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Choices in Recognition and Respect: The Problems of Public Schooling in a Postmodern Age

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Introduction
In this paper, I discuss the problems of public schooling in an age of privatization, deepening retreat from public institutions and a growing politics defined by demands for recognition and individual rights. Specifically I investigate the growing religious retreat from public schools. I review this retreat from the vantage point of democratic theory. Specifically I draw upon the deliberative democratic theory of Amy Gutmann, the critique of liberal society and value pluralism offered by Nancy Rosenblum and finally the theoretical insights of Nancy Fraser concerning the importance and limitations of recognition in a democratic polity. I use these theoretical schema to critique religious retreat and the arguments of neo liberal privatization in respect to schooling.

The Problem of Recognition Respect and the Public School
The problem of recognition and respect in educational institutions is arguably one of the defining issues for public policy and democratic theory in the contemporary era. Democracy and public education are terms that go together easily. Arguments over school choice, public education, parental rights, and the proper place for religion relative to the state are fundamentally arguments about the nature of democracy.

Criticism of the public system is driven by a growing demand for a particular from of religious influence in schooling, an ever-present populist demand for parental control, and finally, a continuing and ongoing critique of the democratic nature of schooling. This critique is manifesting in diverse national settings ranging from the United States to Australia. Dignity, according to some critics, for parents as well as students, can be re-established if people are ‘free to choose’.
Schooling in many contemporary societies, such as the United States and Australia, is beset with the problems of the breakdown of conventionally held beliefs in public purpose and the fracturing of the critical narratives, which sustained beliefs in such purpose. For example, advocates of choice and critics of the ideology of the public school now question the critical democratic credentials of public schooling the commitment to social inclusion and justice. Interestingly, many of these critics articulate their vision within a language of recognition and respect.

The central pillar of public schooling has been its claim that it represented and embodied the promise of democracy. The story of the public school is of an engaged citizenry building a public system of schooling for a public that was dedicated to the propositions and philosophy of democracy. Amy Gutmann writes:

A democratic theory of education recognizes the importance of empowering citizens to make educational policy and also of constraining their choices to a broad range of policies that are nonrepressive and nondiscriminatory, so as to preserve the intellectual and social foundations of democracy (Gutmann 1990).

The discourse of choice and the discourse of parental and religious rights, which imbue choice with its ideological fervor, have taken on a stance that is quite contrary to previously understood notions of public commitment and obligation. This is so in the U.S. example where choice seeks to break down the radical democratic Jeffersonian promise of the public school as well as in Australia where choice assaults the social democratic justifications for state schooling. The concept of a public that can achieve its common good is very different from a discourse of parental rights and religious exceptionalism from the democratic public sphere (Battani, et al. 1997; Boggs 1997; Boggs 2000; Harris 1997; Ku 2000; Misztal 2001; Somers 1995; Villa 1992).

Significant argument exists as to the progressive role that alternate publics can play in the broader social and political context. Nancy Fraser for example recognizes that not all so-called counter or subaltern publics are necessarily progressive or democratic. Nevertheless, the extent to which they challenge the dominant public, and open space for multiple voices, they can contribute to a more inclusive and diverse democracy
(Fraser 1990; Sehr 1997). In this sense, counter publics are important contributors to influencing the wider public. (Fraser 1990; Sehr 1997) The question remains what are we to do with those subaltern publics that are not democratic? Do we allow them to establish schools? Is Aryan Nation’s home-schooling acceptable in a democratic society?

**Religious and Parental Rights**

Religiously inspired critics contend that public schools are controlled by secular elites that ignore the wishes of religious parents, and that this ignoring amounts to a form of exclusion. Religious conservatives such as Paul Weyrich, Carl Thomas and Ed Dobson are now arguing for disengagement from the public sphere. (Weyrich 1999; Dionne 2000; Dobson and Bauer 1990) Only through individual choice can parents make good their ‘God given right’ to educate their children according to their values. For some critics of the public school public schooling circumvents individual autonomy and disallows the proper articulation of people’s true beliefs, in this case educational beliefs (Arons 1983). In the Australian tradition, this dissent manifests in demands for further state funding of private schools and the slow growth of a Homeschooling movement. In the U.S., it manifests in tough fights over church state, vouchers and a rapidly growing Homeschooling movement.

Religious dissent and parental rights mesh easily within an overarching neo-liberal framework. They mesh easily not because neo conservative religious ideology is liberal *per se*. Rather they mesh in an environment where notions of religiosity are reducible to parental rights and choice and hence reductively separated from broader democratic norms and public accountability. These discursive frameworks also mesh with a truncated and reductive discourse of recognition and respect stripped of any commitment to public purpose.

The alliance of neoliberalism with conservative parental rights, often presented in terms of values or religious discourse is the stock in trade of right wing ideology, unstable, contradictory and controversial yet incredibly successful. In the U.S. example, Chris Lubinski recognizes the tension between, ‘[f]or example, the Mackinac Center’s neoliberal appraisal of the efficiency of market driven education … with neoconservatives’ insistence on parental rights to choose as a matter of justice
in itself” (Lubinski 2001). The Australian example of this tension is to be found between the neo liberal arguments found in the Center for Independent Studies and the arguments put forward by Family First.

Advocates for choice argue that parental control is a key right that is truncated and abused in the current system. Critics argue that public schools allow little real chance for parents to change policies and procedures. (Friedman and Friedman 1980) For religious critics of the public school, choice provides parents with the ability leave the ‘naked public square’ and go to schools that espouse their beliefs or school at home in the attempt to maintain religious values they feel threatened in the public school. (Neuhaus 1997; Neuhaus 1984) Many religious parents feel unrecognized and disrespected in public education. Caroline Herrington, in a discussion of pluralism, choice and religion, writes:

As school choice has moved rapidly from a marginalized to a politically feasible alternative, conservative religionists who favor separatist educational settings may make a common stand with the other groups advocating for more diversity in publicly funded schooling. To the degree that religious conservatives brand themselves as an oppressed minority, they can tap into the politically salient issues of minority rights and multiculturalism to buttress and enlarge support for school choice and other separatist approaches (Herrington 2000).

The important point to note about the new critics, whether secular or religiously inspired, is that they do not seek to re-energize the democratic institutions of public education. Instead, they seek to withdraw. We ought not to be misled as to the significant way that contemporary libertarian thought is an effective prop for an entirely un-libertarian agenda. Free market solutions which appear to privilege individual rights or, in this case, the presumed rights of parents, are rooted in modernity and distinctly libertarian arguments arising from classical liberalism. The illiberal agenda of fundamentalism expressed as parental rights and free choice finds a critical safe haven within an ideology overdetermined by procedural rationality, individualism and a retreat from substantive engagement with the problem of the common good. Perhaps this is an example of Hegel’s irrationality of the rational: the irrational consequences manifesting in an overextension of rational theory.
Plurality and democracy

Since the breakdown of any conception of a common good (for some) and the correlative breakdown of a unified public, many critics of public schooling point to pluralism as an inescapable condition of the decline of the public. (Coons 1990; Coons and Brennan 1999; Coons, et al. 1970; Coons and Sugarman 1971; Coons and Sugarman 1978) Privatization and diversity are, in contemporary society, thought to go hand in hand (Radnitzky 1999). This proposition can only be taken seriously when public good and the idea of a res publica are eclipsed. Advocates of choice and radical exit pluralism argue that the aggregate of contending interest groups will establish the common good. Exit pluralism is defined as an ideological position where the presumed rights of groups within society to exit from public institutions and norms trumps broader notions of common purpose and public good. If freed from the constraints of public institutions and free to develop their own visions as they see fit, reinvigorated associations will underpin democracy. Parents, families, and religion are a cornerstone of this approach.

For example, Jay Greene (Greene and Mellow 1998) makes the claim that civic socialization is more developed in private schools. Hence school choice, rather than leading to a breakdown of civic virtue, may in fact engender it. Jay Greene claims that research shows that the values of citizenship can be accentuated through choice. In this sense, choice is not anti democratic; rather it enables proper democratic values to flourish (Peterson 2002). Greene argues that the evidence so far,

suggests that there is no reason to fear that school choice programs will undermine democratic education by allowing more students to choose private schools. There is even good reason to believe that school choice programs may improve democratic education as well as educational achievement (Greene 1998).

The assumption by some is that restoring authority and power to families will aid the development of virtue. This meshes neatly in the Australian example with John Howard’s observations regarding the values of public and private schools in Australia. Howard argues that ‘government schools have become too politically correct and too values-neutral.’ (Crabb 2004) The non-existence of an agreed to big public and its correlate an agreed to common good does not mean that all is lost.
The existence of plurality and diversity does not preclude democratic discourse. Fraser’s recognition of the positive and empowering aspects of counter publics is testament to the importance of a plurality of publics {Fraser, 1990}. Post and Rosenblum point out that: ‘With respect to those aspects of associational life that are pertinent to identity formation, we would stress that a key variable is the degree and manner in which the diverse groups that make up civil society are open and permeable’ (Post and Rosenblum 2001). With regards to education, Post and Rosenblum’s observation regarding the importance of exposure to, and the experience of, pluralism seems to be a useful way of critiquing certain strains of choice theory and parental rights, which fail to address the issue of how children’s democratic rights are to be upheld.

Another way of putting this is to argue that in a liberal democratic society ‘the experience of pluralism’ is available to all members. If we hold children in small closed groups that indoctrinate them and stymie their development, this contravenes their experience of pluralism. This poses a significant democratic criticism of the type of approach favored by authoritarian homeschoolers and others who use the democratic arguments of voice and exit to voice criticism of the public school. For example, Paul Weyrich argues:

What I mean by separation is, for example, what the homeschoolers have done. Faced with public school systems that no longer educate but instead "condition" students with the attitudes demanded by Political Correctness, they have seceded. They have separated themselves from public schools and have created new institutions, new schools, in their homes. {Weyrich, 1999}

Post and Rosenblum’s argument is an effective counter to the excesses of neo-pluralist discourse which tends to uncritically celebrate diverse communities without critical democratic interrogation. (Rosenblum 1998) The individualist argument of choice effectively props up authoritarian groups or associations impervious to dialogue and diversity. This appears to be the model of community favored by choice even if the initial move to achieve it is based upon an individualist libertarian philosophy. Such a result fundamentally undermines the quality of choice not to

The type of argument mounted by libertarians, such as Chubb and Moe, Arons, and Brouillette seeks to fuse community and conscience in a way that fails to interrogate the tyrannical possibilities within communities and fails to comprehend the fluidity of identities necessary for a democratic polity. Another way of putting this is to say that neo-liberal neo-pluralist theory suffers the problems of an excess of the politics of recognition without a concurrent balance with the politics of social justice and democratic values.

Alan Wolfe reminds us that active participation in civic life constitutes and constructs the common good.(Wolfe 1998) The demand of more rights for parents and for consumers seems to trump the notion of civic rights and responsibilities, yet the idea of parents as well as consumer rights ought not to be contrasted with a position that is somehow against parents, families or consumers. Wolfe’s observation gives us a clue as to a better direction for our approach.

There is a world of difference between acting for one’s private good as consumers, or as parents of consumable goods, and the common good as citizens. Advocates of choice seem to think that the values and mores built up over time through public institutions (which can then be dismantled) will always temper possessive individualism. This is an extremely debatable proposition.

In a US example, Tyack and Hansot point out that ‘public schools are everywhere close at hand and open to all children. They generate valuable debates over matters of immediate concern, and offer a potential for community of purpose that is unparalleled in our society’(Tyack and Hansot 1981). In Australia, Maree O’Halloran’s defense of public schools as central to a democratic society is one among many contemporary examples of the same essential argument (O’Halloran 2004).
Of all the institutions in public life schooling is one of the most consciously formative. Stephen Macedo makes the important point that we ‘need to avoid making the mistake of assuming that liberal citizens - self-restrained, moderate, and reasonable - spring full-blown from the soil of private freedom.’ (Macedo 1998) Amy Gutmann writes:

It is not for us to deny fundamentalist parents the right to draw the wrong line for their children in their homes and churches. Parental freedom entails this limited right. It is for us to say that parents do not have a right to veto a line drawn by public schools unless that line is repressive or discriminatory. (Gutmann 1990)

The issue at stake is the public nature of our institutions. Amy Gutmann points out the theoretically simplistic and bare choice between markets or centralized bureaucracy is not the only choice available. Gutmann argues that ‘a more moderate and publicly defensible choice is a decentralized and democratic mixed (public and private) system of schooling. (Gutmann 2000) In other words the idea that our choice in school reform is simply between statism and privatization precludes a more nuanced debate over the fundamental shape and nature of public institutions.

In fact, the condition of modernity has itself rendered redundant the previous implications that the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ hold for us. These terms do not help us much to understand the debate (in their reductive guises) since they point to a reality that has been surpassed a long time ago. More precise language is needed here. The withdrawal to the private realm is in part a characteristic of modernity and a response to modernity, but it is ultimately an inadequate response. It potentially strengthens the very thing it seeks to escape.

Not only does withdrawal to expressive association (families, religious groups) dissipate the realm of public freedom but it also threatens the very freedoms that its advocates seek to defend. For example, the problems of bureaucracy can be addressed, though not entirely overcome, by a commitment to public participation with our public institutions. This represents a third way out of the apparent dialectical contradiction between bureaucracy and freedom.
A withdrawal altogether from public democratic institutions does not overcome the potential tyrannical problems. In fact, it accelerates and accentuates this problem. It establishes, beyond the scope of dialogue, private tyrannies. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson argue in *Democracy and Disagreement* that majoritarian democracy ought to be tempered by a respect for basic liberty and opportunity, and not simply procedural fairness. (Gutmann and Thompson 1997) Critics of the public school and its democratic structure who retreat to concepts of privatization and parental authority avoid these basic needs.

The role of schooling in a democracy, among other things, is to educate and inculcate students in the values of deliberation and ‘mutual respect.’ (Gutmann and Thompson 1997) Critics of public democracy describe education as mired in conflict and argue that politicization brings out the worst in people. That this type of argument is too fearful of the friction and noise of democracy. It represents what Robert Bellah and Charles Taylor have critiqued as ‘the erosion of the political’ (Taylor 1992). The erosion of trust in politics and public involvement according to Taylor actually strengthens the bureaucratic rationality it seeks to overcome.

This fear of conflict and retreat from the public sphere is partly driven by the sense of fear and distrust of others. This fear can only be added to and distrust only built upon in a condition of retreat. In other words, not only does parental and religious retreat reinforce the fear and ‘paranoia’ within individuals and groups, it also undercuts their own freedoms, which are based on a strong political and public sphere and reinforces the forces from which they seek to escape (Wolfe 2000).

As J. Henig, R. Hula, M. Orr, and D. Pedesclaux point out, ultimately, ‘[t]here is no way around politics.’ (Henig, et al. 2001) Claus Offe suggests trust and cooperative behavior can be ‘generated’ not simply ‘inherited’ (Offe 1999) However, fear of others, mistrust and paranoia is accentuated by withdrawal from the public domain. If we argue that we want more democracy and then complain that friction and noise are bad signs, it seems we want to cook a meal without turning on the oven. (Shor 1986; Smith 1997)
There is often in criticisms of democratic institutions, a desire on the part of critics to be without conflict. Sometimes expressed as a therapeutic desire for a ‘conflict-less’ harmony, this type of approach tends to drain democracy of its robustness in order to save it. The therapeutic fear of conflict informs the libertarian as well as conservative retreat from public institutions. Stephen Macedo provides us with an important corrective to the enthusiasm held by those who seek to privatize schooling. The idea that people will suddenly disagree peacefully (or in extremis that disagreement itself will wither away with an end to politics) is both practically incorrect and theoretically dangerous.

Practically speaking, the ability to handle disagreements may decline in a condition of complete privatization. Theoretically, this retreat to the private sphere is a retreat from politics and a retreat from the framework, which provides us with the ability to temper and educate disagreement. The upshot of privatization may not be an eclipsing of politics and disagreement but its acceleration and privatisation. An unintended consequence of a retreat from argument may be to make resultant arguments all the more bitter, not less so.

The notion that we can retreat to the comfort and stability of our respective communities of conscience avoids democratic politics by avoiding challenge and growth. The habits of mutual respect, manners and public behavior are forged by having to deal with, and work, with diversity. Withdrawing from diversity and ‘politicisation’ does not of necessity add to the public good. The habits learnt in public education, the democratic training is a necessary precondition for a society that is otherwise highly individualistic and still unequal. In other words, painting politics with an entirely negative brush enables critics to evade the positive civic and participatory behavior that occurs within the public sector.

The desire to withdraw from the public sphere because it is conflict laden is ultimately a desire to discard involvement in democracy and its institutions. Such a desire can have quite deleterious consequences both for the broader public interest and for individuals as well. The anti-democratic implications of such theory are reasonably obvious, despite claims to the contrary. Why is this so? Democratic freedom is characterized by debate and disagreement. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson
correctly argue, disagreement should be addressed through deliberation (Gutmann and Thompson 1997).

Retreat from deliberation and the public institutions committed to it is not an expression of freedom but rather a retreat from the difficulty of freedom. The choice before us is not one between a conflictless utopia and chaos and resentment. Rather through participation, dialogue and respect a third way between these reductive visions is possible.

The Rights of Children and Student Citizens
The arguments of parental rights advocates often make an implicit assumption that the interests of the child and the parent or guardian are synonymous. Religious advocates make this argument forcefully as well. To what extent parental rights uphold or abrogates a child’s rights or more particularly upholds their recognition and respect is an open question. Here lies the rub, parental rights are a poor measure of how to maintain student rights and recognize their identities.

Is there a clear and easy fit between parental rights and influence in schooling and the rights of children and students? Amy Gutmann provides us with an excellent introduction to the problems of parental authority in schooling {Gutmann 1990}. Gutmann draws upon the observation of John Stuart Mill that children are not the property of parents. Gutmann argues that parents do not simply have the right to do what they like with children educationally or otherwise (Gutmann 1990). Rob Reich also restates the extremely important and simple point made by Mill and Gutmann that children are not the property of parents, nor are they extensions of parents (Reich 2002).

Rob Reich (Reich 2002) refers to the self regarding and other regarding aspects of parental interest in the education of their children. Parents do not always act in the best interests of the child. A type of theoretical and ultimately politically reductive approach to education excludes from view a broader notion of the child as future citizen of a democratic polity. Reich points out:
Children are owed as a matter of justice the capacity to choose to lead lives -- to adopt values and beliefs, pursue an occupation, endorse new traditions -- that are different from those of their parents. Because the child cannot him or herself ensure the acquisition of such capacities and the parents may be opposed to such acquisition, the state must ensure it for them. The state must guarantee that children are educated for minimal autonomy. (Reich 2002).

Reich’s argument is important with regards to the balancing of interests between the parents, the state and the child. It is important to take this position a step further. The habits and practices of a democratic polity are founded in the interactions between all citizens in public spaces, where mutual respect and dialogue are at a premium. Reifying the concept of parental and religious rights at the expense of this potentially betrays children and is ultimately a threat to civic freedom.

Critiques of the public school that posit the parent as the moral answer to the ongoing tensions in democratic society are oversimplified. Assertions of parental rights as trumps over civic engagement and intersubjectivity undercut rather than enhance public freedom, which is the foundation of personal and group freedom. As William E. Connolly explains, intersubjective theory (which is the broad theoretical premise for supporting public institutions and critiquing privatization) directly challenges the behavioralist and individualistic theory that underpins parental rights (Connolly 2001).

Intersubjectivity translates in political terms to support for public schooling and deliberative democratic processes. At a philosophical level, Charles Taylor (Taylor 1991) makes the point that self-determining freedom ultimately ‘undercuts’ itself. Choice becomes the sole remaining value and ultimately ‘subverts both the ideal of authenticity and the associated ethic of recognizing difference’ (Taylor 1991).

The ethic of choice privileges in extremis the construction of particular identities (what Arons refers to as the right of conscience) but it potentially curtails ‘openness to horizons of significance’ as well as ‘self-definition in dialogue’ (Taylor 1991). A public system of education ought not to be trumped by so-called parental rights and market driven notions of religious freedom. Such a position, if taken, would negate
the notion of a public school in the first place. What’s more, parents simply do not have rights to do anything what they want with their kids.

There is no doubt that the combination of parent’s rights; child’s rights expressivism and economic individualist discourses have characterized much of the formal discourse in school choice (Coons and Sugarman 1978). The right of exit and the establishment of autonomous communities according to this model are the key characteristics of democratic society. Albert O. Hirschman’s work on the role that exit and voice have in making organizations responsive to the needs of individuals provides the intellectual backdrop to much of the discussion on the right of exit, and lack of voice, in current public institutions (Hirschmann 1970). For many, withdrawal is an exercise in democratic rights. The right to exit is seen as a fundamental right in a liberal democracy.

The right of exit, as much as voice, are critical components of a democratic society (Dutton 1997; Hirschmann 1970). Paul Teske (Teske 2000) argues that ‘there is a relationship between exit and voice—as parental exit options increase, schools are forced to pay more attention to the preferences (voice) of parents.’ For advocates of school choice the right of exit not only forces public institutions to listen to parents, but is also a significant right in itself. However, the right of exit entails giving up on voice within public institutions and equally importantly potentially inhibits the rights of the child who usually gets little say in any of this.

The idea that parents exercise their rights in a vacuum and that their decisions are made without reference to their broader political and social positioning is contradicted by the facts. A too narrow focus on parental rights excludes from sight the broader issues in contemporary society and helps to exclude from vision a discourse of parental and student involvement tied to a more participatory, dialogic, public and deliberative framework. (Jennings 1968; McEwan 1998; Morgan and Sorensen 1999)

It is far from clear that civic values would be inculcated and that the preconditions for a democratic society (integration etc.) would occur if public monies could follow parents to religious schooling or homeschooling irrespective of its democratic and public nature. Under the auspices of improving choices, the key characteristic of a
democratic society, the diversity within the public school, would, if we are not
careful, break down. What is more, the ‘choice’ to attend religious schools or home
school may in some cases negate the project of public schooling. The right of exit, as
such, is based on the proposition that parents have a complete and unfettered right to
exit public schooling and educate their children in any way they see fit.

This begs a significant number of questions regarding recognition and respect. Is
recognition and respect defined simply as an expression of the right to negative
liberty? In other words, are recognition and respect merely the right to exit? Nancy
Fraser captures the problem of recognition expressed in a reductive sense. Fraser
points out that reductive recognition which exhibits the characteristics of
displacement and reification has extremely negative consequences. According to
Fraser:

insofar as the politics of recognition displaces the politics of
redistribution, it may actually promote economic inequality;
insofar as it reifies group identities, it risks sanctioning violations
of human rights and freezing the very antagonisms it purports to
mediate. (Fraser 2000)

Retreat from public institutions may cruelly undermine the very freedoms and
liberties that advocates of choice claim they are defending. Isolated, fearful and
suspicious of our neighbors is not an adequate result any society should sanction. So
what are the alternatives to privatization, parental authoritarianism and inegalitarian
possessive individualism posing as a resurgence of morality?

My essential argument is that the defining tool to help us make a distinction between
a politics of recognition based on separatism and one based on social justice lies in the
terrain of participation and voice. However, participation and voice must include
students as well as parents teachers and other staff in a school. The significance of
including children as participants in schooling rather than as recipients of schooling is
that it breaks down the notion that students are either the property of parents and
hence puts a limitation on the all-encompassing idea of parental rights while
encouraging the notion of parental participation. Recognizing student voice also puts
a break on the idea of students being mere recipients of education from teachers or
from the broader educational bureaucracy and empowers them as participants in the process. The work of Paulo Freire is pertinent to any discussion of this topic {Freire, 1972}.

**Participation and the recreation of public possibility**

Numerous reform efforts addressing community participation, making smaller schools, providing parents with support to participate and more inclusive pedagogies are all part of a democratic alternative. (Connell, et al. 2002) The famous Chicago reforms in urban education, which began during the late 1980s, are a good US excellent example of some of the possibilities for democratic reform in schooling. Known variously as strategies in ‘egalitarian pluralism’(Hess 1993) ‘democratic localism’(Rollow 1993) or ‘people power’ (Moore 1992), the Chicago reforms pointed in a direction of inclusive publicness and democratic participation. A report from the, Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform points out that:

Research on Chicago school reform’s democratic localism, where parents and community members have an equal role with educators in school decision-making, demonstrates the contribution of such participation to curriculum and instruction and to raising student achievement. (Gold, et al. 2002)

The discursive techniques involved in criticism are themselves a fascinating aspect of cultural struggle. Despite the efforts to recentralize and curtail parental involvement in Chicago, as well as other metropolitan systems such as Cleveland,(Ryan 2001) the promise of parental involvement, democratic participation and public schooling is still an important counter to complete privatization.

Michael Mintrom captures the essence of the Chicago reforms with the observation that, ‘bureaucracy, not democracy, was the problem to be addressed’ and that, ‘democratic localism’ has created ‘new opportunities for concerned stakeholders to deliberate over school problems and to develop creative ways to address them’ (Mintrom 2001). Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright point out that empowered deliberative democracy has been implemented for example in ‘policing and educational governance in Chicago’ where the results were encouraging (Fung 2001).
Bryk and Rollow remind us that, ‘renewed democratic politics, rooted in sustained local participation, is the necessary antidote to unresponsive societal institutions.’ (Bryk and Rollow 1992) This approach takes seriously the work of among others, numerous critics including, Bowles and Gintis, Benjamin Barber, Michael Katz and Robert Bellah. (Barber 1984; Bellah 1991; Bowles and Gintis 1987; Katz 1987)

Bryk and Rollow capture the essence of deliberative democratic participation and point out that, ‘when a politics of enabling school communities is successfully engaged, the base of shared understandings grows, positive sentiments and trust among participants rise, and the capacity of the school community to tackle even larger problems expands.’ (Bryk and Rollow 1992) Numerous reports and studies on community involvement and participation (Brown and Gary 1991) bear out the observation that privatization and retreat are not the only options for addressing the problems of the public school. (Melaville 2003)

A problematic aspect of parental participation and local democratic participation is the lack of civic capacity of some parents. This can be due to low self-esteem, repetitive and structural exclusion, perhaps through racism, homophobia, or sexism. (Leonardo 2003) There are to be sure significant impediments on participation.

The critical point to note is that democratic theory can address the issues and problems that parents and others have with schooling. The importance of democracy to schooling is not something simply imposed upon students but must involve students. These types of participatory practices can be developed within a clear commitment to social justice and equity. They are practices, which seek to consider and recognize diversity but do so within a framework of equitable civic participation and respect.

Such a framework shows us the real possibilities of possibilities for fusing a politics of recognition with a politics of radical democratic participation and a consistent commitment to social justice. In other words, the contradictions of recognition and equity, of equity and participation are not in any sense absolute or predetermined.
Rather the apparent contradictions between them are related to historically situated practices and contingencies, which can be interrogated and challenged.

**Conclusion**

The debate over public school governance is a debate over recognition and respect, and given that these issues are the *foci* for dealing with difference and social justice it seems high time that the participation and rights of students also be given a priority in the debate over recognition and respect in educational institutions. Such recognition of this issue seriously challenges the formulations of recognition and respect put forward by those who prefer school choice and equate exit with the right of recognition and respect.

Advocates of choice pursue their agenda under a broad cover of liberal freedom from which they claim support and to which they want to return. By articulating the issue in this way they gloss over the more substantive and thicker concept of public schooling which links public to forms of participation and deliberation constitutive of democracy. The theoretical arguments of Fraser, Gutmann, Rosenblum and others provide us with a more nuanced approach to the problems of democratic schooling. The essential conclusion of this paper is that recognition and respect must be part of a broader commitment to inclusive and publically justifiable democratic values in schools. The solution to the problems of democratic public education in both Australia and the U.S. lies not in retreating from democracy or the idea of the public. Rather the solution relies on making institutions more public and more democratic.

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