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11 The Politics of Civil Society and the Possibility of Change

A Speculation on Leadership in Education

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THE IDEA OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The idea of civil society first emerged during the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was an essentially utopian aspiration for a civilisation in which individuals would live together as politically mature, responsible citizens, tolerant of religious, ethnic and cultural diversity, and held together by a social contract based upon natural law and the beneficial, civilising effects of commercial exchange, one of the consequences of which would be a reduction in gross inequality. As such, it rejected the absolutist claims of both traditional religion and the authoritarian state, envisaging an essentially republican politics based on the self-organisation of individuals in the pursuit of common interests under the rule of law. Civil society, in its various versions, was therefore seen as something separate from the state but beyond the domestic sphere of home and family—a society of associations operating in the public sphere in such a way as to articulate various interests into the political process.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the idea of civil society was discarded in political economy to the point where Hobsbawm (1994: 139) could describe it as 'nostalgic rhetoric' and Margaret Thatcher could famously declare that there was no such thing as society—only individuals and their families. However, during the past two decades the idea has reemerged as a crucial concept in social, political, and economic controversies. The initial impetus for this 'brilliant comeback' (Kocka 2004: 67) was its use in the antidictatorial critique of one-party dictatorships, Soviet hegemony, and Eastern European totalitarianism mounted by Havel, Geremek and Konrad (Kocka 2004). It was also vital to similar critiques developed in Latin America and South Africa (Kaldor 2003; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). But its use is no longer restricted to such movements and is in wide currency in both left and right political movements as well as by liberals, communitarians, antiglobalisation activists, and social scientists.

Kocka suggests there are three main reasons for the current popularity of the idea of civil society. Firstly, its emphasis on responsibility and self-organisation
appeals to those who believe that the interventionist state has reached its limits. Secondly, with its emphasis on discourse, negotiation, and understanding as opposed to competition, exchange, and individualism, the logic of civil society presents an immanent critique of unbridled capitalism. Thirdly, it offers an emphasis on social cohesion as an antidote to the individualism and fragmentation of postindustrial society (2004: 67–8).

In its contemporary form, civil society is argued to be at one and the same time a type of social action, a social sphere, and a utopian project.

As a type of social action civil society:

1) is oriented towards non-conflict, compromise and understanding in public;
2) stresses individual independence and social self-organization;
3) recognises plurality, difference and tension;
4) proceeds non-violently and peacefully; and
5) is, among other things, oriented towards general things (and) the common good. (Kocka 2004: 69)

As a social sphere, civil society is constituted by clubs, associations, social movements, and networks that form ‘a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected non-government institutions’ (Keane 1998: 6).

As a utopian project, civil society is currently being advocated in the West as an antidote to both big government and big capital, and in developing countries as a political project of modernisation in the pursuit of democracy and civil rights (Ibrahim 1995; Kaviraj and Khilnani 2001). Here the idea of civil society is defined in contrast to both the constraining authority of the state and the primordial authority of the involuntary bonds of family, village, tribe, and historical cultures (Zubaida 2001).

However, there are significant differences in the politics of civil society. Emerging from the Weberian tradition is a view of a public sphere where various groups consolidate around particular interests and argue out differences in values and priorities that can be subsequently articulated into the formal procedures of politics and legislation. As Kim suggests,

> For Weber ... the most crucial issue in revitalizing a civil society is to preserve and magnify the elements of contestation under late modern circumstances. Modern individuals need to engage in various associational activities so that they can challenge and compete with each other in a concrete everyday context in which they will be constantly required to define, redefine and choose their ultimate values and to take disciplined moral actions based on their choices. (2004: 188)

Contemporary commentators like Wolin follow this line of argument, suggesting, for instance, that in modern society with its vast concentrations of power in governments and corporations the most desperate problem of democracy is ‘to develop a fairer system of contestation over time, especially hard times’ (1996: 115).
On the other hand, an alternative view emphasises the associational life it sponsors as a mechanism for establishing social solidarity in the face of anomie and disorder. In this right-Tocquevillian view,

associational life is frequently imagined in terms of communal congeniality and group solidarity: the civic virtues, in terms of civility, cooperation and trust. In the face of the alleged anomie and disorderliness, then, the issue becomes the recovery of this form of solidarity through a pluralistic associational life, which, as an unintended consequence is expected to engender a more engaged public citizenry and a robust liberal democracy. (Kim 2004: 189)

These contrasting views of civil society are taken up in two further ideas: contestation in an autonomous public sphere and social solidarity through the development of social capital.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE AUTONOMOUS PUBLIC SPHERE

The most important contemporary theorist of the public sphere is Jürgen Habermas, who, in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, argued the importance of civil society autonomy as

a domain of our social life where such a thing as public opinion can be formed [where] citizens . . . deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion . . . [in order to] express and publicize their views. (1989: 105)

Habermas originally conceived of the public sphere as a unitary arena where different voices struggled to articulate a ‘public’ view free of the constraints of the political power of the state or the economic power of corporations. Public institutions—especially the media—needed to be autonomous and free from political or economic coercion. They were the third pillar of society, providing the arena within which ‘public opinion . . . is worked up via democratic procedures into communicative power [which] cannot “rule” itself but can . . . point the use of administrative power in specific directions’ (1994: 9-10). Social movements—such as the feminist, civil rights, and environmental—were argued by Habermas to be the most significant contemporary contributors to the public sphere and the development of communicative power.

His critics, such as Negt and Kluge (1993), however, argued that it was precisely the existence of these multiple social movements that supported the idea that rather than a single, unitary, public sphere, there were in fact many publics and multiple public spheres which constituted (or were constituted by) multiple cultures and forms of communication. In the same vein,
Gitlin (1998) raised the question of whether we should be talking about the 'Public Sphere or public sphericules.'

Moreover, Fraser and Honneth (2003), in part following Felski (1989), argued for the idea of counter-public spheres through which marginalised minority groups articulate positions in opposition to those in the broader public sphere, attempting subsequently to move them towards broader acceptance and eventual articulation into state legislation. In many ways, these are arguments about how the public sphere(s) operate rather than about the existence of such an area of discourse, contention, and debate separate from the state and economy within which ideas and interests can be articulated (McKee 2005). But the intersection of public sphere ideas and, by extension, the public interest, with the diversity of contemporary cultures, movements, and associations is an important area of current debate (Bates 2005a; 2005b; Gray 2000; Touraine 2000).

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

The importance of membership in cultures, movements, and associations is emphasised by the development of the idea of social capital. It is possible to see it developing out of ideas of mutual obligation outlined by such theorists as Adam Ferguson (1966 [1767]) and Adam Smith. Smith's most popular book during his lifetime was *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1984 [1759]), which took as its starting point the desire of individuals for kindness and esteem. Such desire was seen by Smith as the foundation for associations beyond the family through which networks were established on the basis of trust. Such networks built shared norms and social capital, which in turn facilitated commercial activity and the growth of trade (Bates 1995; 2003a; Muller 1993). These three key ideas—networks, norms, and trust—form the basis for various approaches to social capital in its contemporary forms. Interest in the idea has recently been revitalised by three authors in particular: Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam.

Bourdieu (1991; 1997) articulated the idea of social capital as analogous to economic capital which, along with cultural and symbolic capital, combines to determine the social position of individuals. Such capital was argued to derive from networks of relationships in which individuals are embedded and which provide social resources through which they establish an appropriate place in social hierarchies. Although Bourdieu uses the term in a number of different ways, it is essentially presented as a metaphor—one that allows social capital to be seen as capable of being accumulated, invested, and spent in ways analogous to, but somewhat separate from, economic capital.

At the same time that Bourdieu reintroduced the idea of social capital to European social theory through his form of cultural analysis, Coleman developed a similar, but functionalist, analysis in the US. Emerging from
his studies of the relationship between educational achievement and social inequality, Coleman suggested that differences in educational achievement could largely be explained by differences in social (somewhat distinct from economic) capital. In this explanation, Coleman defined social capital as 'the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person' (1994: 300). He saw these resources as networks of social relations that were essentially inherited along with economic and political networks, and which consolidated achievement across generations: 'the powerful remained powerful by virtue of their contacts with other powerful people' (Schuller, Baron and Field 2000: 6).

Oddly, despite their mutual interest in social capital and educational achievement, and their collaboration towards the end of Coleman's career, they never acknowledged each other's work in their writings. This was possibly due to Coleman's treatment of social capital and its distribution as relatively unproblematic and 'functional' while, for Bourdieu, the distribution of economic, cultural, and social capital was the result of considerable effort on the part of elites to maintain their ownership of various forms of capital at the expense of the dispossessed.

Perhaps the most popular and influential account of social capital in recent years is Putnam's, whose commentary on the decline of social associations in the US is outlined in his article (later book) Bowling Alone (1995; 2000). The three key themes reemerge in his succinct definition of social capital as 'features of social life—networks, norms and social trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives' (1996: 56).

In charting the decline of associational life in the US, Putnam (2000) argues that trust and trustworthiness lubricate social life, and the reciprocity they engender is the touchstone of social solidarity. This does not necessarily mean that all forms of social capital based upon trust and reciprocity are virtuous. Indeed, certain forms of social organisation (organised crime, for instance), may also depend upon quite particular social norms, trust, and networks for their effectiveness. But the interesting thing about Putnam's work is that it is less deterministic than either Coleman's functionalist or Bourdieu's reproductionist accounts of social capital. It suggests, rather, that social capital is variable between communities and over time.

This idea of variability is taken up by Fukuyama (1992; 1995), who associates trust as the dominant feature of social capital, with particular cultural characteristics. For instance, he attempts to explain the relative economic success of various nation states with reference to his assessment of their levels of social capital. Success, he suggests, depends upon communities 'formed not on the basis of explicit rules and regulation but out of a set of ethical habits and reciprocal moral obligations internalised by each of the community's members' (1995: 9). Moreover, 'a nation's well-being,
as well as its ability to compete, is conditioned by a single, pervasive, cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in the society' (1995: 7).

This being so, Fukuyama argues, ‘high-trust’ societies, such as Japan, Germany, and the US, will inevitably be more economically successful than ‘low-trust’ societies, such as China, Italy, and France, as ‘high-trust’ between managers and workers enables enhanced production. Indeed, the function of social capital in his account now becomes clear: the enhancement of production through the minimisation of dissent. Or, more politely, ‘the economic function of social capital is to reduce the transaction costs associated with formal coordination mechanisms like contracts, hierarchies, bureaucratic rules, and the like’ (2001: 10). It would seem, therefore, that in order to be economically successful states should sponsor the development of social capital in order to reduce social friction and thus, transaction costs.

There are several major difficulties with this approach, but two are of great importance. First, there are considerable doubts as to its empirical validity, particularly given the rise of China and the very high levels of indebtedness of the US, the failure of firms such as Enron and Arthur Andersen, and the growing disparities between rich and poor, none of which are conducive to the formation of ‘high-trust.’ Secondly, like most functionalist accounts of social mechanisms, it entirely dismisses the importance of inequality and conflict in the contestation of existing distributions of economic, cultural, and social capital. Despite these criticisms, another attempt to use the notion of social capital in this functionalist manner is articulated through the ‘Third Way’ movement.

Advocates of the Third Way place considerable importance on the notion of social capital, seeing it first in economic terms and secondly as a mechanism of mobilisation of the disadvantaged through ‘social entrepreneurship’ (Giddens 1998; 2000). Giddens, for instance, advocates networking among industry as a form of social capital that increases innovation and productivity (2000: 78ff) as well as endorsing the capacity of ‘third sector groups’ to ‘offer choice and responsiveness in the delivery of public services’ to the poor (2000: 81). Social capital from this perspective, therefore, seems to involve the sponsorship and/or cooptation of associations and voluntary groups by either the economy or the state. The interests of the economy are served by lowered costs of production combined with higher levels of innovation through networking. The interests of the state are served by more efficient administration of services combined with lowered levels of anomie and resistance (McClenaghan 2000). These are not necessarily unwanted outcomes, but they do indicate the propensity for economy and state to appropriate the supposedly autonomous ‘public sphere’ for their own ends.

Indeed, the ‘Third Way’ project of building social capital among the poor, whether of the First World or the Third, is considered by some as a convenient ideological evasion of the problems of the mal-distribution of wealth and power within and between societies. (Fine 2001)
More broadly, the difficulty with the definition of social capital as primarily concerned with the replacement of the norms, values, and social solidarity threatened by the pressures of globalisation and economic competition is that it obscures the contestation between various groups demanding civil, political, and economic rights and the redress of undeserved inequalities. As McClenaghan observes, in such analyses

social capital is used in such a way as to place the main emphasis upon social cohesion; an emphasis which gives the analysis a profoundly functionalist and socially conservative bent in that it discounts community organization and mobilisation in defence of citizenship rights and the political articulation of rights-based demands which inevitably generate conflict, in favour of activities designed to enhance social cohesiveness and, by implication, social control. (2000: 580)

THE DEMOCRACY OF CIVIL SOCIETY

In essence this is, therefore, a battle between the (private) individual and the (public) state, with civil society being the battleground on which individuals, through collective action, attempt to delimit the power of the state and where the state, through collective agencies, attempts to prevent the fragmentation of the nation. Baker, in his discussion of Havel's approach to this problem, makes the point succinctly:

With Havel, then, the public and the private are intimately related, it is just a matter of how the relationship should be constructed such that the public is not allowed to destroy the private (totalitarianism), nor the private allowed to destroy the public (atomising liberal-individualism). (2002: 149)

The issue for Havel is not that either the public or the private should have primacy over the other, but rather that the private should be a 'holding area' of the self 'from which the self must necessarily emerge to act publicly' (Havel 1988 in Mische 1993: 245). For Havel, it is this emergence of the autonomous human subject into the public sphere that forms the basis of authentic public life—the democracy of civil society (1985, 1988).

In this view, Havel is close to Arendt (1958a; 1963), who argues that 'the political realm rises directly out of acting together, the “sharing of words and deeds”' (1958b: 198). But, interestingly, Arendt defends the idea of civil society against both the incursions of the state and the demands of communities based in national, religious, ethnic, or local traditions:

Arendt's conception of the public realm is opposed not only to society but also to community: to Gemeinschaft as well as Gesellschaft. While
greatly valuing warmth, intimacy and naturalness in private life, she insisted on the importance of a formal, artificial public realm in which what mattered was the people’s actions rather than their sentiments; in which the natural ties of kinship and intimacy were set aside in favour of a deliberate, impartial solidarity with other citizens; in which there was enough space between people for them to stand back and judge one another coolly and objectively. (Canovan 1985: 632)

This is an important issue, for against both collectivist (totalitarian) and liberal (individualist) conceptions of politics, Arendt and Havel argue the importance of civil society as a ground on which both public and private interests can be articulated without the dominance of one over the other; a view similar to Habermas’ account of the importance of an autonomous public sphere discussed earlier. As Baker argues, in Arendt and Havel’s view,

the individual’s private sphere matters, but its preservation is not the sole end of politics, as in liberalism. Yet neither is the collective reified, as in more communitarian visions, since the public sphere is understood not as a thing in itself, but as that artificially constructed (though crucial nonetheless) space in which individuals come together. (2002: 154)

But this raises immediately the question of how and under what conditions individuals are to come together in the public sphere. While individuals may make claims as members of particular communities celebrating particular norms, values, and interests, the demand for recognition of the rights accruing to difference may well create friction with those claiming the primacy of alternative norms, values, and interests. As Olssen argues,

pushing the principle of difference too far results in contradiction. While multi-culturalists and those who advocate difference want to celebrate multiplicity and a de-centered polis, the fundamental ambiguity results from the fact that respecting the autonomy of different groups—whether based on religion, race, gender, or ethnicity—is only possible within certain common bounds. Central to this perspective is that the notion of difference must pre-suppose a ‘minimal universalism’ which in turn necessitates a certain conception of community. (2004: 186)

Just what such a minimal universalism would look like is a matter of controversy. It is, perhaps, easier to say what is disallowed than what is allowed. For instance, it seems clear that

cultural minorities whose practices are based on deeply illiberal oppressive relations based on gender, or sex, or any other basis of difference, cannot be tolerated and neither can group practices that fail to respect the fundamentally important principles of democratic politics, such as
respect for the other, a willingness to negotiate, tolerance, or the institutional basis of deliberation or the rule of law. (Olssen 2004: 187)

Such a perspective implies a middle ground between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, where individuals have the right to be respected as members of particular groups, but also the right of independence from the claims of such groups where they so choose: the principle of equal autonomy applies, as Touraine suggests, as the only universal principle that allows reconciliation between the public and the private.

No multi-cultural society is possible unless we can turn to a universalist principle that allows socially and culturally different individuals and groups to communicate with one another. But neither is a multi-cultural society possible if that universalist principle defines one conception of social organization and personal life that is judged both to be normal and better than others. The call for freedom to build a personal life is the only universalist principle that does not impose one form of social organization and cultural practices. It is not reducible to laissez-faire economics or to pure tolerance, first, because it demands respect for the freedom of all individuals and therefore a rejection of exclusion, and secondly because it demands that any reference to cultural identity be legitimised in terms of the freedom and equality of all, and not by appeal to a social order, a tradition or the requirements of public order. (2000: 167)

Or perhaps, as Taylor puts it more succinctly, 'the struggle for recognition can only find one satisfactory solution, and that is a regime of reciprocal recognition among equals' (1994: 50). But even if this is accepted as the fundamental, democratic principle, the question still arises as to how it is to be articulated in public institutions, and especially, perhaps, educational institutions. How is the democracy of civil society to be constituted in practice?

**THE INSTITUTIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

Two approaches to democracy, the classical and the contemporary, compete as an institutional basis of contemporary societies. The classical view was that democracy required participation in the life of the polis by active citizens who collectively defined the norms, values, interests, and institutions through which their collective aspirations might be realised.

A central feature of this classical conception of democracy, then, is that it is a moral concept identifying a form of social and political life which gives expression to the values of self-fulfilment, self-determination and equality-values constitutive of the kind of society in which
all individuals can fulfil themselves by freely and equally determining the common good of their society. (Carr and Hartnett 1996: 40)

This is not to say that any society has ever realised these principles in practice, but rather, that as an ideal type, such a conception of democracy allows political and social institutions to be held to account against such criteria. The implications are that institutions arising from collective action must be held accountable for their embrace of such principles in their day-to-day practices.

The alternative, contemporary, account of democracy is based on public choice theory. In this version of democracy, contemporary life is seen as too complex and vast for the active participation of all citizens in political processes. Rather than participation, choice is seen as the fundamental principle between rival political elites through periodic voting for political parties. In this 'realist' view,

'political equality' means an equal opportunity to vote for leaders and 'democratic participation' means exercising that vote at periodic elections. It thus takes competition between political elites—and not participation in decision-making—to be the essence of democracy and the criterion that allows the 'democratic method' to be distinguished from other methods of political decision-making. (Carr and Hartnett 1996: 42)

Clearly, the 'realist' view of democracy has significant limitations in that political elites may present alternatives articulating differing versions of the 'public good' between which individuals get to choose, but which may not articulate their particular interests. Moreover, as footloose capital begins to operate 'over and above' the institutions of the state, options offered at the state political level may indeed not bear significantly on crucial issues over which the state has limited control. As Baumann suggests,

Having lost much of their past sovereignty and no longer able to balance the books on their own or lend authority to the type of social order of their choice, contemporary states fail to meet the other necessary condition of a viable republic: the ability of the citizens to negotiate and jointly decide 'the public good' and so to shape a society which they would be prepared to call their own. (1999: 169)

In this view, democracy itself is called into question as decision-making and alternative futures are removed from the political arena of the state and decisions made by capital are represented as inevitable: 'there is no alternative.'

But, as Dewey (1935) pointed out, such failure is not only of political but also of educational institutions. While he argued that the interests of individuals, even at the beginning of the twentieth century, had become increasingly privatised and depoliticised, thereby giving credence to the realist view of
democracy in which participation in the public sphere was regarded as increasingly obsolete, Dewey also argued that the lack of participation in the public sphere was the result of the failure of social intelligence through the failure of educational institutions to provide the opportunity for the development of the knowledge that would allow full participation in the public sphere. Denigrating the intelligence of individuals who were excluded (women, blacks, and those who owned no property) from political participation by lack of knowledge was not the fault of those individuals, but rather of the educational institutions that excluded them from access to crucial knowledge and skills.

The indictments that are drawn against the intelligence of individuals are in truth indictments of a social order that does not permit the average individual to have access to the rich store of accumulated wealth of mankind in knowledge, ideas and purposes. It is useless to talk about the future of democracy until the source of its failure has been grasped and steps are taken to bring about that type of social organization that will encourage the socialised extension of intelligence. (Dewey 1935: 38–9)

For Dewey, prime among these social organisations was education—one that prepared individuals for active participation in the public sphere and the exercise of their democratic rights to participate in the governance of public institutions rather than the 'realist' option of simply choosing periodically between platforms presented by political elites.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF EDUCATION

If civil society is both an arena for collective action and a social process, as well as a utopian vision, one, moreover, that has a relative autonomy from the imperatives of the economic state on one hand and the cultural imperatives of traditional communities on the other, a crucial question is what role has education in preparing citizens for active participation in the public sphere? Increasingly, leaders in education are broadening their view of the purposes of schooling to include more than skill formation in the pursuit of efficient economic production, obedience to an all-encompassing state, or subservience to unexamined traditions. As Bottery (2004) suggests, 'big picture' issues are impinging on all of us in ways that cannot be ignored. It is worth quoting him at some length as his presentation of the current dilemmas facing educational leaders encapsulates the issues in a powerful way.

This is indeed a critical time for education, and for societies in general. It is an age of rapid and far-reaching changes, which no longer occur just at local and national levels, but which have profound effects across the globe. It is a time when we recognize that global warming is no respecter of national borders. It is a time then we recognize that humanity continues
to contribute to global pollution, and yet still seems stuck within postures, both political and economic, which prevent this issue from being properly addressed. It is also a time of great paradox, when massive standardizations of global culture contrast with the easy availability of varied cultures and beliefs . . . Perhaps most importantly, with the demise of fascism and communism as state-sponsored ideologies, it is a time when a version of liberal democracy is the only global political ideology, and walks arm-in-arm across a world stage with an economics of free-market capitalism. The results of this twin domination have been remarkable and striking in their extent and intensity. (2004: 3)

Starratt, while taking a somewhat different approach to educational leadership based upon the requirement of schools to develop ways of cultivating meaning, community and responsibility, also does so within the context of the transition of contemporary societies 'between early modernity and the later, more reflexive modernity' in a globalised world (2003: 55).

Although taking a somewhat realist view of democracy and social capital, Rifkin has also argued for the reconceptualisation of both civil society and the form of education appropriate to it:

The new economic and political realities require us to rethink the mission of the civil society in the years ahead. The third sector is likely to play a far more expansive role as an area for job creation and social-service provision in the coming century. The civic sector is also likely to become a more organized force in every community, working with, and on occasion pressuring, the market and government sectors to meet the needs of workers, families and neighborhoods. Thinking of society as creating three kinds of capital—market capital, public capital and social capital—opens up new possibilities for reconceptualizing the social contract and the kind of education we give our young people. (1998: 177)

Similarly, I have argued on previous occasions the need for a global perspective on administration (2002; 2003b) and curriculum (2005b), arguing, in Bottery's summary, for the work of educational leaders to be 'about more than the delivery and implementation of government legislation, curricula and testing, but ultimately to do with learning to live with one another, learning to support one another, learning to listen to one another, and learning to redress issues of equity' (2004:10).

As Starratt suggests, in such processes the idea of community is quite central: not community seen as a restricted form of social solidarity and tradition preventing autonomous individual decision-making and the claustrophobic condition of Gemeinschaft, but community seen as an active public association directed towards the solution of public problems articulated in the public sphere. In such an argument the relationship between education and civil society becomes central.
If civil society is that space between the private and the public, between the state and economy on one hand and cultures and traditions on the other, then learning how to use this space becomes a central task of education. But, as argued earlier, civil society is not only a space, but also a social process, a process that is focused on deliberative agreement or mediation:

Civil society is not only a space but also a process of mediation... Understanding civil society as a social process draws attention to how these arenas embody a more constitutive model of communication in which social and political realities, mediated through language, are interpreted and achieve explanatory power in the minds of citizen-actors. As processes of mediation, these networks serve as links between citizens and their understanding of the issues and institutions that confront their respective historical moments. (Murphy 2004: 84)

Within such an understanding of civil society, the role of the school in developing skills of mediation in the formation of communities within the public sphere around issues of public interest is of central importance. Starratt articulates a similar view of the role of educational administrators in 'cultivating community.' Rather than being restricted to the development of commercially relevant skills or the communication of 'virtuous communities' (Sergiovanni 1992) based upon exclusion and the replication of particular cultural traditions, Starratt argues for the development of a public education focussed on areas of public policy, one that encourages the development of community mediation around

the major issues contested in public debate: ecological preservation; alternative energy sources; full civil rights for various groups disadvantaged by social and political structures; government regulation of global corporations; international agreements on investments in global economic and technological infrastructures; the ownership of the airways, the oceans, the rainforests, the Internet; international responses to terrorist organizations; genetic engineering of food, livestock, medicine, human organs; immigration rights and responsibilities, to name a few. (2003: 90)

Such a view has considerable implications for the administration of curriculum, but also for the administrative and organisational structures of the school for, 'in the formation and building of community within the school, the processes by which a community governs itself, and the corresponding processes whereby individuals govern themselves, are crucial' (Starratt 2003: 91). It also has implications for the administration and management of pedagogical processes, as Murphy suggests in his argument for deliberative education:

Deliberative education is broadly conceived as instruction that utilizes varying forms of classroom deliberation and deliberative exercises to
enhance the democratic skills of citizenship and to increase understanding of democratic practice. (2004: 74)

Moreover, such an education not only shows students how to ‘engage episodes of public controversy’ but also how such inquiry ‘makes accessible critical learning from the discourses of civil society, performances of public culture, actions of citizen groups, and the struggles of opposition and practices of deliberation’ (Goodnight and Hingtsman 1997: 351).

Such an approach to education focuses not only on the importance of preparation and engagement with civil society and the public sphere but also on developing in students the capacity for ‘argumentative agency’ that encourages in them the ‘capacity to contextualize and employ the skills and strategies of argumentative discourse in fields of social action, especially wider spheres of public deliberation’ (Mitchell 1998: 45).

This approach, of course, is supported by a long tradition of progressive education going back to Dewey, a tradition that has been somewhat muted during the twentieth century by the ascendancy of a factory model of schooling dominated by vocational skills formation in the service of the economy, and the reproduction of culture and tradition through particular forms of moral education (Bates 2006). However, the limitations and restrictions of these forms of education are increasingly apparent and require a shift of focus in the administration of education towards that area of autonomous activity that is called civil society. Such a shift of focus requires that education become more than an unacceptable administrative activity (Touraine 2000: 287), but one which serves both public and private interests through its engagement with civil society and the public sphere.

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