively or negatively—that they aim “to produce a certain type of human being” (Bloom, 1997, p. 499). But that type of human being need not be homogenous or consensual. If we think about the public good as a platform for staging a liberal democracy, then we can accept the possibility for

disagreement about who the public is and what “the good” means without discarding the concept altogether. As Chantal Mouffe (2004) argues, the ideal of democracy is not the realization of a “rational consensus”, and in fact, envisaging democracy in this way is highly problematic because it ignores the necessity for political struggle in a democracy.

Similarly, I would like to advocate a vision of the public good that understands the public as a working democracy and not necessarily as a group with common interests.

Therefore, I will explicitly use the term “public” and not “common” because, although they are often considered synonymous, the former invokes a more democratic understanding of the group, while the latter tends to imply exclusion from that which is uncommon. Moreover, I am differentiating public goods from common goods based on a public good’s orientation to the whole citizenry and not only to a particular group. Public education, according to this definition, is a public good, while private education might be called a common good, although it is more explicitly understood as a private good.

Finally, public education is not only a public good in the form of a service or a product, but it also serves to cultivate a shared set of principles that view the public good as a collective project for the benefit of all. By defining the public good, as well as public education, as a collective project, I hope to show that educational problems cannot be individualized, and that they must be addressed as systemically related if we hope to improve the overall quality of K-12 education.

1. 3. The public school

This brings me to the role of the public school. According to Alan Reid (2005), the role of the public school is to create a “public” that appreciates difference in order to prepare students for a more current version of the democratic project. In his view, the democratic project is not only national, but global as well. Thus, the public consists of all human beings and not only those related to a particular nation or group. Although this thesis deals with educational issues on the national level, thinking about the public on global terms is a helpful way of understanding how broad a conception of the public can really be. Globalization, in this view, has challenged national constructs of society and culture, and continuously changes the national landscapes upon which conceptions of the public are formed. So in effect, even a national understanding of the public must consider society and culture on a global scale.

The public school, then, has a responsibility to be inclusive in order to foster a truly democratic society:

Public schools represent the only spaces in our society where young people from a wide range of cultures, experiences and backgrounds can learn with and from one another on a systematic basis, developing the understanding, respect and tolerance that is the lifeblood of a pluralist democracy. (Reid, p. 581)

Although the private school might also accomplish this goal to the extent that it can welcome a variety of cultures and backgrounds in its student body, it always maintains a distinction of socio-economic status, and in this sense, it restricts access. That is, insofar as students must pay tuition to attend a private school, the space has automatically become closed off to those who cannot afford such a distinction. In effect, this closure

denies difference that is a result of class and therefore fails to accommodate a real representation of the public.

Claudia Ruitenberg's (2008) discussion of the *public* nature of public education makes this distinction more apparent. She identifies a significant characteristic of public education that clearly sets it apart from what I am terming private education: public education does not restrict access. Hence, it is more capable of accommodating a complete representation of the public, and therefore public education also serves to create a public that understands heterogeneity on all levels—socioeconomic, ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc. Whether or not education is publicly funded or governed is not as important as the possibility for students to experience the public on a personal level, and “to encounter such heterogeneity—not on the street, where they can simply walk away from it, but in the school, where they can be required to respond to and interact with those different from themselves” (Ruitenberg, 2008).

Similarly, Reid describes the history of public education in Australia as an effort to address the demands of all citizens and to preserve, not dissolve, difference:

Rather than simply educating individuals, it was recognized that public schools turn a group of people with a host of differences into a civic entity called a public. By contrast, private schools were seen as having predominantly individual purposes with group allegiances to particular religious, cultural or ethnic groups rather than to the public as a whole. (Reid, p. 575)

Although many private schools today have far weaker associations with religious, cultural or ethnic groups, they remain exclusive to the extent that they will generally not

support the attendance of students from low-income backgrounds³. Yet, this in itself constitutes cultural segregation. The only difference is that this kind of cultural segregation has been legitimated by a hard bottom line drawn between individual interest and collective responsibility.

Now that I have described how I distinguish public and private education, I will return to the concept of the education system as a whole. When I speak of the “education system”, I mean to include both the public and the private sectors, as they are unavoidably linked under government policies that create and reinforce the structure of their relationship.

This thesis considers the education system as a whole as a means of addressing the breadth of conditions that contribute to the relationship between public and private education. In other words, it is not the differences between public and private education themselves that are underlined, but the conditions that allow for the possibility *and legitimation* of these differences. My reasons for doing this are twofold. First, these differences, which may be better understood as inequalities, are not new; they no longer mark a significant drift in the way we imagine our education system. Class stratification among students, for example, is a commonly cited effect of the privatization of education and frequently justified as an unavoidable outcome of *any* education system in a capitalist environment. Secondly, these conditions are largely taken for granted as inevitable and therefore *unalterable*, and it is exactly such an attitude that I would like to challenge.

³ Voucher programs and scholarships have provided opportunities for low-income families to send their children to private schools, but they do not address the fundamental issue of exclusion by financial means.

I challenge this attitude on the basis that it is derived from a self-interested and individualistic view of one's position in society, and that it ignores the value of a collective responsibility for the public good. This attitude is shown to be principally related to processes of neoliberalization, prompted by post-industrial countries, and reaching across the globe. Neoliberalism has marked a political shift towards the privatization of responsibility and the reduction of state regulation. This move to free up capital from the constraints of government and public deliberation follows the cardinal assumption of neoliberalism: that freedom of the market and freedom of trade will guarantee individual freedom (Harvey, 2005). According to neoliberalism, restructuring all capital—including public revenue—according to a free market model will ensure that all trade is governed by effort and merit (Apple, 2004). However, social theorist David Harvey argues that neoliberalism is actually a “political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites” (Harvey, p. 19). Unfortunately, Harvey's interpretation is not widely accepted, in part because neoliberalism's pronounced relationship to the market and alleged disassociation from the state have allowed it to remain largely depoliticized.

In response to neoliberal beliefs, I argue that education, insofar as it is considered a public good, cannot be structured by a free market model, because this kind of model necessarily excludes those groups who cannot afford to pay a premium for education. It deliberately creates conditions of scarcity as a means of stimulating competition (Gabbard, 2008). Therefore it cannot guarantee individual freedom, because an absolutely *intended* effect of the free market model is that there is not enough space for

every child to be enrolled in the “best” schools. A system structured in such a way completely eliminates the possibility of providing an equitable education to all children, and it simultaneously hinders those who are implicated within the system in maintaining a community-minded attitude towards education. Therefore, the very option of attending a private school within the current education system disrupts the function of education as a public good.

My argument looks at the underlying reasons why private education continues to be an attractive option both for families and for education providers, and it considers the conditions that allow for those advantages to be legitimized. Such conditions include the national political agenda as well as dominant international policies made common to most industrially developed nations by globalization; and finally, if not most significantly, a powerful condition comprises the dominant social norms that regulate what counts as a legitimate socio-political concern.

1. 4. Theoretical framework and methodology

This thesis takes the form of a conceptual essay. Rather than conducting an empirical investigation on a particular aspect of private education, I have chosen to look at the topic at a conceptual level in order to offer a critical argument against the ideological underpinnings of the practices and policies that support private education in an increasingly divided education system. Although the concrete effects of an education system divided by public and private interest are worthy of empirical study, my aim is not to demonstrate the specific discrepancies within such a system, but to critically examine

how the concept of private education is fundamentally incompatible with the concept of education as a public good. I make use both of analysis and critique; in Chapters Two and Three, I *analyze* central concepts such as “private education” and “public good”, as well as the role of hegemonic neoliberalism in the privatization of education. In Chapters Four and Five, I *critique* the policies and practices associated with private education.

1. 5. Chapter structure

To locate the argument, Chapter Two details the history of the legislation and policies surrounding K-12 private education in Canada and its evolution based on changing local and national educational goals. This leads to the present educational context in Canada, including the variety of school types (i.e. charter, alternative, independent, etc.) that complicate the distinction between public and private. This chapter describes in more specific terms how the issue of the privatization of education has been addressed in other post-industrial countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia as a means of drawing a parallel between the international literature and the situation that exists in Canada. These international arguments are especially valuable because they are developed in countries that are more politically involved in the debate about privatizing education; therefore, they might act as warning signals for Canadian educational directions and for the outcomes that such directions imply.

Chapter Three outlines a conceptual framework that draws from the work of philosophers who have considered similar questions of individualism and collective responsibility in order to develop a set of criteria with which to evaluate the current context of private

education in Canada. To address the concepts of atomism, shared goods, individual rights, and collective responsibility, I draw on the work of Charles Taylor, Richard Pildes, Janice Gross Stein, and Henry Giroux. I choose these concepts and the theories developed around them because they challenge common assumptions about the individual and they defend the value of collective responsibility for society. This is important if the constitution of value in this context depends on how one conceptualizes the relationship between the individual and the greater social body; and I think it does. If, for example, collective responsibility is viewed as a hindrance to individual liberty, as is the general neoliberal sentiment, then the criteria by which the “public good” is legitimated will be more individual than collective. But more significantly, that individualism should come before collective responsibility at all is an assumption that should be challenged. Closely tied to these concepts are questions of how value is constituted and how particular values are legitimized and normalized. To investigate these questions, I look at Jean-François Lyotard’s concepts of the metanarrative and performativity as well as analyses of discourse and power by Michel Foucault. My aim is to describe these concepts as a means of bringing attention to the current hegemonic discourse that understands “value” in overwhelmingly economic terms.

In Chapter Four, I challenge this understanding specifically in the context of private education by showing how the public good is threatened under the dominant view of the individual’s place in society and that the common conception of the value of social responsibility is constructed according to interests that are primarily individual. I argue that private education erodes collective responsibility to the public good based on the

conceptual framework laid out in the third chapter. According to the concepts of atomism, shared goods, individual rights, and collective responsibility illustrated in the third chapter, I analyse the implications of private education as such, and relate them to the specific situation in Canada. Moreover, I refer to the arguments made by Lyotard and Foucault that expose the dominant worldview in order to demonstrate how the Canadian education system is falling prey to the same values that privilege the economy over collective responsibility and mask social obedience under the guise of individual liberty. These values are especially apparent in private education where socio-economic status and individual responsibility are driving factors in its implementation and legitimation. Chapter Four illustrates how private education satisfies the language of economics and conceives of students atomistically, while the principle of public education supports non-commercial values and a shared sense of responsibility for education. Moreover, the collective aims of education to cultivate civic engagement (Giroux, 2004) and to empower citizens to participate in democratic debate (Gutmann, 1987/1999) are scarcely being met by private education because true collective participation requires a public arena. Therefore, privatizing public space undermines the irreducible value of the public good and denies the possibility of shared interests that are not economic.

In my final chapter, I will discuss possible directions for further research and draw on other ideas and recommendations for building a commitment to public education and education as a public good. Furthermore, I would like to address the lack of political involvement surrounding this issue in Canada and to consider ways in which the issue of

the privatization of K-12 education can gain more attention on the national political agenda.

1. 6. Significance

My hope is to draw attention to the issue of privatization in Canada as a social and political concern. I want to make explicit the connection between global market trends driven by neoliberal policies and the implications for social welfare in nations that see themselves as major global competitors. Although private schooling in Canada is not new (e.g., Barman, 2001) the current political climate is particularly significant for education and the future direction that education in Canada will take. This is because the increased dominance of free-market capitalism around the globe is putting pressure on governments to loosen their hold on institutions that are traditionally state-run in order to allow them to be more competitive on the market. Although competition has been shown to increase efficiency and productivity and therefore contribute to economic growth, my concern is that when economic progress is privileged, we will lose sight of our collective responsibilities to all Canadians and will witness the dissolution of our systems of social welfare.

Thus, I not only show how the concept of private education is fundamentally inequitable, but I also demonstrate how its institution affects the public school system by reducing government responsibility for and influencing public opinion about publicly funded education. Moreover, I illustrate how the general acceptance of the presence of private schools across Canada is indicative of the lack of critical engagement with issues of

equity. I surmise that this lack of critical engagement is based on the common assumption that equity is simply not achievable, and that we should focus on what is achievable, such as the measurement of standardized test-scores, post-secondary attendance demographics and employment statistics. While these may be indicative of how effective our education system is at producing employable citizens, none of these methods of measuring achievement considers how the existing structure of our education system is preventing students from conceiving of a public that is democratically minded and for which they share a collective responsibility. My hope is that education will be properly acknowledged as a shared, public good so that students can be educated in an environment that teaches them that they live with something greater than themselves.

Chapter Two

2. 0. Introduction

In order to understand the current context of Canadian policies on private K-12 schooling, a historical overview of such policies is helpful. The first section of this chapter outlines the introduction and development of formal education in Canada, with a particular concentration on the ideological and practical distinctions that have historically characterized the public and private school systems. The second section of this chapter reviews the international scholarship on private education and policies related to neoliberal education reform. An outline of the historical, political and international context(s) of private education will position Canada amongst the many nations that are increasingly restructuring their educational policies to meet market-driven objectives.

2. 1. Historical background

This analysis begins with a general overview of the aims of education when Canada was first being founded to locate the original context of formal education in Canada and then examines the subsequent provincial funding policies and their effects, first in Ontario (originally Upper Canada), and then in British Columbia. While my argument considers Canada as a whole, the fact that education policy is developed at the provincial level means that I will need to limit my research to select provinces in order to provide a clear understanding of the policies that are emerging in relation to the issue of privatization. Still, a preliminary overview of the history of Canadian education policy in general is

relevant because the concepts of educational purpose, models of governance, principles of educational policy design, and criteria of political evaluation are all drawn from political ideology that exists at the national level (Manzer, 1994). Thus, a closer evaluation of the legislation of education in Ontario and British Columbia should highlight some of the overarching themes in education policy that have been developed throughout Canada.

Ontario and British Columbia provide somewhat distinct examples of education policy because they have different legislation surrounding the regulation of private schools.⁴ Ontario, for example, has no regulations in place for the establishment of private schools, and consequently makes up Canada's least regulated market for school choice (Van Pelt, et al., 2007). In contrast, British Columbia has a firmly regulated private school system and provides substantial per-student funding to private schools that meet its requirements. Both examples are valuable, not only because they represent different government approaches to private education, but also because their similarities help to locate the core characteristics that support private education.

2. 1. 1. A brief history of education in Canada

The first government grant for education in Canada was afforded by Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe in 1792 to John Stuart, who had recently opened a grammar school. At the time, the province of Upper Canada was still a British colony and governed by a

⁴ Private schools are officially termed "independent schools" in BC, but I will be using the term "private school" to refer to all schools outside of the public system.

constitutional monarchy. Grammar schools were fee-based schools for the few, imported into Canada from England in the late 1700s. Many felt that they were intended to perpetuate the class distinctions of British society on Canadian soil (Johnson, 1968). “A major function of the grammar schools was to give future leaders of society an educational mark of distinction which would assist them to command respect” (Phillips, 1957, p. 195). However, education in Canada was still able to serve a variety of groups before public education was introduced. This was mostly due to church or charity schools operated by organized philanthropy. Schools in the period between 1840 and 1870 were supported by subscriptions, government grants and fees, but not by taxation (Phillips). With the attainment of responsible government in 1848 and the increasing popularity of Canadian democracy, grammar schools and other such exclusive schools were attacked in the legislature by advocates of democratic reform, and soon local taxes were introduced that would contribute to a public education system available to all. Until then, the government was spending up to nine times more per pupil on grants for grammar schools than it was on grants for common schools (Johnson, 1968).

Not surprisingly then, the period around 1870 in the east, and 1920 in the west, is described as a period of transition from social exclusiveness to public support in which the common school was developed as a free school for all; at the same time, private schools were taken over by the public authority and deprived of their social distinction (Phillips, 1957). In the period between 1870 and 1900, elementary school became free, universal and mandatory, while secondary school was either free of charge or very nearly so, with a mandatory entrance examination. Traditionally there were fees for secondary

schools because they were considered to be within the reach of only a minority anyway; but, by 1920, public secondary schools also became free to all. By the twentieth century, more liberty was given to individual provinces to guide their own legislation and policy surrounding education.

Local authorities and those who supported the public expansion of education saw three major benefits to come of taxation for public education: 1) all parents would be supporters of the school, 2) all would take advantage of the opportunity to send their children, and 3) better teachers would be secured (Phillips, 1957). In poor provinces, the proportion of provincial to local expenditure was high, but there was almost always a reciprocal effect in that access to education improved the economic habits and industry of the people and “created conditions which retained and attracted ambitious citizens who were prepared to work for further educational and material advance” (Phillips, p. 292). Hence, socializing children to create a common and ordered citizenry was clearly understood to be a function of the schools. The schools provided a platform for fostering citizenship and creating social order, especially for “trouble-maker” children and for new immigrants to Canada. This is why the rapid expansion of the Canadian population caused by immigration in the mid to late 1800s was met by a corresponding increase in school facilities. It was a matter of “creating school systems to do new educational work made all the more urgent by the need for assimilating newcomers” (Phillips, p. 165).

Not everyone was in favour of the idea of a public education system. “Proprietors of private schools were among the obstinate opponents” (Phillips, 1957, p. 284), and many

parents were also opposed to the idea. This was due to the Common School Act of 1850 that introduced a property tax for all district members so that, rather than charging parents a “rate bill” for each child in school, free common schools were paid for by taxation (Johnson, 1968). This meant that families already sending their children to exclusive grammar schools were expected to pay both district fees and tuition fees. Hence, there was a clash in attitudes towards education between the “Family Compact”, representing the upper class, who wanted exclusive grammar schools, and the “Reformers”, who wanted common schools to which all could send their children.

According to the Reformers, the Family Compact was forgetting a crucial point:

The principle which safeguards public education from degeneration into a shabby charity is that those who want better schools for their own children must help to provide them for all children in the administrative area. Unfortunately, those who had no objection to providing special education for their sons and daughters at their own expense were usually advocates of strict economy and bare essentials in public education for the many. (Phillips, p. 297)

Still, free and universal education was beginning to be more widely understood as a necessity for the benefit of the country. And the intention of installing a central authority, managed by government trustees, was to establish an efficient and uniform system, to secure at least minimum standards without taking over local initiative, and to provide a more equitable system for financing education (Johnson; Phillips). Nevertheless, in some circles a desire for private education remained. In the twentieth century, and consistently across Canada, the ratio of private to public school attendance was 1:23, except for Quebec, in which it was 1:10 (Phillips).⁵

⁵ Historically, the responsibility of the state was not viewed with the same significance as the authority of the Roman Catholic Church for French-Canadians. Hence, secular control over education did not please the church, and there were more privately funded religious institutions as a result.

Even with the introduction of the Common School Act in 1850, exclusive grammar schools continued to exist as fee-based schools, and they also continued to receive substantial government grants. It was not uncommon for institutions that charged high fees and regarded themselves as exclusive to receive support from public funds because they were expected to serve the public by cultivating future leaders. Many thought those who could afford private schools should attend them and leave the public schools to the lower classes, but as it was stated in one editorial of a professional journal, public schools were “the schools of the nation, not of a certain class” (Phillips, p. 296).

Among those schools of a certain class, Upper Canada College (UCC), founded in 1829, provoked widespread disapproval from its inception. “It had been favoured by the government with an original endowment of land, with advantageous adjustments in its endowment and with substantial grants of money” (Phillips, 1957, p. 296). Again, these grants were presumably intended to serve the future leaders of Canadian society. “[At UCC] the sons of the leading Toronto families received a classical education and were trained to take their places in the professions and in the public and business life of Canada” (Johnson, 1968, p. 29). Thus, while UCC made a strong contribution to education, it was also highly criticized for being exclusive and sectarian in its Church of England chapel services, and by the end of the nineteenth century UCC became disassociated from the government and was established as a strictly private school (Johnson, 1968). All private schools in Ontario soon became disassociated from government control, but such independence from the government did not exist in all provinces.

2. 1. 2. Religion

One exception to the Ontario government's distance from private schooling, of course, is the strong presence of government controlled Roman Catholic schools in Ontario. One might call this an exception to public education, because religious schools are historically understood to fall under the same category as private schools. Although religious schools are not the focus of my research, it is useful to recognize how some have evolved into non-sectarian private schools. For example, historian Phillips (1957) claims that the purpose of religious education distinguishes it from a veritable public education: "As an educational issue, the separate school problem is logically insoluble. The Roman Catholic concept of the purpose of education and of the function of the school is not the concept which produced the public school system" (p. 305). As a result, Catholic arguments for and secular arguments against separate schools are based on entirely different assumptions about education. While Roman Catholic education was based on an exercise of paternalistic authority, public education in North America was constructed to meet a community need, and was introduced at a time when citizens decided to assume collective responsibility for the provision of education. Thus, in direct contrast to any forms of religious education, public education was made possible by the ability to exclude differences of religious faith and economic status from community affairs (Phillips, 1957).

Separate and denominational schools date back to before the 19th century in eastern Canada and to the mid-nineteenth century in the west. Historian Jean Barman (1991) describes how, as soon as British Columbia became a British colony in 1858, the Church

of England had established its own private elite schools. “Over a hundred private boys’ and girls’ schools on the British model were established in areas of extensive British settlement, many soon also acquiring students from other family backgrounds who sought similar, supposedly superior status for their children” (Barman, p. 14). Christian schools also began when Dutch immigrants arrived and wanted their children to be schooled according to their religious beliefs in a government-supported institution (Barman, p. 14). According to Barman, these schools were not seeking profits and regarded themselves not as private, but as independent from the public school system, which is why they also expected provincial recognition and funding.

On the other hand, many of the schools in Ontario that were originally religiously defined are no longer defined by their faith, but instead by their academic mission and culture (Van Pelt et al., 2007). While they were once established as Anglican schools and continue to maintain chapels and religious services, their primary purpose now is to offer an elite education. Thus, there are many ways in which religion plays a part in the construction and persistence of both public and private education; however, some of these associations may now only carry historical significance.

2. 1. 3. Ontario

Although Ontario does not have regulations for the establishment of private schools, it does offer the most publicly governed and funded alternatives in education, such as English Public, English Roman Catholic, French Public, and French Roman Catholic Separate district boards (Van Pelt et al., 2007). Yet, even with the sizeable degree of

regulated school choice within the public sector, there is still a great interest in private education. A report by the Fraser Institute shows that private school attendance in Ontario has increased from 1.9% in the 1960s to 5.6% in 2006. This percentage represents three main categories of private schooling: Academic (34%), Religious (55%) and Special (11%), and of the religiously defined schools, 80% are Christian (Van Pelt et al.).

As mentioned above, these schools were disassociated from government regulation following a strong shift towards a publicly funded and inclusive school system in the late nineteenth century. More recently, under pressure by advocates of school choice, the Ontario government decided to support the families who choose to pay additional fees for private schooling under the pretext of educational equity. In 2002, Ontario introduced an education tax credit for parents who sent their children to a wide range of religious and private schools called the Equity in Education Tax Credit (EETC). According to advocates of the policy, “the EETC was introduced to provide families with the financial assistance necessary to afford their school of choice” (Toronto Sun, 2003). Alan Sears (2003) dedicates his book *Retooling the Mind Factory: Education in a Lean State* to this period in Ontario’s history, because it exemplifies a time when the neoliberal agenda truly took hold of education reform in Canada, and Ontario’s provincial government began to resemble Thatcher’s Conservatives in Britain. The Harris government pushed for total restructuring of education, developing a more entrepreneurial and consumerist orientation throughout the education system, and in doing so, “left behind a dramatically transformed education system” (Sears, p. 1).

However, in late November 2003, the newly elected Liberal government in Ontario cancelled the tax credit, which it described as “the reckless private school tax credit that drains dollars and hope away from better public education” (Ministry of Ontario Throne Speech 2003, as cited in CUPE, 2004). Yet, even though the province acknowledges the importance of public education and has managed to separate public regulation and funding from its private schools so far, the growing trend towards market-oriented educational reform has already begun to blur the line between public and private education in Ontario (Sears, 2003). In other words, as Alan Sears argues, the government can still support privatization without funding it by actively supporting market logic through the language of self-reliance in education. “Accountability” and “competition” are just two of the articulations of market logic that are frequently emphasised as the new beacons for educational reform.

2. 1. 4. British Columbia

In British Columbia, funding for private schools comes from both the public and private sectors, but tuition fees and private donations are their primary source of funding. Nevertheless, B.C.’s decision to subsidize private schools that comply with provincial standards has been very controversial. Private schools were only regulated in B.C. in 1977 when the *School Support (Independent) Act* was passed by the fiscally conservative Social Credit Party, led by Premier Bill Bennett, to give financial support to struggling private schools. This was because private school enrolments decreased to 3.7% in the late 1960s and 1970s. After the introduction of partial government funding in 1977 they quickly rose again (CUPE, 2004). Following the *School Support Act*, the *Independent*

School Act was passed in 1989, again by the Social Credit Party, this time run by Premier Bill Vander Zalm, as a means of maintaining more control over private schools whether they were subsidized or not (CUPE, 2004). Presumably, the government's rationale for regulating private schools was, and continues to be, to preserve some degree of standardization in the education of its citizens. Hence, the *Independent School Act* has raised questions about the true independence of these so-called "independent schools" (Barman, 1991). If these schools collect assistance by the government, argues Barman, then they lose their independence in order to comply with provincial standards, and subsequently, they cease to embody the original philosophical and religious underpinnings upon which they were established. On the other hand, many argue that the more serious issue is whether or not public support for private schools in B.C. has had a negative impact on the public education system, causing public school supporters to challenge the government's allocation of public funding. "Student numbers are growing in independent schools, while declining public school enrolments are contributing to controversial school closures and staff layoffs in school districts across this province" (CUPE, p. 2).

According to the 1977 Act, private schools were eligible to receive 10 to 30 percent of the per-student funding allocated to public schools. The requirements for obtaining 10 percent of funds were minimal; schools merely had to demonstrate adequate facilities and a tolerance for racial and religious diversity. In order to qualify for 30 percent of per student funding, the schools were required to satisfy the basic educational guidelines set by B.C.'s public schools, participate in province-wide educational assessment programs,

operate as non-profit institutions and be in operation for at least five years (Barman, 1991). An amendment of the 1977 Act shortened this time to one year and increased maximum funding to 35 percent, making it easier for private schools to secure government funding. As a result, more and more private schools began to request government support for their programs (Barman).

Following the *Independent School Act* of 1989, regulations for receiving government funding were made more stringent, but the maximum subsidy was once again increased. Currently, there are four independent school groups, two of which receive substantial government funding. Schools in group 1 (e.g., religious schools) are consistent with the goals of the B.C. curriculum and employ certified teachers; they receive 50% of the per student cost in the public school district in which they are located. Schools in group 2 meet the same requirements as those in group 1, but receive only 35% of per student cost because their costs exceed those of the local public school district (e.g. University-prep/British model schools often coined “elite schools”). Schools in group 3 only maintain adequate facilities and meet municipal codes, and those in group 4 cater to non-provincial students and do not have 100% certified teachers. Neither Group 3 nor 4 receives provincial grants (CUPE, 2004).

Private schools now comprise 10.5% of the total K-12 student population in B.C., whereas in the 1950s, only 5-6% of students were enrolled in private schools. The current figure of 10.5% is the highest proportion of private school enrolments in B.C. history

(CUPE, 2004). Across Canada, “the percentage of families choosing independent (private) schools has doubled over the past 25 years” (Hepburn, 1999b, p. 4).

2. 1. 5. Current public policy

All Canadian provinces have private schools and have developed their own policies for private education. Most private schools are subsidized by their provincial government, and in such cases—as we have seen in B.C.—they are often required to comply with specific standards, such as conformity to provincial curriculum and employment of provincially certified teachers (CUPE, 2004; Van Pelt et al., 2007). In this way, they remain regulated and funded to some extent by the provincial government even if they charge tuition fees for their services. Yet, private schools across Canada are still defined by their independence from the central authority of the provincial government and by their deviance from the standard curriculum (Van Pelt et al.). Hence, there are different kinds of private schools nation-wide that boast a variety of specialties, some of which are academically or religiously defined, and others catering to special needs and interests.

The latest available information on private school enrolment in Canada shows a national increase. For example, during the years between 2001 and 2006, private school enrolment grew from 5.6% to 6% in Canada (Van Pelt et al. 2007). This trend has also been observed across North America and Europe (Peters, 2007). Such increases in attendance at private schools do have an effect on the public sector, since municipal boards receive program funding on a per-student basis. Hence, private schools also have a strong interest

in securing high levels of enrolment, a factor that has direct consequences for public school funding (Peters).

Still, the government upholds its justifications for supporting and allowing a private school system, which generally fall into two categories. The first is the common emphasis on standards: making sure that all schools, including private schools, will comply with the provincial and national expectations for K-12 education. The second is attributed to a lack of resources, which often causes government institutions to pair up with private business, as in the case of public-private partnerships (P3s), or to hand over some of its responsibilities altogether by accepting a certain number of private institutions. Of course, in the case of education, as seen above, private schools have been around far longer than any form of public education, which leads me to believe that they are not a last resort due to a severe lack of funding—as we may see in the impending privatization of certain forms of health care—but a tradition based on unabashed aims and procedures of social stratification. The following section will examine these procedures in more detail and the broader justifications that they employ.

2. 2. International policy

This section draws attention to the relevance of the international scholarship and its resistance to the privatization of education in order to illustrate how this same issue exists in Canada, even though it may not have been politicized to the same extent. The global influence of policy trends among the most industrially developed nations is worth

examining as an indication of Canada's own social, political and economic directions. This is especially true in considering a growing force in global relations: the free market. And given that "the demands of the marketplace are hardly local, or even national" (Shaker, 1999, p. iii), Canada's policy incentives are inevitably affected by global competition, reflecting the priorities of the marketplace. Scholarship on the issue of the marketization of education has shown that free-market rhetoric has effortlessly worked its way into government policy in the United States, Australia and the UK, and it is for this reason that I believe it necessary to make the same observation explicit for Canadian policy and to demonstrate that we are by no means exempt from the threat of the disintegration of our national social welfare systems.

The most common literature regarding the privatization of education addresses the market model of education, which applies to the commercialization of the public sector. American commentaries such as *The Blackboard and the Bottom Line* (2004) by Larry Cuban, and *Giving Kids the Business* (1996) by Alex Molnar, confront the corporatization of American public schools, which are increasingly managed as businesses and affected by commercial sponsorship. This is frequently called the "privatization of schooling" because it refers to market-based school reforms that turn public schools into private businesses. In this model, education of all kinds, including primary, secondary, higher education and auxiliary education such as tutoring, becomes accountable to the market and operates according to unregulated supply and demand, so that education is bought and sold in the same way that a commodity is produced and consumed.

Although many of the criticisms of this kind of reform overlap with the way in which I critique the privatization of education, I take issue with a slightly different aspect of the argument: the requirement to pay a private fee for K-12 education. Hence, this argument does not address corporate involvement in public schools; but, rather, those schools that are considered independent and private and, for that reason, escape the scrutiny of the school reform debate. But, first I will provide some background to situate the issue of privatization in its current political and geographical contexts.

2. 2. 1. Market-based educational reform

The debate is very prominent in the United States due to nation-wide reforms that encourage competition as the principal catalyst for improving quality. The late American free market economist Milton Friedman was a leading influence in the neoliberal movement that began in the second half of the twentieth century, favouring the decentralization of government control, market competition and private enterprise. He argued that a political and economic shift to a new classical liberalism was necessary in order to preserve the freedom of the American citizen. Whereas twentieth century liberalism had come to restrict individual freedom by its overwhelming reliance on the state, classical liberalism rejected centralized government in order to enlarge the role of the individual (Friedman, 1962). Friedman also wrote a paper titled “The role of government in education” (1962) in which he argued that the government should publicly fund a variety of schools available to all parents in order to encourage diversity and promote competition. His ideas have proved to be extremely influential in the education

reform movements of the post-industrialized world, and they continue to provide the rationale upon which many of these reforms are based (Harvey, 2005).

Organized offshoots of Friedman's school of thought include the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Hudson Institute in the United States; in Canada, the free-market oriented Fraser Institute is the best-known right-wing think tank with offices across the country. The Fraser Institute defines itself as an independent research and educational organization that aims to support greater choice, competitive markets, personal responsibility and less government intervention (Hepburn, 1999b). Like all of these organizations, the Fraser Institute seeks to promote Friedman's ideas surrounding individual freedom by advocating for more school choice, school privatization, and institutional accountability. Yet, counter to Friedman's objectives, these policies have actually succeeded in hindering individual freedom insofar as freedom is directly tied to economic prosperity. In such cases, those who do not succeed economically are anything but free.

This is evident in the authorization of the No-Child-Left-Behind Act of 2001 in the United States, which holds individual schools accountable for their own achievement and then allocates funds according to the relative success of the school. Here, competition is forcibly imposed on schools because it is directly tied to their sources of funding. Likewise, any alleged benefits of private education or school choice will only be experienced by those who can afford to compete. But this kind of competition is not unique to the United States, and many international scholars are sceptical of a growing

trend to frame education as a competitive arena. Along with American critics of competition and market-based school reform (Apple, 2005; Scheurich, 1994), Australian scholars Rizvi and Lingard (1996) reject this approach to (re)structuring education because it will inevitably reproduce inequalities. And in the UK, Halsey (1997) and Ball (1993) warn that social classes do not come to the market as equals, and therefore a market system in education would likely exacerbate social inequalities. Likewise, Canadian scholar Erika Shaker (1999) is sceptical of the effects that competitive education will have on equity and sees competition in education as an imminent threat to social programs in general. Hence, she also points to the assaults on other Canadian public programs in her overview of market-based choices in Canada's education system, although she does not discuss them explicitly.

This connection between educational public programs and public programs in general is very important. The scholarship that extends beyond the school itself—beyond meeting standards, improving quality, and increasing efficiency—is the most comprehensive scholarship for my own position in the privatization debate because it considers the social implications of privatization, not only the educational outcomes. American scholar James Joseph Scheurich (1994) does this especially well by viewing education as part of a larger social program. When he critiques educational reform, he makes sure to situate it within a greater social context. He identifies social regularities as the unmovable constraints at the foundation of social problems. These societal constraints that affect solutions to social problems are visible, but are perceived by policy-makers as unmovable. This is because

the framework within which the dominant society operates is informed by a worldview that maintains a narrow set of solutions (Scheurich).

This may seem contradictory where the solutions in market-based reform are apparently vast, including the possibility for private schools, publicly-funded charter schools, independent schools, publicly-funded vouchers to attend private schools, and corporate-sponsored public schools. But according to the market model, the underlying trend remains consistent, and that is taking away the government's responsibility for providing education and giving that responsibility to the individual. Hence, current educational solutions have two very important things in common. The first is to transfer educational responsibility to the individual (Molnar, 1996; Shaker, 1999), and the second is to create incentives for educational achievement that are primarily economic (Cuban, 2004; Boyles, 1998). For example, in the case of the voucher policy, which is commonly debated in American educational policy, the solution for the problem of under-performing public schools is to move individual students, along with their allocated funding, out of those schools.

2. 2. 2. The role of government

This brings us to the role of government in market-based school reform and the privatization of education. In these cases, the government seems to be admitting defeat of its own public policies by publicly funding private solutions. Yet, these same policies are intimately tied up in the permission of private solutions, and therefore a clear boundary cannot be drawn between “the state” and “the market”, just as it is difficult to separate

“public” and “private”. Thus, Roger Dale’s (1997) observation that the state’s role is changing *with* the market and not against it, is highly relevant. This is because either the state’s ideological commitments are to neoliberalism, or the state’s capacity to act has been limited in the present social and economic context (Dale, 1997).

Policies that reflect the state’s commitment to neoliberal views involve the decentralization of governing bodies as a means of giving more freedom—and therefore more responsibility—to the individual. Free trade and privatization are the most common policies advanced by neoliberalism, and they are opposed to the public regulation of goods and services on the grounds that more choice and stronger competition will increase efficiency and promote economic development. Neoliberalism’s emphasis on economic development leads most to describe it as a form of capitalism (Harvey, 2005). Yet, because it is not quite an economic theory but a political shift towards the privatization of responsibility, it can be more easily adopted by non-economic disciplines (Olssen, 2004). Hence Goodson’s (2007) claim that the global trend towards privatization and free trade has reached well beyond business and into the realm of public service, culture and education.

From the foregoing we can see how the dominant global, social and economic context is a driving force in the construction of public policies, which explains why we are currently witnessing a major shift towards individualism (Ball, 1993; Shaker, 1999) and economic bottom lines (Cuban, 2004; Boyles, 1998). This is why the state is unable to promote public education; it cannot prove itself as a better avenue for achieving

efficiency and responsiveness to the needs of business and industry (Whitty, 1998). The leading argument against government involvement in the school system is that the government is not as efficient as business when it comes to managing schools⁶. As Carlos Torres (1995-96) asks,

Why favor the market over the state? Neoconservatives consider markets more versatile and efficacious than the state's bureaucratic structures for a number of reasons. Markets respond more quickly to changes in technology and social demands than does the state. Markets are more efficient and cost-effective in providing services than public sectors, and market competition will produce greater accountability in 'social investments' than bureaucratic politics. (Torres, 1995-96, p. 282)

Nevertheless, American scholar John Smyth (1999) claims that "the only justification for the argument that there should be a shift from social to individual responsibility, is that governments have run out of political will and responsibility" (p. 440). Likewise, Shaker (1999) rejects that the government's abdication of responsibility can possibly reflect its *commitment* to education.

Still, much of the government's abdication of responsibility for education is welcomed by proponents of school choice theory and especially by market-based educational reformers. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a neoliberal revolt against existing public services that were viewed as inadequate (Hirsh, 2002). As a result, choice has become an important part of the context of educational change and supporters do not regard school choice as a platform for social inequalities, but rather as an opportunity to foster individuality. For example, in his report for the Organization for Economic

⁶ There is at least one major instance in which this argument has been proven wrong. In 2000, Edison Schools Inc. was established to privatize 133 public schools in the US on the basis that it could make a profit and still prove to deliver education more efficiently. The company failed tremendously with over \$250 million in losses. (Woodward, 2002)

Cooperation and Development (OECD), David Hirsh (2002) claims that “in understanding the character of demand for private provision, it is useful to distinguish the choice of private education as *different* schooling, from its choice as *better* schooling” (p. 14). And yet, proponents of school choice, such as the American Cato Institute, cite “a myriad of problems” such as “notoriously low academic achievement” in certain American public schools as the basis for affording students school choice through vouchers (Aud & Michos, 2006). Thus, choice can often be framed as an escape from a public system that is perceived as inadequate. Canadian scholars Erika Shaker (1999) and Janice Gross Stein (2002) view choice as another part of the individualistic, competitive, free market context that assumes the government cannot be sufficiently responsive to public need. But this is because the fundamental needs that are recognized as such are the needs of business, industry and the individual. Stein adds the important observation that the culture of choice is a part of the growing revolution of *rights* that accepts all individual decisions as individual rights. As I will describe in the following section, this increasing emphasis on individual rights has been observed by many scholars as an excuse to privilege the individual over anything else; but many argue that this is a result of a misunderstanding of individual rights.

2. 2. 3. Individual rights

During the past quarter century the language of individual rights—and not only in the United States—has become a central part of political rhetoric and public discussion to the point where individual rights consistently trump the sovereignty of the state (Stein, 2002). Moreover, there is a vast new range of interests that are being characterized as

fundamental rights. But as we will see in the following chapter, both Richard Pildes (1998) and Janice Gross Stein agree that rights cannot be conceived of as general trumps if we are to properly understand the role of centralized government in redistributing resources and providing social benefits. Instead, individual rights exist as a means of *informing* centralized government in order to improve the relationship between what the community needs and what the government is providing.

Communitarians try to emphasize this relationship by putting the social environment above private interest so that responsibilities are anchored in community (Glendon, 1995; Oaks, 2005). Dallin Oaks (1995) rightly claims that America's failure to address social problems stems from the fact that it has tried to promote most societal goals through rights with little attention to responsibilities. This is a valuable platform for my own argument. However, throughout some of the communitarian literature, the "moral values" that constitute the community tend to be quite conservative. For example, communitarian Robert Bellah's (1995) critique of the "great emphasis on independence and individuality in American society" refers more to non-traditional lifestyles than it does to neoliberal conceptions of individual responsibility.

Nevertheless, communitarian scholar Mary Glendon (1995) makes a useful link between American and Canadian constitutional rights. She points out that what distinguishes the United States from other liberal democracies is that constitutional rights existed for over a century before the liberal regulatory welfare state was established. Glendon argues that this often enables individual rights to trump collective responsibilities according to

federal law. In Canada, however, the foundations of the welfare system were in place before national constitutional rights were established, and yet, we eventually decided to adopt the American model of judicial review, putting constitutional rights before welfare rights. It should come as no surprise that this happened in 1982, at a time when competitive individualism was being born out of Thatcher-era policies that aimed to reduce the role of the state in the British economy (Ball, 1993). Both the American influence over Canadian judicial law and the impact of British economic policy on Canadian politics are examples of the strong global forces at work in the construction of Canada's own political ideology.

2. 2. 4. Democracy and politics of education

Australian scholars Carr and Harnett (1996) agree that the Thatcher era brought about a return to market forces, individual responsibility and economic freedom, and also that it reduced political motivations to self-interest, in the UK as well as in other liberal-democratic and postindustrial societies such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. The emergence of a new neoliberal political ideology in the 1980s meant that major political problems were defined in terms of economic and moral decline, while the issue of equality was painted as the cause of these problems (Carr & Harnett, 1996). Carr and Harnett regard this as a new kind of democracy—from classical liberal to neoliberal democracy—because it has changed the meaning of the word democracy in all democratic countries. In neoliberal democracy, the political agenda revolves around the protection of the liberty of individuals where “the individual is prior to society and has a higher moral value and political importance than any collective entity or group” (Carr

and Harnett, p. 46). In turn, these fundamental political values, which privilege individual wants and desires, come to inform arguments about education.

The relationship between political ideology and educational policy is very close, yet many educational scholars are witnessing what they call a de-politicization of education through the free market model (Apple, 2005; Macedo, 1995; Reid, 2005). Although he does not necessarily disagree with privatization, school choice and the decentralization of education, Stephen Macedo (1995) takes issue with the lack of public discussion surrounding these undeniably political policy directions. He wants to acknowledge the political implications of educational policy directions, and he thinks this is necessary in order to have shared political power so that the public can openly discuss how that power is being directed. Yet, in a situation that gives unfettered legitimacy to neoliberal dogma, it is becoming more and more difficult to find a political space in which to challenge neoliberal policies. This, argues Chantal Mouffe (2000), represents a serious threat to democratic institutions. Thus, failing to think about educational reforms politically undermines the democratic aspect of education as a public institution. Yet, if we accept Carr and Harnett's view that the concept of democracy has shifted to serve the individual, then we can see how conceptions of education might also shift to accommodate individual interest, even if according to neoliberalism schools are still considered to be fundamentally democratic institutions. Whether or not they are supposed to be democratic institutions is another deeply political issue that needs to be addressed if we are even going to begin to solve educational problems (Labaree, 1997). This brings us to the very important question of educational purposes.

2. 2. 5. The purposes of education

The purpose and nature of education has been a topic of debate in America for over a century (Hursh, 2008). Several key goals for education have been expressed as dominant in the education system.⁷ (1) Education serves to foster democratic equality and prepares students to become involved citizens (Labaree (1997); Hursh, 2008). (2) Education aims to train a skilled workforce and to promote social efficiency (Labaree); a variation of this goal is that education serves corporate interests (Hursh). (3) Education facilitates personal growth and potential (Hursh; Egan, 2001); a variation of this goal is that education aims to prepare individuals to compete for social positions and to increase social mobility (Labaree). (4) Education is a means of socializing the young (Egan); and finally, (5) education has the role of shaping the mind by a disciplined academic curriculum (Egan). These do not even capture all purported educational purposes, but what is evident is that there are a diversity of goals for education. For educational scholars Kieran Egan and David Labaree, the fact that they are centred around fundamentally different ideas means that they are almost certain to conflict. For example, some of the goals listed above serve private interests, others serve public interests, and many hinge on divergent conceptions of democracy (Hursh). It is no wonder that Egan and Labaree site the incompatibility of educational goals as one of the underlying reasons why we have educational problems in the first place.

⁷ I acknowledge the distinction between educational goals and ideals that Fenstermacher (2000) makes, but since some of the authors on whose work my discussion relies use the terms interchangeably, I will bracket this discussion here. I will use “goals,” “aims” and “purposes” interchangeably, and all in the sense of “ideals” as defined by Fenstermacher.

Taking the example of the British Columbia public school system, it is evident that many of the goals listed above are identifiable not only in American education, but in Canadian education as well. The mission statement of public K-12 schooling in B.C. reads: “The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.” In this mission statement, democratic citizenship and the training of a skilled workforce are positioned alongside the development of “individual potential.” It is this latter goal that, according to Larabee, is increasingly narrowed to the development and realization of individual *economic* potential. The goal of realizing individual potential *for participation in the market*, Hursh adds, fosters a different kind of “democracy”; “market forms of democracy focus not on the decision-making process but on tallying individual preferences” (p. 505). Hence, as marketization in education increases, the social mobility goal is rapidly coming to dominate the others. And, in a political context, this can make it very difficult to defend the other goals because “[the social mobility goal] provides us with the language we use to talk about schools, the ideas we use to justify their existence, and the practices we mandate in promoting their reform” (Labaree, p. 43), including an alternate conception of democracy upon which we might base “public participation”. Evidently, the democratic goals of education are being overshadowed by an ascendancy of private interest.

For example, Canadian journalist and writer Naomi Klein (2000) observes the effects on the democratic goals of education by the influx of corporate involvement in Canadian

universities. She aptly claims that democracy is at stake when commercial interests begin to cloud educational goals. Although much of her focus is on higher education, her evaluation of market forces that make their way into the Canadian education system demonstrates that Canada is not above conceiving of its students as consumers, which we will see is a problematic model for education as a public good. Although I will not be addressing corporate involvement, the trend that students are increasingly regarded as consumers of education is central in the argument against the privatization of education.

British scholar Stephen Ball (1993) also warns that we are working towards a consumer rather than a citizenship society. He observes that the market model is being privileged to the extent that those agencies seen as inhibiting market relations are removed. According to this view, education is operating primarily to develop a global producer and consumer who will serve the needs of the global knowledge economy (Goodson, 2007). Here, persons are no longer viewed as citizens, but as economic agents whose behaviour is of interest only insofar as it relates to the national or global economy. Critics recognize these market strategies and point to serious oversights on the part of major international organizations, as well as individual nation states that want to use education only as an economic tool (Labaree, 1997; Shaker, 1999; Reid, 2005). On the other hand, some scholars conclude that, if education is being used as an economic tool, then its purpose must be to serve as an economic tool (Grace, 1989). This simple logic is too often accepted as true because of the pervasive view of education as a commodity; however, it fails to consider alternative goals for education as a public good.

How we define our purposes for education will inevitably affect the way that we structure our education system, and it will influence the order of our educational priorities. In Canada, there is a growing emphasis on the economic importance of universal education, but less on the potential for universal education to be socially equitable. There is an increased awareness of the “need” to keep up with global innovation and technological change, but a decreased interest in cultivating democratic citizenship (Sears, 2003).

These changes are one piece of the “broad-ranging neoliberal agenda that aims to push the market deeper into every aspect of our lives by eliminating or shrinking non-market alternatives” (Sears, 2003, p. 3). The neoliberal agenda is broad-ranging in that it crosses both political and geographical boundaries. The present educational context in Canada as well as the priorities emerging from that context should be considered in relation to neighbouring standards of education, as the current global political environment doubtlessly influences the priorities and concerns of parents across Canada. Likewise, the history of Canada’s educational development reveals how neoliberalism entered the scene and changed the purposes of education to meet economic ends.

2. 2. 6. Conclusion

The historical and international scholarship presented in this chapter provides a clear description of current educational directions in Canada and abroad. The original contexts of Canadian private and public education illustrate how Canada has chosen to define its purposes for education. The persistent shift from education for the few to education for all at the turn of the 18th century shows a long-standing commitment to support the growth and participation of all Canadian citizens, and yet education for the few continues

to exist. The Canadian and international research on the politics of education helps to explain the reasons for such an inconsistency, but those reasons remain contested.

In the following chapter, I will consider the philosophical concepts that underlie the debate about private education. I will examine the concepts of atomism, shared goods, individual rights, and collective responsibility through the work of theorists who oppose the general neoliberal direction in which the post-industrial world is moving. These concepts are vital in the argument against private education because they lie at the foundation of our educational goals, and how we construct those goals depends on the way in which these terms are defined. I will also explain how neoliberalism is a dominant metanarrative in the post-industrial world and explore the ways in which the power structures that are created by neoliberalism are maintained and legitimated.

Chapter Three

3. 0. Introduction

The issues at the foundation of the debate for or against the privatization of education hinge on a number of key concepts. It is necessary to articulate these concepts before moving into any substantial argument about education specifically, because they not only apply to education, but are fundamentally socially and politically determined. In other words, the interpretation of such concepts depends on essential convictions about the role of society and government in issues of social justice and equity.

The work of the theorists and philosophers discussed in this chapter provides a critical lens through which, in the next chapter, I will consider the issue of privatization in education. Looking at the concepts of atomism, shared goods, individual rights, collective responsibility, metanarratives, and power structures, this chapter positions my argument within an already critical perspective on the current social and political context of post-industrial societies such as Canada and the United States. These concepts and the theories developed around them challenge common assumptions about the individual so that the value of the collective is recognized in a new light.

First, an exceedingly atomistic conception of the individual must be challenged to establish that humans are not independent creatures. Second, an understanding of how shared goods are produced and maintained is necessary in order to acknowledge the immeasurable value of our interdependence. Third, an explanation of how individual

rights are frequently misconceived describes how our presumed independence misinforms the actions we are allowed to take; and finally, the notion of collective responsibility provides a moral framework for understanding and acting on our interdependence. Unfortunately, assuming collective responsibility is difficult to accept under the present neoliberal conditions, because these conditions reinforce highly atomistic conceptions of the individual. Therefore, the concept of the metanarrative serves to position neoliberalism as a product of popular discourse as opposed to an inherently legitimate political movement, and an explication of socio-political power structures illustrates how neoliberalism in particular remains a dominant metanarrative.

Charles Taylor, Richard Pildes, Janice Gross Stein, and Henry Giroux help to define the overarching conceptual problem by illustrating how neoliberal ideals are firmly embedded in the dominant contemporary view of society. They describe a society in which individuals are extracted from their social, cultural and economic conditions to the extent that they are held personally accountable for all of their actions while simultaneously responsible to no one. As a consequence, privileging private interest is legitimized by the grim reality that the concept of a public interest is rapidly deteriorating. To demonstrate why resistance to the problem presented above is so difficult, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault provide a framework for identifying how the dominant worldview is perpetuated. Lyotard shows that this worldview privileges economic values above all, and Foucault expresses how social obedience can often be masked as individual liberty. Both of these criticisms describe how individuals are invariably shaped by and evaluated according to dominant discourses and social

practices that make up the mainstream. It is these discourses and practices that must be magnified in order to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which certain individuals become more advantaged than others. These factors are important because they determine what we perceive as valuable.

In this chapter we will see how our heavily neoliberal society finds more value in economic efficiency than it does in any shared notion of responsibility for social welfare or equity. Unfortunately, many theorists claim that the highly political nature of neoliberal policies is trivialized to the extent that resistance is perceived as unimaginable, undesirable and almost impossible. Therefore, it is argued that neoliberalism, and the individualistic worldview that it portrays, is not a trivial matter.

3. 1. Charles Taylor on atomism and shared goods

Charles Taylor is a Canadian philosopher whose philosophy of social science and politics underscores the issues at the centre of neoliberal politics. In discussing the nature of social goods as well as social contract theory, Taylor (1985) takes aim at social atomism, which gives priority to the individual and her rights over society as a whole. The atomist view is well represented by neoliberal articulations of the individual as the primary beneficiary of her own actions. The individual becomes responsible for and accountable to herself and only herself, while society plays a largely instrumental role in fulfilling any desires that she may not be able to satisfy alone. This individualistic view of society, according to Taylor, is based on atomistic assumptions about social relations. Although atomism is fundamentally ontological, it has significant ethical consequences. This is

why Taylor chooses to challenge atomism in particular. He wants to show how the very foundation upon which individualism relies, is ontologically impossible. To do this, he makes use of Wittgenstein's language theory. Taylor (1995) likens the social fabric of a community to a language in that it constitutes more than the sum of its parts. "A language is created and sustained in the continuing interchanges that take place in a certain linguistic community" (p. 134). That is, it elicits another dimension that cannot be reduced to the number of words that it contains; this dimension can be described as a code or a mutual understanding that situates each speech act within a particular context. Without such a context, the speech act would have no meaning. Similarly, Taylor argues that the individual experiences more than a series of isolated events, and that these events become meaningful only against a background of collective practices and understandings. In this way, neither language nor social relations can be boiled down to words or plain events. They cannot be conceived of as reducible to their parts because they simultaneously produce and rely on mutual understandings as they remain active.

Social atomism, by contrast, comes from the notion that social goods are "decomposable", that all wholes can be broken down into parts, and that society is ultimately made up of individuals. Taylor's problem with this view is twofold: the first is that it is ontologically unsound, and the second is that it calculates value judgments like a science (or, if you will, an economy) and is therefore ethically volatile. Social atomism has formed the basis for the contemporary view of welfarism, which is a version of utilitarianism that tends to observe moral and social questions (the "good") with an economic lens ("welfare"). That means that the benefits of social goods are calculated

according to their utilitarian potential, and not in terms of any intrinsic moral worth.

Utilitarianism is fundamentally committed to atomism because it depends on the reducibility of social goods in order to quantify them. We begin to see how closely liberalism is linked to atomism if we consider how heavily liberalism has relied on utilitarianism as an influential strand of philosophical thought in politics over the last three centuries (Taylor, 1995).

Nevertheless, Taylor's rejection of atomism does not imply a complete rejection of liberal individualism (Mulhall, 2004). This is because Taylor's critique of atomist visions of liberal individualism addresses how freedom and rights can be wrongly conceptualized, and he concludes that atomism is in fact incompatible with—rather than an indispensable feature of—liberal individualism. The critical element lacking in an atomist view of liberal individualism is a concern for the community. This broader understanding of rights that span beyond the individual can and should exist within liberal individualism, says Taylor, if only for ontological reasons, but more importantly for ethical ones. Hence, “the transition he advocates is one internal to liberalism rather than one designed to move us beyond that tradition” (Mulhall, 2004, p. 112). In fact, Taylor labels himself a “holist individualist,” “a trend of thought internal to liberalism that is fully aware of the social embedding of the human agents whose individual liberty it values so highly” (Mulhall, 2004, p. 114).

Although he is frequently considered a communitarian, he is uncomfortable with this label because it implies a complete and distinct ontological position for both liberals and

communitarians that he considers too narrow. Indeed, there are elements of the communitarian perspective that Taylor wants to endorse, such as the communitarian emphasis on a common identification of “the good” and the consideration of communal rather than individual identities. However, he recognizes the complexity of the debate between liberals and communitarians and holds that there are many levels that can accommodate parts of both camps. Hence, he is interested in the mixed category of “holist-individualists” because it represents an important part of the development of what he calls modern liberalism. Holist-individualism takes from both communitarian and liberal traditions; it denotes “a trend of thought that is fully aware of the (ontological) social embedding of human agents but, at the same time, prizes liberty and individual differences very highly” (Taylor, 1995, p. 185).

The more atomistic liberal tradition with which Taylor takes issue is what he calls procedural liberalism. This is the tradition that is prominent in the United States and that is aligned with neoliberal characterizations of society. Although there is in procedural liberalism an understanding of the importance of the collective, this notion is very heavily based on an instrumental view of society; moreover, any vision of “the good” is only collective to the extent that each individual has a right to her own conception of what counts as good. These models of collectivity are not what Taylor identifies as the necessary basis for common action and common identity. Instead, they declare the neutrality of all possible versions of “the good life” without choosing one, and thus anything “common” can only be understood in terms of rights and not in terms of the good (Taylor, 1995). Thus, procedural liberalism only seeks convergent goods and “I-

identities”, as opposed to shared goods and “we-identities” (a discussion to which I will return in the next chapter). Shared goods are important because they facilitate a way of acting which is qualitatively different when it is acted out of shared significance (Taylor, 1985). Taylor describes this kind of acting together as akin to a secret strength that emerges out of the iconic citizen republic in which “the laws are significant not *qua* mine, but *qua* ours; what gives them their importance for me is not that they are a rule *I* have adopted” (p. 96). In other words, shared goods are what Taylor calls the essentialities of a community. They are stronger than private goods because they are held by many people in common, which means that their significance transcends the individuals who uphold them.

Public goods are shared goods because they also have the quality of collectively benefiting citizens, and creating a sense of security and participation in a democratic society (Labaree, 1997). However, shared goods are not always public goods, because not all things that are valued in common act as a public good for the benefit of all. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that the benefits of public goods can also be economic, as mentioned in the introduction. Creating the conditions that support an abundant and contented workforce has positive effects for the whole community, as we will see in Chapter Four.

Without an understanding of a concept of shared or public goods, it becomes reasonable to give primacy to the rights of individuals over society. But Taylor insists that a “free” society—that is, one that respects individual rights—requires sacrifices and demands

discipline from its members, obligations that are necessarily derived from a shared vision of the public good. In other words, “asserting rights itself involves acknowledging an obligation to belong” (Taylor, 1985, p. 200). Yet, the modern western trend has been to conceive of the freedom of the individual as necessarily unrelated to society. Political philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1969) calls this withdrawal from society “negative liberty”. In contrast to “positive liberty”—the freedom to be one’s own master—“negative liberty” has the goal of warding off interference, which might be better understood as the freedom from coercion by others. While Berlin does not espouse either concept of liberty, his critique of negative liberty accentuates how procedural liberalism separates the individual from the collective, precluding all possibility for solidarity and mutual understanding. Hence, the view that other people can only obstruct individual freedom is disastrous for any society. Moreover, the individual in such a case is personally accountable for her actions as if society has not been a formative influence. But this is a result of the way in which the relationship between the individual and society is conceptualized. In a neoliberal society, for example, the concept of the social signifies an opportunity for profit more than it serves as a means of interdependence and security, and consequently, the benefits of having publicly funded institutions do not seem so important.

If the intimate relationship between society and the individual is not properly acknowledged, then collective responsibility becomes hard to imagine. The struggle to find meaning in the concept of collective responsibility is difficult as shared goods become private, because private goods, convergent goods, and “I-identities” do little to generate a shared significance that will have the effect of strengthening the social fabric

of the community. On the contrary, if individual freedom represents a negative liberty, detachment from the constraints of society—and most of those constraints exist in one way or another as a form of support for society's members—then collective responsibility and individual freedom become mutually exclusive. The irony is that individual freedom and the rights of individuals are not possible, and cannot be protected, without the strength of the greater community. As Berlin remarks, “men are largely independent, and yet no man's activity is so completely private as never to obstruct the lives of others in any way” (p. 198). Not only are we intimately related to the social whole to the extent that our actions *will be* limited and influenced by others, but as such, we are obligated to act with the knowledge that our own actions will reach beyond ourselves. Therefore, individual rights are not wholly individual instruments.

3. 2. Richard Pildes and Janice Gross Stein on individual rights

Similarly, American legal scholar Richard Pildes (1998) also challenges the assumption that individual rights are intended for the individual in the first place. By contrast, he claims that the American constitutional rights of individuals are in place as a means of securing rights for the public good. They are not in place for atomistic purposes, to defend one individual's rights, but they exist *for the benefit of others* who share similar experiences, as a means of adapting government practices to better serve the public good. According to this view, individual rights are misinterpreted when responsibility is shifted from the government to the individual. This is because “rights are not general trumps against appeals to the common good or anything else; instead, they are better understood as channeling the *kinds of reasons* government can invoke when it acts in certain arenas”

(Pildes, 1998, p. 729). In other words, individual rights exist as a means of *informing* centralized government in order to improve the relationship between what the community needs and what the government is providing.

This is a good starting point for accomplishing what Taylor suggests, and moving beyond the opposition between individual and collectivist views of society towards an understanding of the individual as a participant *within* the greater collective. But such a model of citizen participation⁸ is deteriorating as the price of participation becomes very high. That is, the participation model requires that all citizens have some part in forming a ruling consensus and identifying with the political setting: acknowledging a “we-identity” as Taylor calls it. Yet, consensus takes time and compromise, both of which can conflict with economic efficiency and individual freedom. This view depends, of course, on where a particular individual is situated on the scale of wealth and power. For many, the possibility for citizen participation actually facilitates material gains and a political voice, but for some, it is regarded as a violation of individual freedom due to its consideration of majoritarian preference. One such example is seen in the debate regarding hospital waiting times. Those who can afford to pay for shorter waiting times are held back by the majority of patients who rely on free public healthcare. While they could easily pay for faster private healthcare, they are required to wait along with everyone else because the system is structured in such a way that it is more equitable for everyone to follow the same rules. Thus, attention to private interest makes way for

⁸ Pildes cites Taylor as asserting that “Canadian culture has traditionally been organized around the model of citizen participation and that the American model of rights poses a threat to that tradition” (p. 728), but Pildes wants to show that the American model of rights should be similar in theory, only it has been commonly misinterpreted. This also has implications for the way in which Canadians come to mis/interpret our own model.

neoliberal policies that help to alleviate the restrictions placed on the individual by the state. But perhaps this would be more aptly rephrased as alleviating restrictions placed on the *privileged* individual.

For example, in her discussion of how rights are derived, Canadian political science scholar Janice Gross Stein (2002) argues that rights hardly matter if citizens lack the material means to exercise them. Hence, access to education and health care are what Stein calls positive substantive rights that need to be provided for before other individual rights can be exercised at all. In this sense, rights do not constitute individual protection from state control in the way that they have been popularly construed, but rather, “they require social and political supports” (Stein, p. 209), which can be provided by government institutions. The restrictions put in place by the government serve to ensure that rights to education and health care are being met; when they are removed or reduced, by way of privatization for example, the question of social and political support becomes more cloudy. Exactly who is obligated to ensure that positive substantive rights are being met so that each citizen will be capable of exercising any of her individual rights in the first place? What constitutes adequate positive substantive rights? And who decides this?

These are just some of the considerations missing from the argument that minimizing state control will increase individual freedom. In order to ensure the universal provision of these rights, there must be a central body that can be held accountable to the public, and to which the public is also accountable: the state. Both Pildes (1998) and Stein (2002) argue that the state cannot be erased and remains a powerful force in the implementation

and dissemination of these policies: “the state may be less visible, but it is present. It remains the guardian of the quality of public goods, the “voice” of the public, and the standard-bearer of the public interest” (Stein, 2002, p. 67). Secondly, individual freedom and collective responsibility are not mutually exclusive; and finally, there are *new* restrictions placed on the individual when the state takes a step back from intervening in community affairs. These restrictions are most tangibly felt by those who do not hold a position of privilege, and yet they go largely unnoticed by those who are not affected by them, because, as we will see below, they are viewed as individual problems.

In the context of education, for example, this individualistic worldview applies not only to policy-makers and politicians; as will be shown in Chapter Four, other stakeholders in education, such as parents, students, teachers and administrators can propagate individualistic values in their expectations for education. Furthermore, as Chapter Five illustrates, critics of education—the general public that chooses to take part in discussions about education—also have a hand in perpetuating a discourse about education that normalizes certain policies while scrutinizing others. As neoliberal discourse becomes more and more commonplace, society openly accepts individualism as the “normal” way of seeing the world, and the value of social welfare is diminished, even in our traditionally most socially responsible institutions such as education and healthcare. And as a result of a prevalent discourse of individualism, these sentiments are portrayed as rational responses to the “survival of the fittest” scenario that neoliberalism presents to us.

One prominent part of the discourse of individualism is the topic of choice. The quintessential expression of individual freedom since the rights revolution began has been the right to choice. But Stein (2002) illustrates how the right to choice is particularly complex because it is a right that is inevitably at odds with other rights. Although choice is fundamental to liberal democratic theory and practice, and carries tremendous instrumental importance, it is talked about in two very distinct ways. The first considers the end result of choice, with a keen interest in the values at stake, while the second imagines inherent value in the right to choose, independent of its outcomes. This second version of choice ignores Pildes' description of the purpose of rights that is *for the benefit of others* and therefore cannot aim to serve the public good, nor does it depend on any common vision of "the good life", as expressed by Taylor. Thus, the larger social context is irrelevant if we have an inherent right to choice, and the project of choice becomes strictly individual (Stein, 2002).

Appeals to choice that are made only in the name of choice itself continue to masquerade as the same rights discourse that seeks to enhance equality and protect difference, but they are not the same. The former has no criteria upon which to base its appeal other than the appeal itself. In essence, rights conceived of in this way cannot be challenged, and consequently, any common conception of the good becomes less important than the rights bearer herself. In fact, this unconditional individual right to choice has been largely observed as the norm, where, "during the past quarter century, the concept of individual human rights that trump the sovereignty of the state has become an accepted part of political rhetoric and public conversation" (Stein, 2002, p. 61). Even the government

participates in this growing discourse of individualism. In fact, one of the core tenets of the neoliberal project has been to disembed capital from the constraints of the state (Harvey, 2005), which means that state interventions in market activities are minimized. This also means that neoliberalization *depends* on the state to remove itself from the market. In Canada, and especially in the United States, the government has come to welcome the idea of privatization and market models in the hopes that efficiency will increase as competition rises. Also operating in the interest of capital, however, the government has undeniably reduced its own obligations to the welfare of citizens by trading state regulations for market freedom. Therefore, that the state has turned toward markets to deliver public goods is what Stein ironically calls the radical innovation of our time (p. 66). The “public” nature of such goods remains to be seen.

3. 3. Henry Giroux on collective responsibility

Critical theorist Henry Giroux (2004) is equally aghast by the implications of the market as the distributor of public goods. In his profound critique of neoliberalism, specifically in the United States, he makes a similar observation about the delivery of public goods in a market-driven society. In his book, *The Terror of Neoliberalism* (2004), he argues that neoliberalism is attacking all things social. This is because the market disrupts social solidarities and transforms public services and goods into a luxury in a way that undermines the belief that public goods are basic human rights. The most acute problem, for Giroux, is that neoliberalism creates—and has been successful in selling—a new public pedagogy akin to the discourse of individualism that Taylor (1995), Pildes (1998) and Stein (2002) also challenge. Giroux goes further to say that the social is not only seen

as secondary to the individual in a neoliberal society, but that a concept of the social outside of the logic of the market is actually now becoming impossible to imagine. “The social”, in the case of market logic, denotes an instrument by which consumerism is advanced, rather than a sentiment or principle of solidarity and collective struggle. Yet, without a properly cooperative, compassionate and non-competitive notion of the social, any advance toward equity is also impossible.

Tackling issues of equity requires an expectation that political and social transformation is possible. Presumably, this has always been the purpose of the democratic project, but Giroux cautions that neoliberalism offers no such expectations. He claims that “civic engagement now appears impotent as corporations privatize public space and disconnect power from issues of equity, social justice and civic responsibility” (2004, p. xvi). This common neoliberal scenario is allowed by a refusal to acknowledge the political nature and far-reaching social consequences of the issue of privatization. In other words, the concept of the political is trivialized. The result is that neoliberal policies such as privatization terrorize “left” politics by removing the space in which the left can be imagined:

This is a discourse that wants to squeeze out ambiguity from public space, to dismantle the social provisions and guarantees provided by the welfare state, and to eliminate democratic politics by making the notion of the social impossible to imagine beyond the isolated consumer and the logic of the market. (Giroux, 2004, p.107)

The implications of this kind of discourse are disastrous for publicly provided programs and institutions. Not only is there a trend toward the privatization of publicly provided goods and services that threatens the possibility for equal universal access, but there is a

corresponding sentiment that publicly provided goods and services are a waste of time. By that logic, so is “creating democratic culture and communities that are attentive to the problems of homelessness, hunger, censorship, media manipulation, and rampant individualism and greed” (1992, p. 5), because these problems require extensive public discussion and most likely a significant amount time to work through.

Indeed, the issue of problems, how they are derived and how they are proposed to be solved, reveals a great deal about the tenets of neoliberalism. Giroux (2004) observes that problems are increasingly considered private rather than public in nature, an indication of the growing significance of personal accountability in all social struggles. He calls this a “ruthless social Darwinism” that pretends the struggles of the weakest members of society are natural and therefore entertains only “the most limited notions of solidarity and collective struggle” (p. xv). Of course, social struggles are inevitable, but that they must only be acknowledged on an individual basis, or that they are reserved for the weakest members of society, are assumptions that directly contradict the fundamental tenets of democracy as Giroux (1992) understands it:

Democracy is both a discourse and a practice that produces particular narratives and identities informed by the principles of freedom, equality and social justice. It is expressed not in moral platitudes but in concrete struggles and practices that find expression in classroom social relations, everyday life, and memories of resistance and struggle. (p. 5)

Hence, neoliberalism’s continuous retreat from all things public is damaging the meaning of—as well as the possibility for—collective struggle. A veritable democracy appreciates the incommensurabilities of social life and the incessant struggle that they invite because these form the basis of civic engagement, without which no notion of shared

responsibility for the wider community would be possible. Thus, without an adequate democratic discourse, we continue to see the result of a public pedagogy that seeks to create a culture of individualism.

3. 4. Lyotard on the legitimization of knowledge

What we have instead is a public discourse that is in effect extremely narrow and exclusionary. French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's (1979/1984) critique of "the postmodern condition" helps to explain the significance of discourse for political engagement. He describes the dominant discourse as a "metanarrative" that determines the parameters of what counts as legitimate knowledge. In the postmodern condition—the condition in which postindustrial societies such as Canada find themselves—Lyotard observes one predominant metanarrative: that of efficiency and productivity. The central criterion in the current metanarrative is performativity, the economic calculation of input-output ratios, which overwhelmingly homogenizes the sociopolitical realm by shutting out forms of knowledge that don't measure up to the performativity criterion. Knowledge can no longer be legitimated for its own sake, but must be shown to contribute to "the optimization of the system's performance" (p. 47).

Lyotard's articulation of the problem of a homogenized method of legitimation is a helpful way of conceptualizing the issue of de-politicized and unchallenged policy directions such as the growing move toward privatization. His emphasis on language as a channel for sustaining the hegemonic production and evaluation of knowledge is applicable to an assessment of policy directions because it challenges that which is taken

for granted and easily justified by popular criteria. Like Henry Giroux (2004), Lyotard argues that common sense is not a sufficient criterion for legitimating all knowledge because it is built by the common language, which often lacks a self-reflective and self-critical vocabulary. Yet, popular language remains a powerful influence on dominant ways of knowing.

Its influence is why language, as both a metaphor and as a literal conduit for knowledge, is the lens through which Lyotard discusses the condition of knowledge. He chooses to use Wittgenstein's theory of language games to analyze this condition because he suspects that legitimacy is not inherent to privileged forms of knowledge in the same way that it is not inherent to the accepted rules of language games. Rather, language games are commonly understood rules of communication, and they are contingent in the sense that they are not inherently known, but culturally learned. Likewise, the rules of language are more commanding than the words themselves; without rules, words would be incomprehensible. As seen above, Charles Taylor (1995) also invokes language games to highlight the presence of rules that often go unnamed but that perform a crucial role in the relationships and actions between players. For Taylor, as well as for Lyotard (1979/1984), it is the implicitness of these rules that is at issue, and failing to acknowledge them as defining factors in the construction of social norms makes challenging them an impossible task. Thus, the problem for Lyotard is one of blindly accepted legitimacy and how language helps to create and sustain it. After all, the adversary of which he speaks is "the accepted language" (p. 10), or the "metanarrative."

The trouble with a metanarrative is that it uses a totalizing set of criteria to legitimize knowledge. The grand narrative of modern science, for example, relies on verification, consensus and consistency in order to assess its competence and truth-value (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 24), and modern knowledge as a whole serves to evaluate “truth” objectively based on a commitment to a shared metanarrative. For Lyotard, the significance of the metanarrative is that it is dangerously totalizing; it aims to stabilize a system which is necessarily fraught with conflict. But perhaps more remarkably, it can be generally taken for granted as the natural state of things. In fact, it may be taken for granted so much so that it is not recognized as a metanarrative. The postmodern condition is acclaimed for its resistance toward metanarratives, the unwillingness to accept a single, unifying version of the truth, whether religious or scientific, and yet Lyotard shows how this is only an illusion. He argues that the performativity criterion has become a new metanarrative that relies on efficiency and productivity as a measure of “truth”, and we can see that neoliberalism adopts the same criterion. For example, capitalism, which emphasises the rights of individuals, tends to reject totalization on the basis that it restricts individual mobility; and yet, due to prevailing capitalist doctrine, almost everything is calculated according to a narrow principle of cost-cutting because of the overwhelming primacy of economic efficiency. Similarly, neoliberalism rejects total government control over the economy on the grounds that power and freedom of choice should be granted more liberally to the individual. Yet, as economic control shifts from government regulation to private enterprise in a neoliberal economy, the liberty of the individual also shifts into the hands of private enterprise. Hence, the principal difference

in these shifts is in the criteria that legitimate knowledge and not in any move away from a totalizing system.

In a totalizing system, other disciplines must surrender their own criteria of legitimation to the dominant ones; science, ethics and aesthetics are now predominantly evaluated based on criteria of performativity. The implications are similarly dim for politics.

Although neoliberalism is a political movement, its policies are entirely wrapped up in the quest for performativity, to the point that they are legitimated only according to the criterion of performativity and not according to any criteria inherent to politics. Politics, for Lyotard, is the possibility to oppose socially dominant “regimes of phrases” as he comes to explain in *The Differend* (1988) (Warren, 1996). It is the “potential for contestability” that exists within most social relations precisely because it “indicates a breakdown of social regulations and an absence spurred by incommensurabilities” (Warren, 1996, p. 246). Thus, politics, for Lyotard—and as we have also seen for Giroux (2004) and Mouffe (2000)—necessarily involves the principle of opposition that he speaks of in the beginning of *The Postmodern Condition*, and yet performativity tries to deny that principle in an effort to represent society as an integrated whole. Given that conflict and opposition are also notoriously inefficient, they are strictly avoided in a scenario that privileges the principle of performativity. Thus, using quantifiable, economic criteria for problem-solving appears to be a more effective strategy than relying on ambiguous principles like justice and equity.

According to political philosopher John Gray (2000), this kind of strategy is favourable because the economy operates in such a way that it need not reconcile opposing value theories. Therefore, there is a component of justice to the market in that:

The institutions of the market advance human well-being to the extent that they enable individuals and communities with different or incompatible goals and interests to trade with one another to mutual advantage. This classic defence of market institutions can be given another formulation. Individuals and communities animated by rival and (in part) incommensurable values can interact in markets without needing to reconcile these rival conceptions of the good. (p.18)

This can be useful in a value-pluralist society, but it provides a very narrow representation of justice, one that is inextricably tied to the market. Gray claims that a theory of justice that supports differing conceptions of the good cannot exist. For, “if we differ about the good life, we are bound to differ about justice and rights” (p.19). In other words, this semblance of mutual advantage in market relations does not foster social justice, it simply overlooks irreconcilable social ideals in favour of common economic pursuits. Thus, economic language becomes the standard of evaluating what is good because it is most convenient to do so. In this sense, economic language becomes a Lyotardian metanarrative: it is the dominant discourse that defines and legitimates a hegemonic worldview.

Giroux’s (2004) claim that “neoliberalism wages an attack on democracy” (p. xiii) is not unrelated to the view that the prevailing metanarrative of performativity is obstructing political participation and critical engagement. Like Giroux, Lyotard also invokes the concept of terror to illustrate the severity of such rigid systems of legitimation. That the free market is now “the organizing principle” for all things social, political and economic,

has alarming implications for the possibility of achieving social equity. Again, at issue is not only how dominant ways of speaking might disregard the question of equity, but how such metanarratives actually inhibit the very possibility of speaking otherwise. Equity for equity's sake comes to the same impasse as knowledge for its own sake. Neither equity nor knowledge can be evaluated according to criteria internal to themselves because the criterion of performativity is proving to constitute a metalanguage through which other languages are frequently transcribed and evaluated. Even the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which condemns neoliberal policies, frequently cites "efficiency", alongside "equity", as a benefit of publicly-funded services. Thus, it seems equity cannot stand alone as a legitimate objective in policy directions; in fact, it has become very difficult to assess anything in terms that are not essentially performative.

3. 5. Foucault on power and knowledge

French social philosopher Michel Foucault (1977/1984) also discusses constructed forms of knowledge, but his analysis revolves around the concept of "truth" and its relationship to power. Instead of metanarratives or "regimes of phrases", Foucault uses the phrase "regimes of truth". Like Lyotard's metanarratives, regimes of truth are the ordered procedures by which a said truth is preserved and reinforced as absolute. In this sense, truth, like knowledge, is inevitably constructed by dominant discourses. The dominance of particular forms of legitimation of knowledge and truth is not unique to postmodern societies:

Each society has its regimes of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means

by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1984, p. 73)

What is important is to recognize these regimes and to identify the specific political and economic roles that they play, who they are serving, how they are framed by cultural, social and political institutions, but also, how they are perpetuated by less official relationships, such as day-to-day interactions between individuals.

All of these relationships involve exchanges of power on some level. For Foucault, power constitutes a strategic relationship and not a simple binary of haves and have-nots. Hence, power is not only repressive, but it is also productive (Foucault, 1977/1984). Foucault's insistence on power as a productive network means that our objective cannot be to escape power relations, but must be to understand how they operate by paying attention to them. Because it is a strategic relationship, however, power can still be organized in such a way that the mobility of some players is limited.

For example, Foucault observes that there is a tendency for societies to keep power in "proper order" as a means of preventing chaos and securing political control. Hence, he calls discipline an "art" because it is so naturally imposed upon the social body, again, as if social order was an intrinsic obligation. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975/1977), Foucault's chapter on "Docile Bodies" captures the subtlety of discipline and obedience in a society that structures itself in such a way that individuals are happy to be obedient, docile bodies. He describes an elegant discipline, which is neither violent nor costly, because it involves the "mastery of each individual over his own body" (p. 137). In this

case, relations of power are difficult to discern because the master and the slave are one and the same. No one is imposing direct force on any individual, and yet there is still a dynamic of power at work that exists beyond the individual himself.

This silent power dynamic is what Foucault wants to uncover in *Discipline and Punish* (1975/1977). He identifies discipline as a process of individualization that capitalizes on personal accountability as a means of ensuring obedience. Discipline is easily achieved in what Foucault calls functional sites; these are spaces that enable constant supervision of the individuals that inhabit the sites, such as prisoners or factory workers. For example, the spatial arrangement of production machinery in a factory is very significant in considering how mechanisms of discipline operate. Foucault explains:

Each variable of this force (the force of production)—strength, promptness, skill, constancy—would be observed, and therefore characterized, assessed, computed and related to the individual who was its particular agent. Thus, spread out in a perfectly legible way over the whole series of individual bodies, the work force may be analyzed in individual units. (p. 145)

Similarly, the architecture of the Panopticon carries the effect of power directly to the individual so that she is wholly accountable for her own actions as well as her own surveillance. Thus, individualization is a strategy to keep workers on their toes, but it is not necessarily met with opposition; in fact, the worry is that it is rarely met with opposition.

On the contrary, individuals are motivated to police themselves due to what Foucault calls the normalization of the individual, the significance of which is to control how power is organized. Defining what is “normal” involves differentiating, hierarchizing,

homogenizing, and excluding individuals so that clear categories of “good” and “evil” can be widely understood. Therefore, the motivation to be obedient is derived from a desire to belong to the “good” category. Normalized judgement is especially evident in systems that rely on standards such as the legal and educational systems. In the context of education, for example, students are evaluated, not only against a standard rubric of objectives, but also against each other. There is no alternative in a universal system of classification; it is a simple case of moving up or moving down. Hence Foucault’s observation that we are left with the “permanent competition of individuals being classified in relation to one another” (Foucault, 1975/1977, p. 162).

Foucault also recognizes that this system of classification is extremely utilitarian. Pit them against each other and they will be more productive, he remarks ironically. Such rivalry is inspired by rank, hierarchy and pyramidal supervision, which are all ordered relations of power that rely on competition in order to be significant. This explains why many who are advantaged in the system encourage their own classification and resist efforts to move outside of rigid assessment schemes⁹. Neoliberalism operates according to the same principles. It relies on a notion of the individual who is in constant competition with others, and who accepts hierarchy as the established social order. Furthermore, normalized judgements that define how we are allowed to judge ourselves as well as others *do* matter if they are widely accepted as true, because they will affect how we fare in any social contest that relies on those judgements. Foucault claims that the only freedom available to us is our ability to rebel against categorization, for freedom

⁹ In Chapter Four, we will see how privileged parents adamantly insist on letter grades to evaluate their children.

is “a revolt within a set of everyday, concrete practices that has become common-place or ‘natural’ and that defines and limits us as individuals” (Rajchman as cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 492). Yet, as we have seen, to be categorized is to participate, which is why one benefits from—and perhaps even desires—one’s domination (Foucault, 1975/1977).

Hence, mobility is limited when it is neither perceived as possible or desirable, which is why the concepts of discipline and accountability are so important for Foucault. These mechanisms that function to control individuals are empowered by the perception that truth is absolute and that power is ordered intrinsically. While discipline and accountability may be useful for preventing chaos and securing political control, they should be understood as socially constructed instruments for social organization and not as naturally evident or politically neutral. Institutions such as education and healthcare provide classic Foucauldian illustrations of the ways in which social practices are established as legitimate and perhaps even as natural. This is because institutions are widely legitimated by their role to serve society, and yet their policies and procedures must nevertheless be guided by a totalizing form of power. That is, they depend on widely understood standards of rationality:

The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them. (Foucault, 1974, p. 171, as cited in Rabinow, 1984, p. 6)

It becomes clear here that Foucault’s critique of universal standards of rationality is at odds with Taylor’s (1985) insistence on a common understanding of “the good life”. Foucault disagrees with any assertion of assumption that, in order to act or judge, we

need “fixed and rational standards for judging what constitutes a better society” (Rabinow, 1984, p. 6). Even justice, for Foucault, is an instrument of power. Taylor is also aware of the impossibility of any neutral version of “the good life”, and his recommendation for shared goods hinges on the expectation that significance is socially created, and not intrinsic. The particular relevance of Foucault’s critique of universal standards of rationality is his claim that they tend to justify normalization and individualization because they are disseminated and disguised as absolute. This picture of “the good life” looks very different from Taylor’s because it pretends to be neutral, while simultaneously imposing itself on the whole community. Finally, Foucault’s analysis of individualization is particularly helpful in considering how society structures itself atomistically and how such an arrangement limits us, both collectively and individually.

3. 6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented a conceptual framework that explains how the neoliberal version of individualism ignores the significance of wider social and political factors that impact society’s members. An overwhelming trend toward private interest and personal accountability is the result of an increasingly individualistic society, which sees individuals as the sole authors of their own destinies, while overlooking the unavoidable influence of a complex social fabric on their lives. This has led to a reduction of all things social on the basis that the individual can fend for herself, and to a trivialization of the social and political implications of market-driven incentives. Furthermore, the prevailing economic and performative discourse of neoliberal policies has been largely accepted as

common-sense and therefore minimally challenged by government or by the general public.

The following chapter will address the privatization of K-12 schooling in Canada in light of the conceptual framework laid out in this chapter. It will be argued that the notion of a privatized education conforms directly to the neoliberal version of individualism that has been described, and that as such, it contradicts any adequate vision of “the social” that is required to advance collective struggle, social solidarity and the distribution of public goods. The privatization of K-12 education organizes students in such a way that they are not only able, but encouraged, to compete for positions that distinguish them from the public. Here, the issue is not whether students should be differentiated, but how these distinctions take place, and on what basis.

Chapter Four

4. 0. Introduction

This chapter will use the conceptual lenses explained in the previous chapter to evaluate initiatives to privatize K-12 schooling in Canada. It will illustrate how private education erodes collective responsibility for the public good by supporting a conception of the social that is only secondary—and in service—to the individual. The perspectives of the theorists and philosophers discussed in the preceding chapter on the position of the individual within society inform the analysis and subsequent critique of private schools in the Canadian education system.

In short, I will argue that K-12 education regarded as a private good has the major consequence of corrupting collective responsibility overall in four significant ways: (1) by narrowly defining citizen participation and issues of equity according to the hegemonic language of economics (Giroux and Lyotard); (2) by conceiving of individuals atomistically to the extent that any notion of social collaboration is only instrumental (Pildes and Stein); (3) by denying the irreducible value of the public good (Taylor); and (4) by ignoring the power structures that exist within the institution of education (Foucault).

4. 1. The language of economics

The language of economics is becoming increasingly common and dominant as a means of articulating the aims of education. It is not unusual to hear education referred to as an

“investment” or as a means of increasing employment and participation in the “global economy”. The potential to be “competitive” in the global marketplace is classically cited as an advantage of educating citizens, and the right to choice is often framed as an escape from public “monopolies” toward a more diverse private sphere. These terms are essentially economic, and yet they often function to describe what might otherwise be cultural, social and educational goals. Hence, education, described in market language, must inevitably surrender to market-driven criteria. This is influenced by the rise of a highly economically-minded neoliberal agenda that holds the free market, private enterprise, consumer choice, entrepreneurial initiative, and the deleterious effects of government regulation as its core tenets (Ross & Gibson, 2007, p. 2). What these tenets reflect is an overwhelming dedication to the two principal values that guide market logic: efficiency and performativity. As I discussed in the previous chapter, efficiency and performativity have become such dominant values that they are frequently considered ends in themselves (Stein, 2002; Lyotard, 1979/1984). But such a view misses the possibility that other values are equally—if not more—important in the process of evaluating education.

In the case of the private school, education is regarded as a commodity to be bought and sold, which makes it reasonable to evaluate it according to economic criteria. Yet, if we conceive of education as a public good and as a means of facilitating equitable citizen participation, then viewing it as a private commodity for the benefit of consumers is quite contradictory. If education is truly a public good, then it should be valued collectively and not in the form of an individual advantage. Thus, the issue here is not only about

providing equitable education, but about valuing the very principle of a public school system that serves collective interests. As Giroux cautions, it is public space and non-commercial values that are at risk. Nevertheless, a growing neoliberal trend to delegate responsibility for public goods to private companies is blurring the line between public and private goods. For neoliberals, this spells more efficiently provided public services; however, regardless of whether or not these services are actually more efficient, the critical issue is that they are no longer public; hence Giroux' (2004) claim that neoliberalism is attacking all things social, and that any conception of the social outside of market logic is now inconceivable.

Similarly, advocates use market logic to defend private education. In a study that demands an end to government-funded education, Claudia Hepburn (2005), of the Fraser Institute, recounts one low-income parent's reason for choosing a private school: "If you were offered free fruit in the market, you would know it was rotten. If you want good fruit, you have to pay for it. The same is true of education". This remark illustrates precisely how the language of economics comes to make sense of education as a commodity and the public space in which education is offered as a marketplace. In fact, the logic presented here completely eliminates the possibility for conceiving of a good education as a free public good. The link between market value and educational value is perceived as indissoluble. Similarly, Hepburn's insistence that "government interference in education is part of the problem, not the solution" reflects the neoliberal fixation on the ability of the market to solve any number of social problems. Giroux (2004) calls this a

resistance to civic engagement in all facets of public life. Such resistance solves problems by privatizing public space so that public debate is no longer required.

Consequently, educational value is increasingly defined by such a neoliberal worldview. Therefore, efficiency and performativity become the core criteria for legitimating what counts as good education, which is why the public education system is so frequently attacked by supporters of privatization. The market—and by extension, private education—is commonly viewed as superior to the public sector because:

Markets respond more quickly to changes in technology and social demands than does the state. Markets are more efficient and cost-effective in providing services than public sectors, and market competition will produce greater accountability in ‘social investments’ than bureaucratic politics. (Torres, 1995-96, p. 282)

More important than the fact that these claims are not necessarily correct¹⁰ is Giroux and Lyotard’s focus on the criteria against which the supposed superiority of the private sector is evaluated. The dominant criteria of performativity and efficiency are too narrow to account for the immeasurable value of social solidarity, collective responsibility and civic engagement that truly public services aim—or should aim—to support. These fundamentally social and *non-commercial* values are quashed by the tremendous emphasis on productivity, results, measurability, cost-effectiveness, and profit that come from the language of economics. Consequently, neoliberal policy-makers as well as many members of the public encourage a reduction of regulations that are perceived as inefficient, such as those associated with the public school. In other words, “those agencies which are seen as distorting or inhibiting market relations are being removed.

¹⁰ There is evidence to show that these claims cannot be generally accepted. See footnote on Edison Schools Inc. in Chapter 2.

What is being worked towards is a consumer rather than a citizenship economy” (Ball, 1993, p. 6).

American educational philosopher Deron Boyles (1998) also identifies a language of economics in prevailing educational policy directions. For Boyles, the culture of schools is reduced to economics so that “after appealing to populist zeal about the cultural hues of ‘choice’, the shift is quickly made to capitalist materialism” (p. 158). What is really astonishing is that this language has so profoundly co-opted cultural meanings that blatantly capitalist vocabulary is not only acceptable, but favourable, such that “large numbers of citizens consciously champion a language of economics as culture” (p. 158). Here, “having” and “owning” are marketed as human rights so that it would be against our democratic constitution to deny them. An example of this in educational debates is the private school voucher. Following in the footsteps of prevailing American policies, the Fraser Institute recommends private vouchers to support the “parental right” to be an “active partner in the education system” (Hepburn 1999a). Such a recommendation effectively advocates the primacy and indispensability of dollars in the democratic process. In this sense, democratic rights are now exercised through consumerism.

Along these same lines, “ethical consumerism” has been presented as a form of “social responsibility”. It is an attempt to influence how companies do business by actively selecting products that adhere to the consumer’s ethical standards (Irving, Harrison & Rayner, 2002). According to such a model, the consumer’s power of choice is her only tool for effecting change in the corporate world, because the consumer has a voice only

insofar as she can offer or withhold her business. Consequently, revoking consumer choice is viewed as a fundamental violation of democratic rights. In this view, contemporary democracy seems to operate exclusively within the economic paradigm. One can only cast one's ballot, so to speak, if one is able to pay for it through the "power" of consumerism (Beck, 2002). By this logic, democracy in education means being able to "vote with one's dollars" for one private school rather than another. But consumerism and citizenship are not the same thing. The capacity to consume is dependent upon wealth, while the right to be a citizen in a socially democratic society is not. Therefore, the insistence that privately operated schools will conform more readily to consumer choices not only misses the point that those consumers will only have choices insofar as they have money, but it completely dissolves the distinction between a citizen and a consumer.

Conflating the terms—or replacing citizen with consumer—violates the principles of democracy by insisting on economic rather than social import. "The first principle of democracy [...] is providing means for giving power to the people, not to an individual or to a restricted class of people" (Ross, 2006, p. 322). Yet the ability to participate in market activities is restricted to those who can afford it. Thus:

If the market model is adopted in public education and other institutions of civil governance, there will be few practical ways left to promote the general welfare. Individuals will be, as they increasingly are already, left to the tender mercies of the global market. (Molnar, 1996, p.178)

Incidentally, the private school already conforms to the market model by promoting self-interest and a subsequent disbelief in the possibility of a general welfare for education.

As such, the concept of private education undermines all social commitments to public education by asserting that individualism is necessary in order to achieve success. Moreover, private education that requires tuition facilitates a model of participation that is fundamentally economic and therefore undemocratic.

4. 2. Individualism

The rhetoric of individualism is closely related to the language of economics. As mentioned above, the politics of neoliberalism is highly entrepreneurial and market-oriented, but fundamental to these tendencies is a propensity to reduce, measure, and calculate in order to “squeeze more into less” (Ross & Gibson, 2007, p. 4). Likewise, neoliberal policies and processes are designed to support individual interest on the basis of the view that individual interest is the guiding motivator for all social, political, technological and economic progress. Resulting from this overwhelming attention to the individual, however, “neoliberal economic policies have created massive social and economic inequalities among individuals and nations” (p. 2). A common response to such gross inequalities is to lay blame on the individual who experiences them. This is due to the fact that through the neoliberal lens, there is a minimal sense of collective responsibility because responsibility is apportioned individually. Missing from this individualistic worldview are the concepts of social collaboration and collective responsibility as ends in themselves and not only as instruments for further personal fulfilment. Also missing from this individualistic worldview, as Charles Taylor has pointed out, is an understanding of the social embedding of the individual that influences her social context and gives meaning to her life.

Many parents sending their children to private schools view it as their personal right to exercise choice where education is concerned and to choose the best school for their children. There is a sense of entitlement that accompanies the choice of private education, and it can be seen in the private school literature. The following quotation from the Havergal College website illustrates how choice is advertised as uniquely personal:

Imagine your daughter's future with the *advantage* of a Havergal education. Families seek Havergal for their daughters because they seek excellence. [...] Havergal's longstanding and cherished *reputation* is one of academic challenge and intellectual rigour. [...] As a parent, *the choice to send your daughter to Havergal represents your belief in her future* – a future of fulfillment through achievement, responsibility and leadership. (Havergal College website, 2008, emphasis added)

The problem with this kind of rhetoric is that it ignores that the consequences of school choice, and many so-called “individual” choices for that matter, are not strictly individual. As I discussed in Chapter Three, Pildes (1998) and Stein (2002) explain that individual rights are not in place for atomistic purposes, but for the benefit of others who share similar experiences so that general practices can be adapted to serve the public good. The private school, by contrast, appeals to individual interest because it provides an alternative to public education. In other words, it escapes the jurisdiction of general practices by creating private ones. Therefore, it does not operate for the benefit of others, but fulfils predominantly atomistic purposes.

While it is true that qualities fostered by the private school, such as leadership, good citizenship and integrity,¹¹ extend beyond the students to the wider community, the private school is not attempting to change the fundamental structure of the community so that social and political practices that reproduce inequalities are altered to better serve the public good. On the contrary, Havergal explicitly states that its graduates will “take their place as leaders of the future” (Havergal website, 2008). Whether or not this is due to the fact that the impeccable instruction cannot fail, or that the cherished reputation will ensure a position of leadership, one thing is clear: no followers attend this school. Like the British-imported grammar schools of the early 1700s, which arguably *intended* to maintain class distinctions¹², the private school continues to give students an “educational mark of distinction” and prepares them to become the “future leaders of society”. This emphasis on social positioning and leadership raises the question, where do the farmers, laymen, and trades-people go to become educated citizens of Canada? Does good citizenship mean something different for those who choose—or who are in some way obliged—to pursue careers that do not constitute roles of leadership? If good citizenship—as defined by the market model—is a contribution to the economic development of the community by continuous obedient consumption (Shaker, 1999), then it can be measured according to one’s position and income. However, good citizenship is not based on socio-economic status. Catering to a higher socio-economic bracket or to a particular religious group, the private school is effectively homogenizing its conception of citizenship. However, if education aims to develop good citizenship, then it must

¹¹ These are examples from Havergal’s website

¹² See Chapter 2, p. 2 (Johnson, 1968)

adequately represent what it means to be a good citizen, which is invariably manifested in a variety of ways.

In a social democracy, and according to this thesis, good citizenship involves the knowledge and act of democratic participation and collective responsibility within the public sphere. As educational philosopher Claudia Ruitenberg (2008) argues “education must facilitate the transition to a heterogeneous public sphere” (p. 20), and because the public sphere itself is diverse, education needs to reflect that diversity. As I noted in my Introduction, Ruitenberg argues that:

To successfully make the transition to being a member of a heterogeneous democratic public, students must have the opportunity to encounter such heterogeneity—not on the street, where they can simply walk away from it, but in the school, where they can be required to respond to and interact with those different from themselves. (p. 20)

Public education also provides students with the opportunity to recognize their shared interests—or at the very least recognize that they *do not* share interests—by creating spaces in which a diversity of students exist. While private education also promotes shared interests, those interests are only shared among those in attendance, the majority of whom are the ruling elite. Thus, the private school evades the challenges of heterogeneity by admitting most of its students from high socio-economic backgrounds and segregating them from students from low socio-economic backgrounds. It reinforces the view that public education is an obstacle to be avoided and presents itself as a more reputable and effective choice for securing a successful future.

Returning to the issue of the right to choice, it is important to consider the social conditions in which such a right may be exercised. While the private school champions

the rhetoric of individualism because it presents choice as a right in itself, Stein (2002) observes that certain rights are not rights at all in a socio-political climate that does not first provide what she calls positive substantive rights such as healthcare and education. We might call these unconditional rights, and they must be properly accessible before any citizen is able to exercise *individual* rights, which, as stated above, should not be confused with individual interests. Private education, by contrast, is neither a substantive nor an individual right. Instead, it transforms education from a substantive right into a matter of individual interest by imposing conditions that restrict access—namely, high tuition fees that are only affordable to affluent families—and by maintaining the social norms that create socio-economic segregation rather than challenging them.

Whereas rights are supposed to realize public goods (Pildes, 1998), private education undermines them. Pildes (1998) describes rights as a form of public goods:

[Public goods] are nonexcludable goods, the benefit of which are either available to all or none, like clean air or national defense. So, too, traditional liberal rights, such as freedom of speech or democratic participation, realize goods that are common in this sense; the cultural benefits of such rights are available generally. (p. 732)

In fact, according to Pildes, the weight and importance of the right depends on its value to others, and not on the benefit that it secures for the right-holder. Therefore, private education cannot be a traditional liberal right in the way that Pildes describes them, because it is *not* generally available. Likewise, choosing a private education does not constitute a right for parents who lack the material means to make that choice (Stein, 2002). Thus, their “right” to choose is inoperative as soon as education becomes an exclusive private good, and therefore, private education no longer constitutes a substantive right.

What Pildes and Stein serve to illustrate is not that rights claims are irrelevant in the attainment of public goods, but that they are inherent to the attainment of public goods. Therefore, rights claims are important, but they need to be understood as fundamentally social and should not be regarded as individual concerns. As Stein (2002) explains, “a rights claim is the strongest kind of claim we can make, because it entails entitlement and obligation by others” (p. 206). This means that although rights, and especially the right to choose, are popularly regarded as entitlements that are free from state interference, the role of the state to provide meaningful choice among public goods is actually quite important (Stein). Not only is the state “the guardian of the quality of public goods” (Stein, p. 67), but it is also responsible for protecting the citizen’s right to have access to public goods, such as education. Claiming the right to private education, therefore, obligates the state to make exceptions that conflict with the quality of public goods that it tries to uphold.

In British Columbia, for example, the general quality of public education is under question even as B.C.’s economy is booming (Ross & Gibson, 2007). Yet the government continues to publicly fund private schools, covering up to 50% of their costs¹³, while “cuts in the provincial education budget have produced 92 school closings since 2002, displacing more than 14,000 students. And 2,881 teaching positions have been cut, even though enrolment is 12% higher now than it was in the mid-1990s” (Ross & Gibson, p. 6). Even in Ontario, where private education is not subsidized, the recent

¹³ See Chapter 2, p. 10

Equity in Education Tax Credit of 2002 aimed to support families who choose private over public education as a means of indirect subsidy. In 2003 it was appropriately cancelled because it was criticized for draining public money from the public education system, while simultaneously giving families an incentive to leave the public schools. These examples demonstrate how the “right” to private education demands more than the choice to be dismissed from the public education system. Rather, it creates a whole other system to which the government becomes obligated.

Rights discourse that aims to enhance equality and protect difference is not the same as choice discourse that champions choice as a right in itself (Stein, 2002). And yet, the government protects the discourse of choice by authorizing the operation of private schools that have offered little evidence of enhancing equality. In fact, it is widely argued that “the operation and effects of an education market benefit certain class groups and fractions to the detriment and disadvantage of others” (Ball, 1993, p.13). Still, there are political and economic incentives to keep those groups who benefit from private education happy, because the overall social effects of private education are not considered in the evaluation of private education itself. Neglecting the importance of developing social solidarity and collective responsibility *beyond* the walls of the school, supporters of privatization persistently cite personal preference and competitive ability as the ruling factors in educational quality. Moreover, these conditions are expected to have an impact on the public system as it tries to stay afloat amongst the rhetoric of privatization. The Fraser Institute aptly claims that “developing an informed understanding of Ontario parents’ growing preference for private schools has important

policy ramifications for public schools if they are to compete effectively—to, in effect, retain their market share” (Van Pelt, 2007, p. 7). Indeed, it seems that values historically associated with the public school, such as inclusiveness and community mindedness, are being defeated by business initiatives, which would prefer to maintain a focus on individual opportunity and self-interest in order to compete with the ever-powerful private sphere.

4. 3. Public goods

Charles Taylor’s (1985) definition of public goods or, more precisely, *shared* goods, provides a useful framework for understanding the concepts of collective responsibility and social solidarity, the facilitation of which may be regarded as an essential aim of public education. The concepts of collective responsibility and social solidarity may appear to have lost their significance as a general desire for individual autonomy has grown stronger, but they are fundamental to the construction of an equitable and cohesive community. While a convergent good is determined by an individual conception of the good life that merely *cooperates* with other forms of the good, a shared good depends on a mutual understanding of the good life, shared values, and communal identities. Taylor distinguishes these by calling them “I-identities” and “we-identities”; that is, the shared good is significant only insofar as it is *our* common pursuit, and not *mine* alone.

Taylor’s distinction between a convergent good and a shared good is a significant part of the argument against the privatization of education because it illustrates the value of conceiving of education as one common project. The difference between a convergent

good and a shared good is recognizable in the different historical aims of private and public education, respectively. Private education was established as a means of organizing the upper class into a social elite, while public education was introduced as a collective project to socialize a common citizenry. Private education was not intended for every citizen, and therefore, was never conceived of as a shared good. This distinction still holds true; while private education never explicitly claims to aim for the perpetuation of class distinctions, it cannot be understood as a shared good because it is not shared.

A significant element in Taylor's definition of a shared good is that it is cherished in common. But what is remarkable according to such a definition is that neither private nor public education can be understood as a shared good. Private education is reserved for those who can pay for it, and is therefore explicitly a private good, while public education cannot be characterized as "sought after and cherished in common" (Taylor, 1985), given that it is subject to widespread dissatisfaction, mostly regarding the quality and effectiveness of public schools (Boyd, 2000). Yet, if all education were publicly provided, then it would necessarily constitute a shared good in which all have a stake. Thus, what is at issue is not only that private education is not a shared good, but that the very existence of private schools means that education itself is no longer a shared good. With two competing identities for education, and without a common understanding of what education means to a community, national goals for education are superficial at best. What we have instead are private goals for education, resulting in massive class stratification and socio-economic injustice (Ross & Gibson, 2007).

Taylor's theory of shared goods expresses the strength of communal significance and points to the importance of public space. Public space is a crucial part of developing a notion of communal significance because it is a place in which meaning can be envisioned collectively (Taylor, 1985). In the context of education, public space is an indispensable element in the process of learning to live among others, and it is crucial to revive the shared character of public education for this lesson in particular. However, Canada's diverse society poses a challenge for facilitating a communal significance because a truly common social fabric would not be able to recognize the richness of diversity that already exists in this country. Therefore, the aim is not to homogenize the population via public education, but rather, to develop a sense of shared recognition of—and honour for—the essential differences of individuals (Ruitenberg, 2004). In order to achieve this, however, values must be embodied in the classroom itself, and not only taught in the curriculum. Hence, “the mix *is* the education. This is how you get a society, real and interconnected, rather than a collection of perhaps well-trained, highly “educated” individuals” (Salutin, 2008, p. 26). Unfortunately, such connections are forgone as public space becomes privatized.

The consequence of this detachment from collectively envisioned meaning is that some social meanings are genuinely *not understood*, and therefore not accepted as significant. In this scenario, utility rather than intrinsic moral worth becomes the measure of the value of social goods. For education, this means educational goals and successes are calculated according to a “policy-as-numbers” approach (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006), which makes test scores and achievement rates a primary indicator of educational quality. But if

there is any aim to render education more than a utilitarian purpose—that is, to promote a crucial concern for the community above all—then educational quality must be evaluated according to different criteria, not by its efficiency and performativity, but based on its ability to facilitate collective responsibility and a sense of social solidarity. Taylor’s theory of shared goods has shown that these are decisive factors in a strong and equitable society.

What is lacking, then, in the institution of private education is a critical concern for society as whole or the principle of equity. As Taylor makes clear, we need a common identification of “the good” in order to build communal rather than individual identities. Yet, the private school aims to build distinguished identities that are not obliged to mingle with the full “we” of society. Rather than cultivating empathy and understanding on a superficial level, there needs to be a genuine attitude of commitment, not only to public education, but to the public itself. In a nation of cultural, socio-economic, racial, religious, and political diversity, a collective sense of responsibility and social solidarity is admittedly difficult to achieve, but at the very least, we can aim to foster a shared sense of citizenship within the schools in such a way that diversity of *all kinds* is experienced in the classroom as a *welcomed* challenge.

4. 4. Social contexts

Educational scholars Green and Preston (2001) show that research has been conducted on the relationship between education and social cohesion. However, they find that these studies rely on quantitative analysis that cannot properly grasp the intricacies of social

cohesion. Like social solidarity, they define social cohesion as a shared sense of citizenship and values among different groups and communities. Their main criticism is that the question of the effects of education on social capital, and not on social cohesion, is frequently at the centre of the sociology of education. Yet, social capital is a fundamentally economic and individualized conceptual tool and fails to recognize the largely contextual factors of social cohesion that will be invisible at the individual level. Just as Taylor, Pildes (1998) and Stein (2002) criticize atomist understandings of individualism for their neglect of the social embedding of individuals, Green and Preston challenge the view held by methodological individualism that individuals can be evaluated outside of their complex social contexts:

To methodological individualism, phenomena that cannot be explained statistically as the result of the accumulation of individual actions do not exist. However, this simply ignores the fact that many societal phenomena are simply indefinable and hence, unmeasurable at that level, as is notably the case with income inequality. Alternatively, they remain unobserved because they exist as constants. (p. 262)

This explains the likelihood that factors related to the inequitable effects of private education are not adequately considered by policy-makers. While social effects are often addressed in educational analyses, this is largely done through a collection of individual facts, rather than by analysis of societal institutions and cultures (Green & Preston). In other words, social phenomena are explained by (atomistic) numerical data, which provides no insight into the complexities of social relationships and human behaviour.

Therefore, whether the evaluation of school quality is based on achievement outcomes, facilities and resources, class sizes, parental preference or even safety, the key issue is not

how different student populations might affect these factors, but how cultural and institutional obstacles make student populations different. Admittedly, there are a great deal of underlying social structures that need to be transformed in order to make education work for everyone, and the privatization of education is just one of them. But as shown above, private education does more than exclude access to the majority of students whose families cannot afford tuition; it fundamentally undermines the concept of a public education as a public (shared) good. Moreover, the individualistic view of society that private education implies—in which personal choice is the chief tool for educational reform (Hirsh, 2002)—ignores the profound power relations that exist across institutions and social groups. As Stein (2002) aptly states:

We cannot understand the current dilemmas surrounding public goods without an appreciation of the social supports that make it possible for some people to exercise those rights and the social obstacles that make it difficult, if not impossible, for others. (p. 209)

Stein recognizes that even at the level of public goods, there are social barriers that prevent certain groups from participating, which makes the privatization of public goods that much more obstructive.

Educational theorist Jean Anyon (2005) expands on Stein's point in her critique of educational policy directions. Anyon argues that even basic educational skills are not sufficient, and the unconditional right that a good education represents encompasses more than reading, writing and arithmetic. She argues that there are social conditions that render the acquisition of basic educational skills, such as reading and writing, obsolete. What this means is that the attainment of equal skills does not ensure the attainment of

equal opportunity, and the poor stay poor, not because they lack the ability to read and write, but because social conditions do not support a change in their socio-economic position.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Green and Preston (2001) do not find a significant correlation between education and social cohesion in the United States, confirming their argument that “educational effects may well be greatly outweighed by more powerful institutional and cultural factors at the national level” (p. 279). In other words, deeply embedded divisions of class, race and culture, are perpetuated both socially and spatially by the ways in which particular institutions operate so that efforts to educate more citizens are not sufficient in addressing a lack of social cohesion. In order to link education to social cohesion, social solidarity or collective responsibility, education must be structured in such a way that it reflects these principles, so that education, as a dominant institution itself, can combat the other powerful institutional factors that Green and Preston detect in the creation of social barriers.

While private schools seem to be the most apparent manifestations of these barriers, public schools can also reproduce social divisions based on factors of geographical exclusion, such as an affluent neighbourhood, or specialized curricula, such as a school for the arts. However, the potential for social stratification within the public system itself does not make the case against private schools inane. On the contrary, it reaffirms the relevance of challenging the power structures frequently established and perpetuated by dominant institutions.

4. 5. Power structures

Citing Michel Foucault, James Joseph Sheurich (1994) discusses the reproductive nature of social barriers and social opportunities¹⁴. He claims that, while certain barriers might visibly contribute to social problems, they are often perceived by policy-makers as unmovable. This is because the framework within which the dominant society operates is informed by a worldview that maintains a narrow set of solutions. In the case of education, for example, the solution for the problem of “under-performing” public schools is to move students out of those schools by creating more alternatives to the public school, rather than addressing the reasons why the public school is “under-performing”. These could include a number of things, from the definition of “under-performance” itself to external factors that affect the students attending these schools. While Green and Preston (2001) want to consider these external factors on a “macrosocietal” level, Foucault is most interested in the first kind of possibility because it captures the processes of constructing truth. According to his view, educational quality is defined by a politics of truth that is shaped both by informal relationships and institutional goals and practices, and therefore cannot be inherently defined. Consequently, classifying what counts as an adequate education simultaneously defines *who* is adequately educated, and therefore ranking education inevitably creates a steep social hierarchy.

Whether or not these hierarchies must exist is not at issue here, but what is relevant is *how* they exist. Hence Foucault’s declaration that our task is to figure out how power

¹⁴ Sheurich calls these “social regularities”.

actually operates in our society (Rabinow, 1984). The significance of exposing relations of power is to show that they are ultimately constructed and that, therefore, they may be opposed. But this exposition is difficult, and opposition is nearly impossible, because the individual is now caught in what Foucault calls a “double-bind”. The individual is both normalized by widely accepted standards of rationality (e.g. test scores are the best demonstration of aptitude), and individualized by her distinct accountability to these standards (e.g. each student is classified and ranked according to individual test scores). Likewise, the individual is more likely to benefit from her adherence to these standards, and as a result these standards grow more acceptable, and so on. In fact, Alfie Kohn (1998) identifies a particular population of affluent parents of high-achieving students who demand test scores and letter grades as a means of distinguishing their children from low-achieving students even though there is good evidence to show that alternative forms of evaluation can reach more students and facilitate deeper learning. Kohn’s observation illustrates the fact that certain students benefit from widely accepted standards of rationality, while others do not. Yet, those who do benefit are most often the students who have parents in high positions of socio-political power. Those students who do not benefit, therefore, must continue to adhere to such standards of normalization.

In a scenario like this, it is no wonder that opposition to modern power structures seems impossible. And yet, we continue to encounter the rhetoric of individualism claiming to liberate us from state control and public monopolies, even though it is this very individualism that allows us to be studied, assessed and classified to the extent that our own subjectivity is lost to us (Rabinow, 1984). Therefore Foucault (1984) claims that:

The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries. (p. 216, as cited in Rabinow, 1984, p. 22)

Private education, by contrast, has the consequence of reinforcing the kind of individuality that Foucault is talking about because it seeks to place students in a “web of objective codification” (Rabinow, p. 22). By boasting that all graduates of Havergal College will “take their place as leaders of the future”, for example, the school claims to be able to produce a particular kind of person. Furthermore, as Havergal's cherished reputation grows stronger, students are expected to embody it, and in this sense, they are defined by the school by virtue of their position within it. This is an advantage for some, but only because of its relation to the disadvantage of others. Thus, whether a private school is academically, culturally or religiously defined, it always has an aim to cultivate a more specific kind of individual than the public school can offer, otherwise it would be unnecessary.

What Foucault's regimes of truth—like Lyotard's metanarratives—help us to understand is that the necessity of private education is largely constructed and easily perpetuated through discourse and social practices. And it is precisely because these practices are social—and not only institutional or governmental—that it becomes difficult to recognize them, let alone oppose them. For example, the perceived value of privatization relies on widely accepted rational standards, such as efficiency and performativity, that are deeply established, and these standards are reinforced by educational choices that are

increasingly demand-driven. As the private school develops a distinguished reputation for meeting demands—regardless of the nature of those demands—the reputation of the public school depreciates because it is less individualistic in its aim to meet demands. Of course, we can see how even public education is attempting to keep up with educational demands by imposing more individualistic practices such as the *No Child Left Behind Act* in the United States, the institution of the *Education Quality and Accountability Office* in Ontario, the new “superintendents of achievement” in BC, and the Fraser Institute’s school rankings in various provinces. These programs have been established for the sole purpose of measuring achievement rates. These measures are promoted as a means of improving “our schools”, but they are inevitably utilized as a reason to leave them:

Insofar as schooling is seen by family and society as a means of “getting ahead”, a flow of enrolments towards more advantaged sectors seems inevitable. Insofar as schools are seen as institutions for building cohesion with communities, the story may be different. (Hirsh, 2002, p. 14)

What is clear from this analysis is that schools are not seen as institutions for building cohesion with communities. While some still believe that “all sectors of society are extremely well-served by a full, well-funded, and varied system of public education—both directly and indirectly” (Shaker, 1999, p. vi), this is far from the general consensus. Instead, an emphasis on the individual demands of students and families has led to an expectation that public schools will compete in the same market-oriented ways as private schools. But these demand-driven policies are not fostering a stronger citizenry because they separate collective responsibility into individualized social groups.

While private education is frequently cited as an alternative to public education, it should not be conceived of as independent of public education. That is, private education affects public education in that it is a response to and an attack on its principles. The aim here has been to take up Foucault's recommendation to "criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent" (Foucault, 1974, p. 171, as cited in Rabinow, 1984, p.6). We must be especially wary of the private school and other privatization initiatives in the public sector because of their concurrent associations with the public and with the market. After all, "markets are marketed, are made legitimate, by a depoliticizing strategy. They are said to be natural and neutral and governed by effort and merit" (Apple, 2004, p. 18). However, it is precisely because no institution is neutral or independent that the principles which define public and private education, and their respective institutions, must be considered through a critical—and indeed political—lens.

4. 6. Conclusion

The private school is not unrelated to its public counterpart, and it is certainly not unrelated to deep-rooted social arrangements. It demands government involvement because it is a publicly sanctioned institution, and as such, it must be critically and politically examined. This means identifying the large-scale influence of the presence of private schools and how it affects a whole nation's perception of education and educational goals. Hence, individual achievement outcomes are not at issue here. What is significant in this analysis is the worldview that is espoused both by government and by society as a whole as private education remains acceptable. While it has been sufficiently argued that the role of the state and institutions in providing a structural basis for social

solidarity and collective responsibility is crucial (Green & Preston, 2001), the state continues to support processes and institutions that effectively destroy collective responsibility. Processes that rely on competition and individual accountability are lauded for their efficiency, and yet, they systematically break down social supports that are born out of a collective sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of all Canadian—and hopefully global—citizens.

Chapter Five

5. 0. Introduction

The provision of education is a highly political and contentious issue. This is because of the far-reaching effects of education, ranging from the individual to the global. Education has such a wide variety of goals and stakeholders that it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how it should operate, who is responsible for how it operates, and whom it should serve. As we have seen in previous chapters, the responsibility to supply K-12 schooling has generally come to fall on the shoulders of government, but to what extent the government accepts that responsibility is disputed throughout the literature. In fact, what that responsibility actually constitutes also remains in question because of the contrasting interpretations of the way in which a government should govern. This is why education, insofar as it is linked to government, will always be a matter of political exigency. Reigning political agendas will inevitably shape the state of education on all levels (e.g. primary, secondary, higher and supplementary education) by defining educational goals and prioritizing stakeholders. Therefore, examining the broader political context in which an education system is situated—whether it is local, national, or global—is absolutely crucial in any evaluation of the condition of education.

This chapter aims not only to summarize the argument elaborated above, but also to relate the privatization of education to its broader socio-political context and to offer suggestions for making it a more prominent item on Canada's political agenda. Brought

to the fore in this chapter is the question of how education is—and might be—valued and what subsequent aims for education look like according to this valuation.

The structure of the education system and its political context are not as prominent in discussions about education as personal and economic consequences. The topic of education in Canada is largely framed as an issue of quality and performance, which provokes thoughts on personal choices instead of rousing debate about the national, provincial, and *social* directions of educational goals. Public expectations for education are consistently based on quantifiable criteria, which means that other, non-quantifiable criteria are overshadowed by a fixation on achievement scores and graduation rates (Green & Preston, 2001). In Gary Fenstermacher and Marianne Amarel's (1995) discussion on addressing the issue of racial segregation in schools, for example, another, seemingly more crucial aim for education becomes apparent:

The removal of psychological barriers is a distinctly educational problem. It rests on human beings becoming the kinds of persons who see racial isolation as morally unjustified action. Education, in its broadest conception, is the means for becoming persons of this kind. (p. 403)

In this view, education serves a greater purpose: liberating students from dogma, bias, and conformity. While graduation rates are important considerations, they do not address the more fundamental issue of values at the root of education and the way that the content and the structure of education inevitably reflect a particular worldview. Moreover, paying too much attention to achievement scores and graduation rates tends to encourage an individualist attitude toward the goals of education. For example, the privatization of education is often legitimized by its commitment to achievement, but, as shown above, it

is centred around a concentration on the individual and therefore embodies individualistic values.

5. 1. Neoliberal values

Michael Apple (2004) argues that it is not the liberty of the individual that is the aim of neoliberal strategies so much as the *regulation* of the individual. As such, neoliberalism, Apple claims, is directly linked to neo-conservative values that intend to individualize and segregate schooling in order to preserve the moral traditions of the middle class. Despite these supposedly moral traditions upheld by the regulatory state, “efficiency, speed, and cost control replace more substantive concerns about social and educational justice” (p. 33). Still, these values are similarly upheld in Canada, where individualistic and regulatory practices are increasingly recognizable, as seen in the previous chapter. Likewise, individualization and segregation created by the private school also appears to be a relatively uncontested topic in Canada. Perhaps the fact that private education is perceived by many to be a political non-issue is a result of hegemonic individualism in this country, which makes the proliferation of individualistic values seem wholly acceptable at the level of K-12 education. Now, rather than challenge such an attitude, the direction in which we are headed tends to encourage it. Not only do private schools remain, largely operating as elite institutions for the country’s wealthiest students, they also often act as models of successful educational structuring.

Examples of neoliberal restructuring can be seen in many of Canada’s centralized systems of welfare. Programs that are fundamentally designed to support Canadian

citizens, unconditionally, are being transformed by the pressure of neoliberal ideology to re-evaluate their services based on new criteria. As mentioned above, these criteria predominantly include economic efficiency and productivity. Our national healthcare system, for example, prized for providing a universal public service, is facing the possibility of privatization because it is inefficient. Tuition fees in Canadian universities have more than tripled since 1991 (Stats Can, 2006), and the national welfare system itself has seen severe funding cuts to the point that welfare income is lower now than it was 20 years ago, and there are more and more barriers to receiving it in the first place (Hunter and Miazdyck, 2004). These examples highlight a crucial trend that is occurring in a wave of neoliberal “solutions” to large-scale economic problems: restriction of access. In fact, David Gabbard (2008) argues that a “law of scarcity” has been introduced into public policy in order to position both the state and the market in the role of benevolent providers of that which is in short supply. Similarly, it is in the best interest of the private school to appeal to its own image as a benevolent provider.

According to economic principles, such a strategy will likely succeed in cutting costs to the public by privatizing fiscal responsibilities. The goal in this schema is to make services more efficient, but efficiency has a very narrow—if not empty—definition here because it is only measured by costs. Efficiency is not the same thing as cost-containment and cost-cutting but it is perceived that way when the only desired effect of efficiency is to cut costs. Hence, Janice Gross Stein (2002) argues, “efficiency, or cost-effectiveness, has become an end in itself, a value often more important than others” (p. 3), which is why restricting access can be justified by aims to increase efficiency.

Let us also not forget the primacy of profits amongst the motives of neoliberal policies. While profit is seldom cited as a reason to expand private education, it is the concept of profit that rationalizes how private interest and competition can be such powerful vehicles of productivity. The privatization of K-12 education represents just one of the ways in which restriction of access claims to increase performance. Moreover, the argument that appealing to private interests is the most realistic way of improving public goods—which is especially common in the arguments for privatizing education and healthcare—overlooks the perpetuation of vast class stratification and the negative impact on a conception of “the social”. As Giroux (2004) insists, a concept of the social *outside of* market logic is necessary for a truly cooperative society that understands itself as more than an assembly of individuals. While attention to the improvement and cost-effectiveness of our public goods is important, it should not eclipse the basic principle that public goods are universally accessible.

5. 2. Educational goals

As seen in Chapter Three, Charles Taylor’s (1985) explanation of the significance of shared goods emphasizes the collective identity that is built by virtue of the shared nature of those goods. In Taylor’s view, goods are not shared if they are withdrawn from public space because in private space they cannot acquire a common significance. Similarly, educational goals must be shared if they are to be commonly fulfilled. As the literature demonstrates, however, there is no consensus about the aims of K-12 education in Canada, and some educational aims fundamentally conflict with others. Canadian

educational philosopher Kieran Egan (2001) argues that education is based on three fundamental ideas that are both significantly flawed *and* in conflict with each other. “The result is that neither is adequately or sensibly achieved” (p. 937). Thus, a national discussion on the aims of education seems to be the first step in addressing the issue of competing interests in education. Such a discussion would make educational aims more explicit so that the public might have a hand in transforming them through democratic debate. For example, it would be clearer how private schools necessarily contradict the educational aim of promoting an equitable and democratic society. Egan illustrates why returning to the theoretical aims of education is so important when he writes:

We behave as we do, design schools of the kinds we have, as a result of the ideas we hold. If we want to improve our schools, it is with the abstract and awkward realm of ideas that we must first deal. (p. 940)

As noted in Chapter Two, American scholar David Labaree (1997) identifies a similar contradiction in the debate about educational aims. Labaree’s main critique is that the goal of social mobility that privileges individual opportunity is beginning to dominate the others, which indicates a move away from the goal to produce public goods and toward a purely private conception of education.

Labaree and Egan’s analyses of educational goals highlight the political disagreement surrounding the issue as well as the need to come to a common understanding of what it is that education is supposed to achieve. It is futile to talk about improving education if we are not clear about what we are aiming for. Amy Gutmann (1987/1999) asks, what do we mean by “better” education? Better with respect to what purposes? Further to Janice Gross Stein’s (2002) point above, efficiency cannot be an end in itself because it fails to

identify a purpose for education. Certainly, the ultimate purpose of education cannot be that it operates as efficiently as possible. Thus, attention to the aims of education beyond efficiency and cost-effectiveness is critical. While Labaree and Gutmann recognize that there are conflicting visions for education that interfere with its advancement, they emphasize the importance of maintaining the democratic platform upon which such disagreements are able to be articulated. Labaree states that:

The central problems with American education are not pedagogical or organizational or social or cultural in nature but are fundamentally *political*. That is, the problem is not that we do not know how to make schools better but that we are fighting among ourselves about what goals schools we should pursue. (p. 40)

Thus, the greatest danger to be aware of in this dissonant climate is that we lose our democratic voices. I say this in light of Gutmann's call to "preserve the intellectual and social foundations of democratic deliberation" (p. 14). Given the fact that there will always be political disagreement, a properly functioning democracy is the only thing we have to rely on to ensure that we can be fair in addressing our disagreements (Gutmann). In that sense, education should at least prepare citizens to understand what it means to participate in a democracy, but it must also provide the possibility for them to do so.

This is where the issue of access becomes a top priority. Universal access to democratic participation is a public good, and any restriction of access should be regarded as a matter of private interest; therefore, democratic participation is restricted as public spaces, such as schools, are privatized. Labaree identifies this tension between public rights and private rights as the result of a tension between democratic politics and capitalist markets. Consequently, if education is going to promote democratic participation, it must be collectively minded both by teaching students what it means to be a part of a collective,

and by affording students the opportunities they need to participate in ways that are not fundamentally linked to capitalist markets (Labaree). Likewise, conversations about education itself must also lend themselves to democratic, rather than economic, participation. Yet neoliberalism has been known to be hostile toward democratic practices (Klein, 2007; Harvey, 2005); Harvey explains this claim:

To guard against their greatest fears—fascism, communism, socialism, authoritarian populism, and even majority rule—the neoliberals have to put strong limits on democratic governance, relying instead upon undemocratic and unaccountable institutions (such as the Federal Reserve or the IMF) to make key decisions. (p. 69)

The privatization and deregulation of public programs does not encourage public opinion or control; it quells public deliberation. Thus, it is fair to say that “public schools differ from privately-controlled schools in that they harbour a distinct potential for public deliberation and oversight that privately owned and controlled educational institutions limit” (p. 175).

But widely-held concerns about education rarely have anything to do with questions of collective responsibility and democratic participation as neoliberal values have taken over educational debates. Instead, the media is riddled with headlines about achievement rates, test scores and choices—issues that can be easily quantified and that encourage individual, not collective, educational goals. This has created an interesting contrast in the aims of public school critics. On the one hand, some advocates of private and independent schools cite “fostering individuality and creativity” as a core benefit of private schools (Dunfield, 2007). On the other hand, some of those who want to reform the public school system to make it more effective emphasize standards and a rigid

curriculum to ensure higher achievement rates (Ravitch, 1999). Ironically, this is all expected to be achieved through an increase in choice and deregulation. Clearly, educational goals are still foggy.

5. 3. The media and assumptions about education

While there is some Canadian scholarship on the deleterious social effects of the privatization of education, public debate surrounding the “issue” of education seldom touches on the fact that there is private education in Canada—period. Class stratification is a popular topic, but private education itself is rarely challenged. For example, an online question and answer column in *The Globe and Mail* discussing the public school system in Canada opened with the following quote: “ ‘In Edmonton, even billionaires send their kids to public school,’ says Angus McBeath, who recently retired as a superintendent with the Edmonton board” (Wente, 2006). Presumably, this statement is meant to demonstrate the success of Edmonton public schools, yet it also underscores two glaring assumptions about Canada’s education system: (1) That public schools are poorly revered, and (2) That billionaires are more likely to send their children to private schools. Both assumptions illustrate the issues that I have raised throughout this paper.

That the public education system is a “failure” is an assumption that has been reinforced by popular media to the extent that it is almost universally held as true. This is most evident in the United States, but Canada is routinely exposed to American media, which inevitably influences Canadian public policy and opinion (Hoberg, 1991). In the United

States, Berliner and Biddle (1995) argue that the public has been misled about public education and its accomplishments:

Many of the myths seem also to have been told by powerful people who—despite their protestations—were pursuing a political agenda designed to weaken the nation’s public schools, redistribute support for those schools so that privileged students are favored over needy students. Or even abolish those schools altogether. (p. xii)

Yet, as shown above, this so-called failure is predominantly discussed according to a language of efficiency and cost-effectiveness that rarely addresses the value of education in broader social terms. The factors listed as evidence that the public school system is failing are typically low test scores and parental dissatisfaction, but these factors are rarely considered in their social and cultural contexts (Saltman, 2008). Consequently, popular questions about education already preclude the possibility of thinking about public education in positive terms.

Whether or not the second assumption—that billionaires are more likely to send their children to private schools—is always true, the fact that there is a system in place that can incite us to make such a claim is a problem that must be addressed on the political stage. By opening her article with this quote, Margaret Wentz implies that the attendance of extremely affluent students at public schools is newsworthy, and that therefore, it is rare. Whether or not this is true, that opportunities for educational distinction at the K-12 level are available at all, let alone only for the wealthiest proportion of students, should sound off alarm bells regarding national expectations for class stratification and social exclusivity. Rather than being challenged, however, this kind of statement enters the realm of common-sense and actually comes to represent a beacon of success against

which all other education is measured. This kind of common-sense is passable today because of the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005).

Indications that neoliberal ideals define educational issues are the criteria employed to evaluate education. For example, the emphasis on quantitative data justifies the view that numbers and economic criteria are at the bottom line of educational issues and that “values” are ambiguous, difficult to study, and fail to yield definitive results.

Nevertheless, as illustrated throughout this paper, values are a crucial component of our educational system and they need to be addressed outside of a quantitative framework in order to be properly understood. For example, stepping away from educational quality and “customer” demand, we have seen how the value systems from which public and private education are derived are indeed very different. The aims of public and private education in general may seem to be the same, but the principles of public and private education are divided. Privileging the individual over the collective is a distinct characteristic of private education, and yet it is rarely viewed as a problem, and therefore private education is seldom disputed.

However, as I have shown in the preceding chapters, the privileging of the individual over the collective is a fundamentally political issue that should be debated rather than taken for granted as natural. In fact, according to Stephen Macedo (1995), “There is nothing necessarily wrong with calls for school choice, privatization, or the decentralization of educational authority. What is inherently misguided is the failure to think about these or other reforms *politically*” (p. 304, emphasis added). While I do think

that the privatization of education is the wrong policy direction in light of broader social concerns such as collective responsibility for the public good, Macedo makes a crucial point. The privatization of education has political motivations and implications. This means that it should remain open to debate and that any objections must be legitimately heard. “Political power in a liberal democracy is, after all, the shared property of reasonable fellow citizens who want to offer one another public reasons for the way they seek to direct that power” (Macedo, 1995, p. 306). Due to the “non-public” nature of privatization, however, privatization threatens to remove itself from political debate. Thus, the final aim of this paper is to elicit a political response to the issue of private education so that it can be adequately represented as an educational issue on the political stage.

5. 3. A crisis in public education?

Is challenging private education the responsibility of the general public, policy-makers, politicians or the media? Can this issue be addressed from the bottom up, or must it be adopted by political leaders who have the authority to influence national and provincial legislation? Certainly, both have a part in the transformation of educational policies. The government and the general public influence each other. On one hand, public sentiments about public education inevitably have policy ramifications for public schools if they are aiming to compete with private schools or gain public acceptance (Van Pelt, 2007). On the other hand, the power of government to embellish public policy issues has also been illustrated by critics of neoliberalism and demonstrates how public sentiment can actually be manipulated in order to justify certain policy directions.

Canadian journalist Naomi Klein (2007) shows how countless neoliberal governments have either invented or exacerbated problems that surfaced as a result of major national incidents. These problems were framed in such a way that it appeared they could only be solved by free market strategies, while previous non-market strategies were actually working quite well before the identification of these so-called “problems”. The trick, Klein says, has been to capitalize on crisis by rebuilding what has been destroyed on new—and supposedly improved—terms. In her most recent publication, *The Shock Doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism* (2007), Klein’s opening example describes the overhaul of the public education system by the instatement of charter schools after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. Milton Friedman’s public policy recommendation to replace the public schools in New Orleans with for-profit charter schools was carried out in just nineteen months and with no public input (Klein, 2007). This kind of “raid on the public sphere” demonstrates how responses to a crisis—or to what is perceived as a crisis—are exempt from democratic practices. As Klein explains, “crises are, in a way, democracy-free zones—gaps in politics as usual when the need for consent and consensus do not seem to apply” (p. 167). What Klein really reveals throughout *The Shock Doctrine* is that neoliberalism thrives on crisis, and that neoliberalism itself might actually be incompatible with democratic practices. The privatization of the previously public school system in New Orleans at the time of Katrina illustrates how neoliberal policy-makers *had* to wait for a disaster to move forward with their agenda. In other words, the community opposed privatization until they were given no other choice.

The educational reform imposed on New Orleans depended on the impression that no other alternative was possible. Klein identifies this kind of fabrication of choices throughout countless efforts to implement neoliberal policies, which is why she is tempted to assert that neoliberalism precludes democracy. In Canada, choice is also a pivotal tool in the creation of public sentiment that supports neoliberal policy directions. Both the limitation and the abundance of choice serve to corner the consumer-citizen so that the policy choices made appear to be democratic, or at the very least, necessary. Klein gives the example of the overblown “deficit crisis” in the Canadian financial community in 1993. As a result of extensive publicity, there was a major push to lower taxes by cutting public funding to education and health care. “Since these programs are supported by an overwhelming majority of Canadians, the only way the cuts could be justified was if the alternative was national economic collapse—a full-blown crisis” (p. 309). But the crisis, Klein alleges, was invented. The Canadian press presented the Canadian financial situation as catastrophic even though it continued to receive high credit ratings from financial experts.

While public education has not yet suffered a full-blown crisis, it is not far from it, if we believe media reports. The escalation of the standards debate, the recent closing of 171 public schools in BC due to declining enrolments, and the growing attitude that public schools “fail” students are contributing to a general sentiment of hopelessness when it comes to public education. The media has aggravated the issue by focussing on standards, and in fact, as Erika Shaker (1999) argues, “the manipulation of concepts like “choice” and accountability—although it seems the only type of choices that are

acceptable are those within the competitive, free market model—has capitalized on the standards debate, paving the way for education testing companies” (p. xi). Thus, there is a market-oriented incentive for challenging public education. Right-wing lobby groups, like the Fraser Institute, persistently aim to shut down public education by accentuating its so-called failure, but their analyses consistently omit the possibility of improving public education. However, a less ideological look at the latest report on education by the Canadian Education Association (2007) tells us that while three-quarters of respondents reported only an average grade for Canada’s public education system, the same number believe that provincial governments should be directing more financial resources to public schools, and 56% would be willing to pay higher taxes in support of such an investment (CEA, 2007). The majority of the public still supports public education, and yet neoliberals are determined to tell us a different story.

In some cases, however, the story does become a reality, created by the neoliberal lobby and passed off as inevitable. Alan Sears (2003) observes this kind of “disaster capitalism” when he examines educational reforms under the conservative Harris government in Ontario at the turn of the century. Harris chose not to wait for a crisis, but to create one. His cuts in funding to public programs did lead to a disaster for public education and they had very profound and long-lasting effects. Moreover, Sears argues, the Harris government managed to present its plans to restructure education as a practical response to the times, as though ideology had no part in the debate. This has to do with the important role that “common sense” plays in the transformation of policy, and Harris was

well aware of this when he called his policy changes a Common Sense Revolution. Sears illustrates the power of common sense when he writes:

Gramsci used the term “common sense” to describe the everyday conceptions about the world that tend to be shared among people in similar social positions at a particular moment in time. These ideas take on a fact-like solidity as they are widely shared and therefore seldom challenged. The Harris government in Ontario, like other neo-liberal administrations, is attempting to accomplish a revolution in common sense, shifting the taken-for-granted assumptions and expectations that are widespread among the population. (p. 6)

By the end of his second term, Harris, along with his massive cuts to public programs, had lost a great deal of support. Nevertheless, his initial success in almost eliminating the deficit did appear to “make sense” regardless of the jobs that were lost, which is why he was elected for a second term. The common sense that Harris evoked was based solely on economic criteria. Thus, even “common sense” is shaped by dominant views and not by inherent logic (if there is such a thing).

The nature of common sense—that it is generally accepted knowledge—makes it difficult to challenge. Right now, common sense still relies heavily on the measure of economic benefits, while moral values are not always generally accepted and therefore less self-evident. But as the Harris government has shown, common sense should be regularly challenged, just as the dominantly held worldview is not always right. Private education is a difficult issue to confront for the same reason. The long history of private education in Canada, combined with the increased acceptance of neoliberal policies, makes it difficult to imagine a reason to oppose a tradition that is only gaining political clout and public approval. Yet, the above examples also demonstrate how these assets are not always good indicators of the whole picture. “Unless we honestly face these profound

rightist transformations and think tactically about them, we will have little effect either on the creation of a counter-hegemonic common sense or on the building of a counter-hegemonic alliance” (Apple, 2004, p. 40).

5. 4. New discussions in education

Erika Shaker (1999) is right to say that “all sectors of society are extremely well-served by a full, well-funded, and varied system of public education—both directly and indirectly” (p. vi). And yet the possibility of paying for an alternative education will not escape the minds of the public as a desirable opportunity for students—who (or whose parents) can afford it. What seems to be central then in the argument for private education is the question of personal choice. But what is not front and centre are the effects of abandoning public schools. Shaker argues that they are closely related; “freedom of choice and specifically freedom of education or school choice has become an excuse for right-wing groups such as the Fraser Institute to promote the dismantling of public education entirely” (p. iv). Therefore, there are two reasons why the issue of private education should be a matter of political debate. The first is that private education is strongly linked to, and might further foster, an individualistic conception of education *and* citizenship. The second is that private education undermines the integrity of the public education system and threatens to diminish its importance.

Admittedly, the above analysis relies on the underlying *principles* that distinguish public and private education; therefore, claims to the integrity of the public education system refer to public schooling in its ideal form. Nevertheless, it is important to consider what

principles underlie the processes and practices that shape our social institutions because they will undoubtedly come to bear on our own behaviour. As Egan (2001) states above, we must first deal with the awkward realm of the ideas before we can claim to understand how those ideas affect our actions and the purposes that we intend to fulfil through them. Hence, the ideal of public education remains a valuable benchmark for evaluating educational directions that aim to be socially democratic, and it is only by revisiting and *reaffirming* the ideal of public education that it can continue to serve as a point of reference.

By contrast, education that is not socially democratic needs to be more explicitly exposed in Canada, as it has been in the United States. The role of privatization in such cases must also be made clear. Therefore, resistance to privatization strategies in Canada would be strengthened by future studies on the concrete effects of markets on the democratic aims of education, and more Canadian examples of failed policy-directions, such as the Harris government's common-sense initiative. Furthermore, in order to make these points relevant to Canadians, we need to start having different kinds of conversations about education. A comprehensive discussion about the state of education in Canada cannot only revolve around standards and rankings. There is a crucial element missing from popular debate about education, and that is the question of values. That is, what values are promoted, not only through the content of the curriculum, but through the very social structure of the school and the education system? As Rick Salutin (2008) of the CCPA states, it is not enough that values are taught in the curriculum, but they must be embodied in the classroom itself. This means that we need to be much more sensitive to

the issue of social organization in education if more inclusive social structures are an aim for us as a community in Canada. Finally, Canada cannot be exempt from the public scrutiny regarding social programming that the United States has endured, and therefore more critical examinations of our public policies are essential.

In the mid 19th century, developing a more inclusive social body marked a period of democratic progress in Canada. Advocates of democratic reform opposed elite grammar schools on the basis that they were socially exclusive and that public support was required to educate all of Canada's citizens. Those who lobbied for a public school system believed that education should be universal and that all citizens would be supporters of the same school system (Phillips, 1957). These values are at the foundation of public education, and yet the persistence of private education continues to contradict the efforts of those who sought to create a common education for all Canadians. Now, what we have is a distinct effort to create competing kinds of education so that citizens are evaluated and ranked until, in effect, nobody is ever good enough. The values fostered in this scenario are individualistic, competitive and socially destructive.

One key value that seems to be missing from the current educational debate is collaboration. Having faith in collaboration means taking collective responsibility for education, being compassionate and making socially inclusive practices a top priority. But collaboration is very difficult to achieve under the present neoliberal circumstances. Still, many argue that there is hope for a more collaborative vision of education. Christopher Olakanmi (2008) of the CCPA writes:

While ideological changes made to the public education system by the Harris government in the name of improving the system actually served to harm it, there still exists the opportunity to make positive reforms to public education in Ontario. This requires a collaborative effort amongst all of us—educators, students, parents and government—to improve the quality of public education and to restore equity and accessibility to the system. (p. 71)

Olakanmi's view hinges on the partnership between the various players in the system of education. Hence, the success of public education across Canada is not only reliant on adequate funding, but it also depends on public support. Public moral support for public education cultivates a value in itself. It means that the concept of a collaborative education system is not a hopeless ideal, but an indispensable part of our democratic society.

Moreover, it is crucial that the relationship between education and democratic politics be recognized. The fact that the original advocates of democratic reform opposed private education should tell us something about the status of democratic participation in the context of a private school. While those who attend a private school might have a hand in shaping its directions, the wider citizenry is excluded from this process. As mentioned above, the difficulty of situating private education in a political debate lies in the nature of privatization. Education in such a case is not explicitly linked to government. Yet the neoliberal movement, that includes the privatization of public institutions, has existed as “a *political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites” (p. 19, Harvey, 2005). Whether these institutions were privatized before or after neoliberalism interjected, they remain implicated as class-based institutions designed to perpetuate class distinctions. As such, private education must undeniably be more prominent on the Canadian political agenda.

5. 5. Putting the public good on the political agenda

In order to see a substantial resistance to private education on the political agenda, the general public must understand the wider consequences that accompany the privatization of shared goods. The limitation of democratic involvement in public affairs (Klein, 2007), the restriction of access based on economic status (Ball, 1993), the weakening of social fabrics (Giroux, 2004), and the perpetuation of class power (Harvey, 2005), are all widely understood to result from neoliberal practices.

Naomi Klein (2007) suggests two reasons why the invasion of neoliberalism has seen—and will continue to see—resistance at the level of the general public. The first is that as patterns of stratification become more visible, the perception of a deeply entrenched class-based system will spur a return to democratic socialism in countries in which it previously existed. After all, socialist ideals were neither defeated nor voted down by neoliberalism, “they were shocked out of the way at key political junctures” (p. 542). Both fortunately and unfortunately, the instances of shock in Canada have not been as prominent—partly because we are already a very affluent country—and ours is a gradual story of neoliberalization influenced in large part by American and international economic policy (Hoberg, 1991). For this reason, there is already an expectation that class segregation will be visible, and those who do not suffer the negative effects will be unlikely to make adjustments to their privileged lifestyles if they are not sufficiently aware of those effects. Hence, I prefer Klein’s second suggestion to begin with a new narrative and a new perspective to reorient the dominant worldview. Without understanding the disparities that exist in our social, political and cultural environment,

we are vulnerable to those who are ready to take advantage of them for their own ends (Klein). Those who will be most vulnerable are those who do not understand the whole story. This refers to both those who are privileged and those who are not. Thinking and talking about the world in a way that does not essentially “financialize” everything, as neoliberalism has done (Harvey, 2005), will be a difficult task for anyone.

Finally, as I have aimed to show through the work of Giroux in particular, resisting neoliberal discourse is impossible without an appreciation of the concept of the social as a value in itself. Not only do we require new narratives, but these narratives must utilize new criteria that take into account the irreplaceable significance of the social edifice, the strength of collective responsibility, and the reciprocity of shared goods.

5. 6. Conclusion

The argument presented here is difficult because it requires us to step back and forget the criteria with which we are accustomed to evaluating problems and answering questions. The question is not “is private education more effective than public education?”, or “are families satisfied with the public education system?”. It is a question that comes before these questions. It is “what kind of education will foster collective responsibility for the public good and faith in the strength of the public itself?” and “how can we make that available to all citizens?”. These questions deliberately do not address numbers because the tendency in research about education has been to quantify the results of our education system even when these results are unquantifiable matters of value. I propose that we begin by thinking about what constitutes a valuable education in a qualitative rather than

quantitative way. This means considering the democratic goals of education that aim to support social equity and collective responsibility.

The principles of exclusion upon which the private school bases its mission are fundamentally incongruous with the notion of equity and collective responsibility. While many proponents of private education claim that their choice of an alternative educational avenue has nothing to do with exclusion (Van Pelt, 2007), they fail to recognize the relationship that is created between certain class groups as a result of their withdrawal from public education. By contrast, building a more collaborative environment requires a genuine understanding of the various experiences—distinct and shared—among students. Public education can foster this collaboration because it includes the whole citizenry, and as such it embodies collective responsibility, compassion and inclusiveness—values that resound far beyond a winning test score.

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