

On: 10 October 2012, At: 12:36

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Journal of Curriculum Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tcus20>

### Education for citizenship in for-profit charter schools?

Sarah M. Stitzlein

Version of record first published: 19 Sep 2012.

To cite this article: Sarah M. Stitzlein (): Education for citizenship in for-profit charter schools?, Journal of Curriculum Studies, DOI:10.1080/00220272.2012.713996

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2012.713996>



PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# Education for citizenship in for-profit charter schools?

SARAH M. STITZLEIN

Most Americans and many residents of other democratic countries hold public schools to the social and political goal of preparing children to be good citizens. This goal is being challenged by some new forms of schooling promoted through popular education reform movements, especially in the US. This article reveals potentially insurmountable conflicts between the beliefs and practices of one of those forms of schools, for-profit charter schools, and their public task of educating for citizenship. This study begins by exploring the public nature and purposes of public schools, especially their role in creating particular types of citizens. This understanding of public schooling and good citizenship, then, becomes the theoretical lens for analysing the practices of for-profit charter schools. A critical discourse analysis was conducted of school materials such as websites, curricula, investor relation materials, proposals for new charter schools, and interviews with charter school founders. That analysis was used to indicate aspects of support for and incompatibility with quality citizenship education and to assess the overall likelihood that for-profit schools can educate citizens well.

Keywords: Education Management Organizations; citizenship education; for-profit schools

## Overview and methodology

Even as widespread calls for education reform sometimes pull into question the purposes of education, most Americans and many of their democratic neighbours abroad continue to hold public schools to the social and political goal of preparing children to be good citizens. One especially noteworthy type of education reform in the US is the rapid expansion of charter schools. These schools have been financially encouraged through major policies, including the federal \$5+ billion programme, Race to the Top. As increasing proportions of everyday Americans and elected officials celebrate charter schools, this article aims to analyse some potential conflicts between one particular type of charter school, for-profit Education Management Organizations (EMOs) and the goal of educating for citizenship. Americans are not alone, however, in the challenges posed by new forms of schooling and trends in education reform. EMOs are not confined to America; they are already in place in Europe and the Middle East and have set their sights on expanding in Asia. The presence of EMOs and similarly managed schools is often strongest in countries that are basing their education reform around market-driven models of competition and

---

*Sarah M. Stitzlein* is Associate Professor of Curriculum Theory at the University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH, USA; e-mail: Sarah.Stitzlein@uc.edu. Her primary areas of scholarship are philosophy of education, curriculum theory, democratic education, and educational equality. She is the author of *Teaching for Dissent: Citizenship Education and Political Activism*.

choice. Education scholars in those countries concerned with the education of future citizens may benefit from this article by detecting and responding to similar patterns to those depicted here.

In this article, I will show that EMOs tend to uphold purposes and approaches that, in many ways, run contrary to the goal of educating for good citizenship. I ask: Can the practices and guiding ideologies of for-profit public charter schools be reconciled with the democratic purpose of educating for citizenship? How do shifting public and policy perceptions of schools as markets, and the push toward corporate management of charter schools in particular, jeopardize civic education as a key public goal of schools? To pursue these questions, I begin by exploring the public nature and purposes of public schools, especially their role in creating particular types of citizens. This understanding of public schooling and good citizenship, then, becomes the theoretical lens for analysing the practices of EMOs.

To better understand the goals and approaches of EMOs, I conducted a critical discourse analysis of EMO materials such as websites, curricula, investor relation materials, proposals for new charter schools, and interviews with charter school founders. I also reviewed key texts by school choice advocates who have been celebrated and are regularly referenced by EMO leaders, including Milton Friedman, Fredrich von Hayek, John Chubb, and Terry Moe. I considered how those materials were used to support and challenge aspects of educating for citizenship. I paid special attention to writings about EMO schools that were authored by EMO founders so that I could target the beliefs and goals espoused by their creators and then seek the implications of those on the practices and organization of the schools.

Critical discourse analysis, an approach pioneered by Norman Fairclough, is a methodology that identifies correlations between language and social practices. It is especially helpful for revealing and probing the political and economic ideologies underlying the language used by an author or speaker as they play out at micro, macro, and meso levels. It also examines how texts are distributed and consumed, practices central to public advertisements and descriptions of schools, including their brochures and websites (Rogers 2011).

### **Education management organizations**

Most EMOs are private, for-profit companies that manage public schools through executive authority rather than mere vendor relationships, although a small percentage perform the same job on a non-profit basis. With the growth of charter schools in the US, EMOs, which appeared in the early 1990s, have taken an increasing role in running charter schools, although some also lead district schools. For-profit EMOs are typically investor owned and seek profits for those investors, while at the same time are held to public accountability standards for student and school performance. Being profit-driven distinguishes most EMOs from other charter schools, which are typically mission-driven.

As of January 2012, EMOs educated 394 096 students in 33 states, comprising ~ 20% of the total number of US charter school students, which recently passed 2 million. EMOs have a particularly strong presence in Michigan, Florida, Arizona, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Some of the largest EMO companies are K12 Inc. (founded by William Bennett and Ronald Packard), National Heritage Academies (founded by J. C. Huizenga), Edison Learning (founded by Chris Whittle), and White Hat Management (founded by David Brennan) (Miron *et al.* 2012). While based in the US, many of these companies and their approaches have spread abroad. K12 Inc. manages schools in 36 countries around the world and Edison CEO Jeff Wahl boasts ‘more than 250 partnerships, serving 500 000 students in 25 states, the UK, and the Middle East’. He adds, ‘we have significant growth potential in the markets we currently serve and other nations, including China’.<sup>1</sup>

### Defining public schools

Although many people shy away from specifically defining what public schools are, preferring instead to describe what they are not (places of religious indoctrination, for example), explicit consideration of the defining elements of public schools is essential to understanding the impact of for-profit charter schools.<sup>2</sup> As argued by a significant percentage of both for-profit charter proponents and critics, public schools should not be thought of as merely government-run schools. Or, in the words of K12 board member, Chester Finn, ‘A public school is any school that is open to the public, paid for by the public, and accountable to the public. It need not be run by government’ (Finn *et al.* 2000: 61). This formalist definition is focused on the control and funding of schools. This definition fails not only to adequately address the unique situation of EMOs, which are ultimately accountable to citizens, but which operate mostly as private, autonomous entities and often draw on funding from private investors (who in turn hold EMOs accountable for profit and success). More importantly, this definition fails to encapsulate the public functions and purposes that public schools serve.

A formalist definition does little to describe what public schools actually do, while a functionalist definition focuses on whether a school actually works to serve the needs and interests of the community. Higgins and Knight Abowitz (2011: 367–368) further identify those interests: ‘A substantively public school would promote not only private interests (for example, a student’s positional advantage in the labour market), but public interests in the political, social, and economic realms of life’. Often these more important public interests are consolidated into a notion of the public good, a mutually beneficial way of life thought to be sought, created, and maintained by educated citizens.<sup>3</sup>

Defenders of public schools, especially those aligned with the American common school model, claim to educate for the public good. School choice forefather Milton Friedman acknowledges that schools serve the public good of maintaining civic stability, while fellow advocates John

Chubb and Terry Moe claim that the accountability of their schools to public interests and public authority should be weak and simple, preferring instead to emphasize the choices and success of individuals (Chubb and Moe, as described in Friedman 1962, Henig 1994: 94). Charter school scholar, Wilson (2008: 9), wisely redirects the course of analysis: 'Since it is neither solely a private good nor solely a public one, it is impossible to ask whether education should serve the private *or* the public interest. The real question, of course, concerns just *how* education fulfils and balances both private and public aims'. When it comes to for-profit charters, we must determine whether those schools strike acceptable compromises between private and public aims in order to warrant the title of public schools and the support traditionally given to them and their missions.

Here I try to move past simple dichotomies defining for-profit public charter schools to look at the way that they prepare children for citizenship, with an acceptable balance between public and private interests. I use a deep notion of 'public' within public schools, where they are those that are open to the public (all citizens are welcome, even if they may be educationally costly, such as special education students), serve the public (they meet societal needs like preparing active citizens to maintain the government or economy), are accountable to the public (citizens can vote out school officials or change school policies), are creators of publicness (meaning that they cultivate citizens who know how to collective-mindedly exchange and respond to the ideas of others), and sustain public democracy (by critically reflecting upon democracy and enacting democratic, justice-oriented decision-making). However, 'public schools are, in effect, *more* than the sum of their parts' (Knight Abowitz 2011: 469). Assessing these schools is best done when, as Higgins and Knight Abowitz argue, 'public' is seen as a verb, an action that entails creating common worlds often arising from mutually-beneficial problem-solving or a bringing together of different viewpoints around common concerns.

While many private schools certainly have the potential to produce good citizens, it is public schools that enact this thoroughgoing sense of publicness that overtly are tasked with this challenge. Also, it is those schools that have the tools to succeed when the senses of publicness just outlined are practiced well. Of course one must be careful not to romantically celebrate public schools as great champions of citizenship creation or even of publicness. Clearly there is a long history of exclusionary practices in public schools that have privileged some children and denied others based on gender, race, wealth, ability, and other attributes.<sup>4</sup> There is also evidence that the quality and success of citizenship education varies between American public schools and even amongst student groups within schools. Hahn (2002), Journell (2011), and Kahne and Middaugh (2008) have all documented schools that have denied quality citizenship education to poor students or students of colour and, at times, have worked to keep those students passive, silent, and obedient. Despite these failures, public schools have the ability, and should be motivated by the expectation, to create good citizens.

### Public schools and the creation of citizens

Across time, education for citizenship has been one of the goals most consistently held by American school leaders, public officials, and taxpayers. When asked in a nationwide survey about the primary purpose of schooling, the most popular answer was ‘to prepare people to become responsible citizens’ (Cuban 2004: 150). People in many other democratic nations also uphold the goal of educating for citizenship. In England, for example, the ‘end’ of public schooling was proclaimed in the 1998 Crick Report to be the development of civic participants who seek to promote the common good. Following the Report, citizenship education was established as a required part of the National Curriculum. More recently, Prime Minister David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ movement has sought to encourage political activism amongst everyday citizens, invigorate civic life, and develop alternative schools that are led by the desires of local citizens (a task akin to the vision of American charter schools).

All the while, England, like the US and other countries, has also sought to balance these civic goals of schooling with shifts in economic ideology. Most notably was the lasting impact of the 1988 Education Reform Act, which, Sharon Gerwitz claims ‘redefined parents as consumers who—at least in principle—were given the right to choose a school for their child’. She adds, that, at the same time, schools were ‘effectively reconfigured as small businesses whose income was to become dependent on their success in attracting customers within competitive local school markets’ (quoted in Biesta 2004). These ideas are similarly represented in EMO justifications today.

When looking more closely at the goal of educating citizens, any depiction of desirable citizens is driven by an underlying understanding of democracy.<sup>5</sup> Citizenship is most basically a status based on the rights and duties of a person within a specific location. However, few people confine their definition of good citizens to a status alone. Instead, citizenship is typically thought of as a normative way of behaving by using or fulfilling one’s rights and duties in particular ways, including, as directed by some visions of democracy, contributing to one’s local or national community. Civic republicans, for instance, would likely uphold participatory duties of citizenship, while liberal republicans would emphasize individual rights or individual duties.

The commitment to the public good and publicness that I emphasize in this article is centred within a more participatory understanding of democracy that grows out of the pragmatist tradition of democracy as associated living directed toward the flourishing of a community (Dewey 1927). My notion of citizenship focuses on putting one’s civic skills to work in one’s community alongside other citizens, not just as a duty to strengthen democracy, but also as a way of sharing in the collective effort of working toward the well-being of oneself and one’s community members. This citizen recognizes that democracy is a yet to be fulfilled vision that requires revising and continued effort, especially in the struggle for equality amongst all its members. My desired citizen does more than just participate in civic and public life, she also critiques established systems

to understand them, to identify when they perpetuate injustice, to challenge them when they do so, and to alter them by imagining and implementing alternatives. This vision of good citizenship is aligned with the participatory version outlined for commonwealth countries around the world by McCowan (2009, 2012), grows out of an expanded notion of the 'Social-Justice Oriented Citizen' offered by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), and is enacted through the account of political living I (Stitzlein 2012) espouse elsewhere.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) rightly explains that there is considerable overlap in the typical ways in which educators use the terms civics education, citizenship education, and education for democracy, but each has a distinct meaning. The broader term of citizenship education has more recently been used to go beyond the mid- to late-20th century idea of civics education, with its focus on narrow rights and responsibilities and, at times blind patriotism, to consider how best to live one's public and private life in the context of others in one's local, and increasingly global, community. Citizenship education encompasses learning about government, but goes beyond that to account for other places where community members interact, such as churches and public meeting spaces. The final term, education for democracy, is the most encompassing and includes not only school-based learning about government and one's role within it, but also learning outside of school about skills of communication and transaction so that individuals learn how to recognize, value, and improve the conditions of associated living.

Although my overarching concern is with educating for democracy, the educational practices and ideologies I describe in this article are a bit more confined to citizenship education. Citizenship education takes place most overtly within schools and most of my discussion of it will be so positioned. However, citizenship education should not be understood as taking place only in schools. Quite to the contrary, it should extend beyond school walls, bringing the outside world in to classrooms. Unfortunately, however, many US public school practices have shifted away from these activities, suggesting that recent citizenship education is less than ideal. A study conducted on U.S. Civics Instruction: Content and Teaching Strategies at the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement Lopez and Kirby (2007: 4) found:

The 2006 NAEP Civics Assessment shows that teaching strategies have changed between 1998 and 2006. Since 1998, there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of 8th and 12th grade students who had community members come to their social studies classes to discuss important events and ideas. There has also been a drop in the percentage of 8th graders who read extra material beyond the textbook (such as newspapers, magazines, maps, charts, or cartoons) and a drop in the percentage of 12th graders who watch television shows, videos, or filmstrips in class.

Citizenship education needs to prepare children to participate in society as it currently exists, but also to question and change it, using approaches that may sometimes be outside the norm (Stitzlein 2012). In this way,

citizenship education should be developing both civic and political life, where civic life entails learning to participate in one's community through volunteer work and being tolerant of other viewpoints, among other things, and political life entails learning to use power through voting and movement building, among other things. Civic life helps one become a part of society, and political life provides the tools to change that society to meet a group's needs. Citizenship education should not be straightforward enculturation into an existing order, but rather a questioning of how that order came to be, whether it is the best possible way of living, and what alternatives to it might look like.<sup>6</sup>

Public schools have certainly struggled in fulfilling the cultivation of citizens in the thick ways described here, in part because of the exclusions and privileges afforded certain groups of students, the reduced time devoted to social studies education, and the narrow focus on civics education as mere factual knowledge and patriotic behaviour, each described elsewhere in this article. Yet they have had more potential for achieving these ends than other types of schools, such as private religious ones, that are necessarily more insular or exclusive, serving slices of the population or orienting themselves toward one fixed and particular vision of the good life. Despite their limited success, public schools have long been expected to develop competent citizens, and one would assume that for-profit charter schools, as formally public schools, are held to the same expectation of developing citizens for public life. However, as I will show in the next section, much of the rhetoric used to talk about the benefits of charter schools and rationales for increasing their number or size are not well aligned with the mission of cultivating citizens, especially citizens who come together in the act of publicness to solve shared problems or bridge differences around common concerns. Rather, the focus is on individual gains and competitiveness. The rhetoric espoused in charter advertisements and by supporters is more than just words; rather it indicates a guiding ideology that brings into question the public nature of for-profit charter schools and their goals, as the following results of my critical discourse analysis demonstrate.

### **Shortcoming and conflicts in EMO schools**

With the theoretical framework of publicness and notion of citizenship education defined above, I conducted my critical discourse analysis, which revealed the following trends. Each raises serious challenges to the teaching of good citizenship and to the publicness of EMO schools, thereby casting doubt on the reconcilability of those schools with the longstanding goal of educating for citizenship.

### **Emphasizing the individual**

As they make the case for the superiority of their schools and for the right of parents' to select schools that are 'better' for their children, many EMO



leaders and their school choice colleagues argue that school success should be measured by the achievement of individuals on particular pieces of tested knowledge. This differs considerably from focusing on knowledge building that brings children into contact with one another, with the world around them, or with social problems—components just outlined in quality citizenship education.<sup>7</sup> For Whittle, Edison schools should be focused on teaching to individuals who seek personal success or well-being.

Critical discourse analysis draws attention to not only what is stated, but also what goes unstated. In his published works, I could find no mention of the importance of collective work or knowledge building beyond simple small group activities, which are primarily designed to help individual students remember material better. In this spirit, he proclaims ‘Of all the things that this book proposes, independent learning could have the greatest single “educational effect”. The reason: What can be more important than schools graduating students who are capable of independent work? Being literate is one thing. It is quite another to be self-motivated, self-organized, self-disciplined, self-confident’. This, he says, is ‘important to success in life’ (Whittle 2005: 107).

Employing critical discourse analysis, I sought correlations between the language used to describe and advertise EMOs, the social practices they engage in schools, and the economic ideologies that underlie them. I found that it is ‘self’, rather than ‘other’ or ‘community’, that is at the heart of many EMO goals and practices. This emphasis on seeking the best interests of the individual and seeing that individual as special, as distinct from the larger community, is part of a worldview classified as neoliberalism. More than just self-reliant or independent in the classical liberal sense, the individual celebrated in a neoliberal outlook is entrepreneurial and enterprising, overtly competing for his own advantage and consuming to ensure his own well-being. Extending (in some ways, problematically) the ethical individualism of liberal thinker David Hume and economist Adam Smith, this perspective sees individuals as naturally acting in their own self-interest. Emphasizing unique individuals pursuing their own interests and success, K12 Inc. touts on its website, <http://www.k12.com>, ‘With more than 150 online courses from which to choose ... students can enjoy an individualized high school programme tailored to their goals and abilities’. Moreover, ‘K12 will help maximize each student’s personal post-high school success’.

As I will detail in later sections, the discourse I analysed reveals that, for EMO leaders, the individual should be primarily educated to attain the skills necessary to secure his or her own economic well-being and to be a good consumer and producer. This differs from being educated for political ideals like civic tolerance or communal ideals like identifying and alleviating oppression or injustice waged against certain groups in ones community. It is through entrepreneurialism and consumerism that the individual forms connections to others.<sup>8</sup> In this way, the individual is seldom described in political terms of civic relations or citizenship, rather the individual is an economic being who fulfils social roles through consumption and pursuing economic well-being. Self-interested economic life need not be narrowly selfish living under this view, however, for produc-

ers of goods and services must often think of the desires and well-being of the consumers they serve in order to ensure their own economic viability. In this way, economic relations are not as deep or sustained as the thick forms of community and civic engagement I described earlier, but they are not entirely trivial or selfish either.<sup>9</sup>

*The free individual acting through the market*

More than just focusing on individual students and their personal success, EMO charter school leaders and other advocates of school choice emphasize the ability of individuals to use the market to exercise their personal liberty in unrestrained ways. A straightforward micro-level reading of the sources I analysed shows that ‘choice’ and the ‘freedom to choose’ are some of the most frequently used words and phrases in EMO publications. K12 Inc. tops its website by saying that its ‘schools provide powerful choices for parents’. The site goes on to bring together choice and the interests of individuals when it answers the question ‘What is K12?’ by saying ‘We give parents a choice: Individualized learning customized to each child’s needs ... to help students find their own path’.

I then moved to a macro-level reading in order to understand the impact of broader ideologies on EMO materials. Freedom, as used in these materials, is mostly aligned with Hayek’s (1960: 68) definition in *The Constitution of Liberty*, as freedom in a negative sense—the absence of coercion. Hayek adds that freedom should be a value celebrated unto itself, without taking into consideration whether the results of an individual’s pursuit of freedom will be harmful or beneficial. The freedom invoked is sought independently of the public good, including the political and social purposes that compose it. Indeed, the public sector is seen as necessarily restrictive of private liberty, and the marketplace is envisioned as a freer space of connected individuals. In this way, Barber (1992: 13) explains,

civil associations feel (at best) rather like consumer cooperatives or rights alliances. They permit individuals to protect themselves more efficiently and serve themselves more securely but have little to do with participation, cooperation, or sociability *per se*, let alone solidarity or community and the pursuit of a commonweal such a community makes possible.

The sense of invoking freedom as the choice to remove one’s child from a traditional public school, a decision lauded in some EMO materials, may lack sufficient concern for the well-being of the others left behind in that school or for the types of communal decision-making that privilege the well-being of specific groups of people. This way of seeing the freedom of individuals leaves behind the communal concerns of the welfare state and the notions of citizenship as concern for others and the common good. Even though an EMO school may encourage its students to participate in a community service activity, such as White Hat Management engaging its students in the Feed the Children programme, a contradictory message is sent when they encourage families to leave traditional public schools in those communities.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, I employed the last prong of critical discourse analysis, a meso-level reading, to determine how the materials are constructed and consumed within the process of advertising EMOs. Nearly all EMOs use advertising materials that champion the individual liberty of parents to choose schools that serve the best interests of their children as individuals preparing for a life of competitive exchange, all the while heralding the choice to break away from government-run schools that are seen as restrictive and bureaucratic. In their landmark book on school choice, a necessary precursor to the development of EMO networks, Chubb and Moe (1990: 23) conclude, ‘the most important prerequisite for the emergence of effective school characteristics is school autonomy, especially from external bureaucratic influence’. Later they add,

Our guiding principle in the design of a choice system is this: public authority must be put to use in creating a system that is almost entirely beyond the reach of public authority ... As long as authority remains ‘available’ at higher levels within state government, it will eventually be used to control the schools. As far as possible, all higher-level authority must be eliminated. (Chubb and Moe 1990: 218–219)

Charter schools, especially EMOs that seek to employ their own corporate practices, celebrate reduced government oversight (which, like Chubb and Moe, they are quick to dub ‘bureaucratic’) and argue that they will be more effective because of it.<sup>11</sup>

One way in which EMO leaders strive to de-emphasize government intervention and pursue liberty is through use of the free market. Competition and exchange in the marketplace are believed to lead to better schools and the types of schools that excel in the marketplace are thought to be those most responsive to consumers’ wishes (in this case, largely parents’ desires). Indeed, many EMO website headlines tout high percentages of parent satisfaction, such as National Heritage Academies claim ‘92% of parents would recommend their NHA school to others’, or website tabs such as ‘testimonials of customer success’.<sup>12</sup> While there seems to be a trend in the commentaries of EMO managers toward an unregulated free market when it comes to education, famous school choice proponent Friedman (1962) argues that the nature of education distinguishes it from many of the products and services that the market is better equipped to manage. Because of this, Friedman argues that education should not be purely market-driven, rather the government has some responsibility for ensuring that education is provided, including some regulations on the content of that education.<sup>13</sup>

Whittle and Brennan celebrate the free market for the ways in which it can introduce competition and ultimately innovation in schooling. Brennan proclaims,

The power of choice in the hands of the consumer is the most awesome power to guarantee quality, effective cost, effective delivery, and consumer responsiveness. It’s incredible because—and every one of our people in our organization knows—if these participants aren’t getting what they need, we

won't be here. ... The demands to satisfy the needs of the users drive quality ... It's the example of our society as a whole, that the quality products don't come from government-dictated regulation. They come from competition.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, Whittle claims,

Competition raises all boats. When we're asked to manage a school, we know we have to do it well. If we don't do it appreciably better than the school down the street, why are we there? This argues for the concept of a multiple-provider model, and children are the winners of that competition'.<sup>15</sup>

Yet Whittle also recognizes that there needs to be a more overt focus on ensuring quality of choice amongst schools available within the market. Supporters of the model of education reform via charter schools tend to use testing to provide seemingly objective comparisons between schools (thereby offering determinations of quality) so that a market can rise amongst them. Interestingly, there is a lack of testing in civics and social studies in nearly all states, suggesting perhaps that either parents are uninterested in comparing and consuming that aspect of education or that school leaders and policy-makers do not see that aspect of education as a worthy marker of quality within the education market.<sup>16</sup>

In those cases or others, it is important to recognize that while the market is described as though it were objective and neutral, the market is actually a constructed category that is promoted and reified. In education, this has taken the form of continuous data measurement and comparison through testing, which poses some schools as winners and some as losers. However, this is not an objective state of affairs, education leaders actively shape tests, their frequency and content, and the portrayal of their results in ways that suggest connotative understandings and directions for the market. Made to seem unpolitical and neutral, education markets are carefully crafted.<sup>17</sup> While not the most fitting example of this phenomenon, my attention was drawn to the use of one interesting statistic on an EMO homepage: '100% of graduates of White Hat-managed schools pass required State High School graduation tests'.<sup>18</sup> This claim, seemingly a great marker of success, is a rather convoluted portrayal of test performance used to appeal to consumers. For, in order to graduate, one must pass state graduation tests. In other words, it would be impossible to have anything less than a 100% success rate, yet few consumers would detect this use of statistics or how it shapes their impression of the schools.

*Privatization and corporatization: Conflicts with associated living and the common good*

The move to for-profit management operations turns over work traditionally done by public employees to the private sector in hopes of achieving less regulation, more innovation, and greater efficiency. The most overt call for privatization was Friedman's 1962 call for vouchers, which was based on the belief that privatization was necessary to spur innovation in schools. Privatizing of the services and delivery of education is often tied to a shift toward

corporatization, where corporations provide those products and services, but, moreover, where school management operates on a corporate model.

This consumer-minded business model is one that is led by innovative entrepreneurs, such as Whittle, Brennan, and Packard—a winner of several awards for entrepreneurialship. Chubb (2006: 21) calls for exploration of corporate models within education reform: ‘many of the organizational tools that the private sector uses to great effect are rejected by the public sector, often because they are simply too controversial for public education to embrace broadly. All of these ideas deserve a chance. Private management provides one’. Alongside his colleague Moe (Chubb and Moe 1990: 13), he explains what he sees as one of the objective advantages of corporate models: ‘Unlike the established players, the business community has strong incentives to take a coldly analytical approach to the problem, and thus to acquire the best possible knowledge about why the problem exists and what can be done about it—and to evaluate, in the process, the full range of policy and institutional options, however unsettling they may be to defenders of the status quo’.

Those working outside of traditional school models are thought to potentially be able to offer better leadership and organizational practices. Brennan sees his background as an industrial entrepreneur this way: ‘Public education, like all bureaucracies, particularly in monopolies, does not want to change from inside, and will not. So we are the force of change’.<sup>19</sup> He explains,

Education is first, last, and always, a business. If it’s run like a business, it can be done profitably. I hire engineers and technicians and specialists to do things in my company that I can’t do. Education is the same way. We hire people who are very good at what they do. But to expect them to be businesspersons at the same time is ludicrous. No other enterprise in our society requires that. Education does it the other way around. They put the educators in charge of the business functions and the organization, and look what has happened.

This shifts the historical emphasis from schools as sites of public development and deliberation to schools as a service, best run like a business, which provides customers (parents and students) means to fulfil their private desires, such as getting into college or acquiring a lucrative career. It shifts the emphasis of schools from the intrinsically (or even the mundane extrinsically) valuable aspects of education to those products that provide wealth or status. These new business-like goals of economic and cultural capital are upheld by school leaders like Brennan as obvious and, because of this, he speaks as if business leaders would be better at managing schools. Thereby, he employs a micro-level rhetorical device that both creates and reinforces a ‘common sense’ which also exhibits neoliberalism as a worldview at work.

In this context, there is not space or value for creating the type of citizens I describe above: those who work collaboratively to understand, question, and challenge the practices of social and political life as they work together to address shared problems or create mutually beneficial ways of life.

### **Reconciling EMOs and citizenship education**

Given the depiction of EMOs just presented, I am led to wonder whether the principles of such schools can be reconciled with education for democratic citizenship, particularly education for public life. As I will argue in this section, there appears to be several irreconcilable contradictions between the mission and practice of public education and that of for-profit charter schools, and a worrisome imbalance between private and public goods. EMOs tend to disconnect schools from communities, conflate private interests with public life, favour economic understandings of individuals and democracy, privilege freedom over equality without sufficient justification, and avoid the more costly aspects of good citizenship education.

#### *Disconnect between EMOs and communities*

Charter schools were originally intended to arise from the needs and initiatives of local parties. Because of this most states empowered groups of parents, teachers, and community members to obtain charters to start schools, typically approved by the state department of education, a local school board, or a local university. However, in the case of EMOs today, they are often run by corporations housed outside the community where the charter is proposed and import many of their administrators and educators from elsewhere. In some situations it appears that EMOs may be artificially constructing ties to and justifications for charter schools within communities.

Miron and Nelson (2002: 183) documented:

In most of these cases, the strategic planning interests of the EMO was the impetus for starting the school. After selecting a promising community, the EMO organized informational meetings (several of which we attended), and then sought out a few local persons who could sign on as the founding group. The establishment of the school was driven by the EMO that completed the application materials and submitted them to a state university charter school office.

In these cases charter schools don't arise from the needs or interests of a community; instead, EMOs generate an audience that is sympathetic to the image of charter schools that they envision and then use those local people to seek the charter the EMO desires. Miron and Nelson (2002: 185) continue,

In short, it appears that in some instances, at least, the EMO tail is wagging the charter school dog. This sort of arrangement, then, might well compromise the public character of the schools by delegating an excessive amount of authority over school operations to private entities.

This practice does indeed call into question the truly public nature of these schools, including whether they serve the needs and interests of the community as defined by that community itself.

This problematic situation is compounded by the reduced public accountability of EMO charter schools. Whereas the running of most traditional public schools involves a process of open discussion whereby they are influenced by public opinion and elected officials on school boards (and in this way demonstrate how active citizenship can impact school life),<sup>20</sup> EMOs do not generally employ such democratic means. Instead, unelected and often non-local corporate leaders make educational decisions largely behind closed doors, thereby failing to model or embody communal partnership in education or even publicness. In some states legislation has been introduced to actually enshrine the ability of EMOs to make educational decisions regarding their practices, intentions, and finances private and withheld from the public.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the fact that charter schools are often celebrated for their strong local control, EMO leadership is often quite disconnected from the community. In their study of EMO governing boards, Wells and Scott (2001) found that ‘those who are handpicked to govern are not always those with the most vested interests—parents and educators. Instead, they are the ones with the most money, expertise, and connections’. Even once handpicked, EMO members of the Board of Directors are kept closely in check by corporate overseers rather than by community members or local elections. In the case of White Hat Management schools, we see in a recent charter school proposal that ‘The sole member of the Corporation shall have the power to appoint and remove Directors. Directors may be removed at any time, with or without cause, for any reason or no reason’.<sup>22</sup>

For generations, local control of public schools has also meant that local communities have a significant role in influencing the goals of the school. Chubb and Moe (1990: 30) argue that, unlike a commitment to the development of citizens across all public schools, ‘schools have no immutable or transcendent purpose’. Instead, the goals schools do hold must arise from the immediate community whom that school serves. Chubb and Moe (1990: 30) continue, ‘[Those goals] are intended to appeal only to a portion of the market, and perhaps a very small and highly specialized portion’. In this way they argue that their schools can better serve the particular desires of their immediate market, thereby better satisfying customers, regardless of the needs or interests of others outside their market share. We see a commitment here to the desires of small groups of individuals, but not to a public, which has lost its understanding as a deeply social endeavour that gives rise to desired communal goods.<sup>23</sup>

When describing his Edison schools, Whittle (2005: 109) notes that teachers should tell students that school is important, yet he doesn’t define that importance in terms of any specific goals. Once again essential to my methodology, some purposes (or lack thereof) are implied through omission. In the case of Edison Learning the civic purposes of schools are not mentioned in Whittle’s writings nor is citizenship education mentioned in the online description of Edison schools. Interestingly, K12 board member Chester Finn, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools member Bruno Manno, and former K12 administrator Gregg Vanourek (Finn *et al.* 2000: 155) point toward the importance of producing ‘good citizens according to a publicly defensible conception of citizenship,’ but couch this not as the

purpose of his schools, but as ‘the surest way to contain [the] risk for charter schools’. In other words, according to these men, charter schools will be less at risk for public scrutiny if they produce a type of citizen that most people can endorse. From their perspective, this type of citizen may mean a patriotic and hard-working individual who is knowledgeable of US laws and follows them with respect and obedience—a more widely accepted baseline of citizenship than the participatory citizen who engages in thick practices of democracy that I describe here. So cultivating citizens is not an end in itself, but rather is a means for avoiding public criticism of charter schools.

While some EMO advocates may proclaim that educational goals should only arise from particular communities, the assumption revealed through macro-level scrutiny of their materials seems to be that the goals selected will be aligned with a model of social mobility, where education is seen as a commodity whose purpose is to provide individual students with an advantage over their competitors in the marketplace as they seek to fulfil their own desires. This worldview regarding educational goals differs considerably from more public and civically aligned goals of democratic equality or even social efficiency (Labaree 1997), thereby calling into question whether EMOs would even pursue curricula and pedagogy aligned with alternative goals aiming at preparing citizens for public life directed at a common good, even if these were the explicit desires of the community being served.

Relatedly, the disconnect between the origination of the charter via the EMO and the population it intends to serve jeopardize the ability to develop civic allegiance and participation within a community, especially if the charter imports teachers and administrators from outside of that community who lack knowledge of its struggles or deep commitment to its well-being. In sum, an EMO cannot serve the public if the educational purposes sought by that public don’t match up with key aspects of EMO beliefs and practices, thereby revealing a potentially insurmountable conflict between the goal of education for citizenship and for-profit charter schools.

### *Conflation of private interests and public life*

Corporate providers of education tend to see the public they serve not as a larger collective body oriented toward a common good, but rather as sets of consumers seeking private returns. As evidenced by surveys of British parents asked about the educational choices they make, many increasingly have come to see themselves as consumers, suggesting that this term is not merely applied by the promoters of corporate models, but adopted by the participants themselves (Biesta 2004: 239). Consumerism in education has a tendency to work against the common good. This is largely because education consumers have sought personal advantage via schooling, primarily through degrees, certifications, and markers of educational prestige. Many parents seek educational hierarchies that serve to distinguish their child from the pack, thereby giving them social mobility



(Labaree 1997). Those are private goods, which work mostly to the advantage of the individual recipient and do little to benefit collective knowledge or social well-being.

Labaree (2007: 4) warns that this ‘also promotes formalism in education, because markets operate based on the exchange value of a commodity (what it can be exchanged for) rather than its use value (what it can be used for)’. Rather than using education for social purposes or even to deeply comprehend new knowledge, it is consumed by individuals for their own personal gain. Indeed, within neoliberalism, an ideology that encapsulates many viewpoints of EMO backers discussed so far, rationality itself is conceived of as making choices that maximize one’s own good. Such choices then come to be seen as prescriptive oughts of moral and just behaviour as one ‘cares’ for oneself (Brown 2005).

Yet evidence shows that many parents choose and celebrate schools that are not necessarily the best in terms of test scores and other more supposedly objective measurements, suggesting that the market is yet again not straightforward, but rather created through choices that are not always rational in the neoliberal sense (Tyre 2011). Or, as Finn (2006:) admits,

Although school-choice enthusiasts, myself included, insist that parents can be counted on to make wise education choices for their children, the charter-school experience shows that many families lack decent comparative information about their school options *and* that many are content with such school attributes as safety, convenience, a welcoming atmosphere, and ‘caring’ teachers. In other words, the school’s academic effectiveness doesn’t rank high. Which means many parents enrol their kids in academically mediocre schools, cheerfully keep them there.

Despite the fact that parents often don’t make choices that EMO operators see as wise, their advertising materials continue to recommend that parents remove their children from the traditional public schools so they can acquire a better education for their child—an individual good—rather than working to improve those traditional schools that serve a community of children and families—a public good.

Additionally, the market can do very little to help us make wise choices about living democratically in fair ways. Traditionally, however, schools have been expected to fulfil this very task (Molnar 1996: 183). Philosopher of education, Biesta (2004: 238), points out

It is important to remember that parental choice in itself can hardly be called democratic if it is not a part of a wider democratic deliberation about the aims and shape of education in society. If this broader deliberation is lacking, parental choice leads to what Michael Apple aptly describes as the ‘conversion of economic and social capital into cultural capital’. In such a situation parental choice simply reproduces existing inequalities.

In this view, choice accompanied by open public dialogue about the educational purposes supported by parents is more likely to have just and democratic outcomes.

The public served by EMO schools, then, is a loosely associated collection of self-interested individuals who begin as consumers and are preparing themselves for entering their own lives into a market of exchange. In her study of charter schools, Wells *et al.* (2002: 354) notes that school operators narrowly conceive of the public in this way, as consuming parents who enact school choice for the private goals of themselves or their children. In my examination of K12, Inc., I found that, as they grow more specific in the benefits of their history programme (a field within the social studies that has traditionally been directly tasked with initiating students into collective public life), the examples they provide emphasize how the individual student will benefit from the new knowledge, such as being able to read a newspaper or appreciate a painting, in ways that are largely autonomous and self-serving.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, The National Heritage Academies describe the focus of their social studies curriculum as 2-fold: first developing an understanding of economic principles and second comparing American culture to non-democratic cultures so that students appreciate their individual liberties.<sup>25</sup>

Given these takes on key arenas for citizenship education, I am led to ask, When public charter schools embrace serving private ends nearly exclusively, does the public begin to excuse them from fulfilling the historical commitment to the public good, namely the development of thoughtful and active citizens?<sup>26</sup> As Brown (2005: 43) explains of the neoliberal worldview that captures many of the ideas behind EMOs, the very public itself may cease to exist as we know it:

The model neoliberal citizen is one who strategizes for her- or himself among various social, political, and economic options, not one who strives with others to alter or organize these options. A fully realized neoliberal citizenry would be the opposite of public-minded; indeed, it would barely exist as a public. The body politic ceases to be a body but is rather a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers.

In this regard it seems that for-profit charter schools cannot be reconciled with education for democracy as long as public life is conflated, rather than appropriately balanced, with private interests and rationally, and morality is reduced to self-interested behaviour.

#### *Political vs economic understandings of individuals and democracy*

As we seek to determine whether for-profit charter schools can be reconciled with education for citizenship, the crux of the argument depends on the understanding of the citizen and his or her relationship to society and government. Within healthy democracies, citizens strive to balance power, liberty, and rights, as they live alongside one another. However, in the worldview exposed thus far, humans are neither essentially social, nor must the groups in which they live be organized by means other than economics of exchange and competition. Ties instituted by the welfare state, including the large publicly run and funded system of education, have come to be seen as economically costly in the US and elsewhere, including under the

New Right leadership in New Zealand and the vision of patriotism expressed in their Tertiary Education Strategy (Roberts 2009). Due to cost, the public school system is no longer viable or desirable, despite the social connections and shared public life that it supports. Apple (2006: 15) explains that the neoliberal worldview leads to ‘the destruction of what might best be seen as “thick democracy”, substituting a much “thinner” version of possessive individualism’. Whereas thick democracy brought people together to debate and construct the public good, all the while supported by a government, the thinner economic notion of democracy that remains is one where individuals are only connected to one another through fleeting transactions and small government interventions.<sup>27</sup>

The individual citizen, then, is no longer substantively constitutive of the state in that he or she no longer engages in public life concerned with the common good, but rather is dependent on the state merely for economic purposes related to constructing and maintaining markets as sites of individual choice, in some cases regardless of the welfare of other members in the market. Moreover, economic rationality functions normatively to guide expectations of citizens’ lives. This is not to say that neoliberal practices are apolitical, for clearly they have political goals and outcomes, such as moving away from principles of collective responsibility and moving from professional control of schools to managerial control, but rather that the economic rationale is used to trump the political as a site for engagement in the public good.

So can EMO schools produce citizens? If the citizen is understood in economic terms as one who depends on the state for certain types of market guidance but who works primarily as an independent consumer, then, yes, the EMO school would likely be quite successful at producing this type of student. This is largely a passive citizen who has no obligation to perform any duties to the state beyond making self-serving choices in the marketplace to improve his or her own living conditions. However, if the citizen sought is understood to be one with a thicker connection to fellow people and to government, a relationship that requires foregrounding the political, then, no, it is far less likely that the school would succeed. This citizen must necessarily be more active in participating in public exchange of ideas and efforts to ensure the wellbeing of others, skills unlikely to result from curricula that emphasize fulfilling individual’s desires.

### *Freedom vs equality*

A longstanding philosophical debate between the freedom of individuals and the equality of groups reappears in the for-profit charter school movement. Given an overwhelming emphasis on the individual and a weak sense of the social, equality, which is necessarily a social principle, is reduced to a goal that might be achieved through a problematic form of personal choice. In this section I will consider some of the possible implications of the inappropriate balance between freedom and equality that seems to be rising within EMO schools and that can be deduced from looking at similar practices playing out in other realms that hold similar neoliberal views.

An education marketplace aimed at individual success is likely to pay little attention to equality of access or opportunity within the education of their neighbours, thereby deepening many of the conditions of social inequality already faced by schools. Carnoy (2000: 16) explains,

More choice is certainly a desirable goal in education. When parents get to choose a school for their children, they are likely not only to be more 'satisfied' but also more committed and involved. Yet, when the 'market' has entered into the struggle for equal education, it has mainly been on the side of Whites fleeing integration or majority minority inner-city schools. If anything, private choice has traditionally responded by ignoring or even exacerbating class, racial, and ethnic segregation and inequality.

Even Moe (2001: 109) found 'that separatism and possibly even bigotry' may be motivating some parents' educational choices. Finally, EMO critic, Wells and Scott (2001: 236), discovered in her study of California charter schools that 'some charter schools could restrict who learned about them and thus who had access to them', thereby making access a marker of individual privilege rather than a right of all. Perhaps this could explain why a study of EMOs in Arizona found significantly higher percentages of White students and native English speakers and lower percentages of Hispanic and ELL students than in traditional public schools and non-profit charter schools in the same areas (Garcia, Barber, and Molnar 2009).

Despite all of this, Chubb and Moe (1990: 221–222) proclaim:

Schools will make their own admissions decisions, subject only to non-discrimination requirements. This is absolutely crucial. Schools must be able to define their own missions and build their own programmes in their own ways, and they cannot do this if their student population is thrust on them by outsiders. They must be free to admit as many or as few students as they want, based on whatever criteria they think relevant—intelligence, interest, motivation, behaviour, special needs—and they must be free to exercise their own, informal judgements about individual applicants.

Some EMOs, like the Signal Tree Academy Northeast school proposal of White Hat Management, proclaim 'Diversity is an asset'—an intriguing choice of economic terminology.<sup>28</sup> However, Chubb and Moe (1990: 65) reveal a troubling aspect of their vision of a fortunate student body make up when they say, 'The fact is, suburban schools are lucky. They are more likely to be blessed with relatively homogeneous, problem-free environments'.

Indeed, EMOs appear to make exclusionary decisions. In their now slightly dated study of what they call 'market-oriented' and 'non-market-oriented' charter schools in Washington DC, Lacireno-Paquet *et al.* (2002: 145) found that 'Rather than skimming the cream off the top of the potential student population, market-oriented charter schools may be "cropping off" service to students whose language or special education needs make them more costly to educate'. They continue,

While non-market oriented charter schools are serving equal or higher proportions of needy populations than the traditional public school system, those with more entrepreneurial aspirations are not. The percentage of special education students served is nearly twice as high in non-market-oriented charters than in market-oriented ones. (2002: 155)

EMO schools, then, are ideally and in practice not equally open to all members of a community, nor do they provide equal opportunity to every child. Similarly, studies of schools in New Zealand, a country with a history of market-driven school reform dating to at least 1984, revealed patterns of secluding special education students and privileging wealthier students in market-oriented schools as early as the late 1990s (Lauder and Hughes 1999).

Adding to this situation, for-profit charter schools and the consumer accountability measures in place to assess them emphasize the success of individual students, meaning that the accountability expected by the public is that individual students will succeed academically, whereas traditionally the public expected schools to provide a larger equality of opportunity to all students collectively.<sup>29</sup>

Charter school leaders are often adept at describing themselves at the micro-level in democratic terms as pursuing and enacting freedom, especially when consuming and choice are seen as types of freedom, but they may fall short of also describing democracy as balancing equality and social justice alongside individual liberty.<sup>30</sup> As described above, EMO endorsers see the freedom of the individual as being freed from bureaucratic oversight to pursue his or her interests as he or she sees fit, primarily through exchange and consumption. Jonathan (1997: 198) expounds on conceiving of individual freedom this way:

It is clear at least that when the concept of the citizen as individual consumer is extended to the one social practice which provides the site for the formation of preferences as well as for their satisfaction, this results in a fragmentation of interest and action which denies the public that most basic social good of all: some shared notion of what the good of society consists in. Far from placing us in greater control of our fate, this individualized conception of citizenship simply releases each of us individually to obtain the best deal that we can within circumstances we have ceased to try and optimize together.

The situation that Jonathan describes here grows into one that is even more alarming, where individuals focus on themselves to such an extent that they fail to recognize their connections to others and to take responsibility for moments when their individual desires may conflict with the needs or well-being of others. This, then, is an individual who overlooks (at minimum) or disregards (at worst) the publicness of his or her actions and their implications. Thereby, he or she jeopardizes public life and the public good (which was defined earlier as a mutually beneficial way of life sought, created, and maintained by educated citizens), which is necessarily concerned with issues of equity and justice for others.

Not only does this self-serving individual come to be defined more by what he or she buys than by what he or she does, but also his or her very ability to engage in particular types of action are placed in jeopardy: namely collective action toward ensuring group wellbeing or social justice, where that action is not seen to immediately benefit the individual or where it may constrain his or her ability to pursue other desires. Indeed, some individuals are likely to celebrate expansion of their perceived powers as individuals without recognizing that they may be jeopardizing their collective powers, including the very collective powers that may be needed under some forms of corporate management in order to ensure the wellbeing of individuals (Davies and Bansel 2007: 249). It is no surprise that unions, being the most obvious example of collective school power, are forbidden at most EMO schools.

Additionally, individual ‘freedom from’—a negative sense of liberty where one is free from interference by others, especially the government—tends to be prioritized over communal conversations regarding collective well-being, or ‘freedom to’—a positive entitlement that often requires support, protection, or services from the state (Berlin 1969). Peters and Marshall (1996: 3) describe this shift in New Zealand where ‘the New Right believes that equality and freedom are incompatible and that freedom construed in individual and negative terms (i.e. freedom from intervention) is indispensable for economic vitality and well-being’. Other countries, like Belgium and the Netherlands, have enshrined the freedom of the individual to make education choices that depart from traditional public schooling within their constitutions (Macedo and Wolf 2004).

What we are left with, then, is neither a convincing compromise nor a sufficiently justified preference within the classical debate between individual liberty and collective equality. Instead, EMO practices emphasize individual liberty in ways that jeopardize social equality initiatives and the ability of individuals or groups to pursue them, which is particularly disconcerting when the topic is education, an endeavour traditionally thought to provide not only uplift for individuals but community improvement as well. This surely is also a worrisome conclusion within any school system concerned with ensuring the success of traditionally marginalized groups and also with preparing citizens for a world where equality and collective well-being are admirable values.

### *Costly citizenship education*<sup>31</sup>

Quality citizenship education can be hard to justify in economic terms. On one hand it is costly and likely not very efficient, especially at producing some of the desired outcomes described above. It requires time, ongoing conversation, and interaction between students and the outside world through field trips, service-learning, guest speakers, technology, and the like. It is already known that many of these aspects of quality citizenship education have been recently reduced in US public schools for a host of reasons related to decreased funding and increased time needed for test preparation (Levinson 2007, Lopez and Kirby 2007). The case may be

additionally worrisome in EMOs because these types of educational approaches may eat into the profits of the EMO or the time that could be directed toward more favoured markers of educational success, thereby dissuading those schools from desiring or offering them in the first place. Because for-profit charter schools are often driven by testing and profit as those markers, they may shy away from careful and prolonged education for civic action because it is difficult to measure, typically not tested, and may prove to be costly in both finances and time spent away from tested subjects.

Good citizens that engage in collective decision-making and contribute to society require advanced thinking skills, including critical thinking. While one of White Hat Management's recently proposed charter schools does express a desire to emphasize critical thinking, a rare study of EMOs revealed that EMOs often use drill and practice methods that are effective at improving basic skills, but fall short of cultivating advanced skills like reading comprehension and complex thinking.<sup>32</sup> Saltman (2005), in an extended study of Edison EMO schools, argues that their use of the scripted curriculum 'Success for All' fails to prepare children for a multi-cultural world, including an understanding of how power works across different groups of people—understandings I would argue are important for good citizenship education. In British schools that operate similarly to EMOs, Gerwitz *et al.* (1995: 154) concludes, 'what is visible and quantifiable is effectively being given more weight than processes and practices which are more intrinsically important but cannot be easily seen'. It may be the case that the types of thinking skills necessary for quality citizenship education fall into this situation.

On the other hand, citizenship education does not often yield personal economic gain for the students who undergo it. While it may substantially improve the economic well-being of the country as a whole, when the unit of analysis is the individual student and his or her preparation for competition and consumption in the market, there is little direct payoff. Differing from other costly school subjects, like science with its expensive labs and equipment, students are unlikely to acquire more lucrative careers because of their civic knowledge or practice, in fact the appreciation for public service careers that may result from extensive civic training may actually jeopardize a student's earning potential insofar as many of those careers, including teaching and law enforcement, are relatively low on the payscale. It is possible, though not necessarily the case, that active civic participation during the K-12 experience may help individual students craft a resume that helps them secure admission to a desirable university, for civic participation is often still well regarded by admissions committees, thereby fulfilling a personal goal of students. In sum, quality citizenship education may be in jeopardy in EMO schools given their economic concerns.

## Conclusion

Education for citizenship has long been understood to be a necessarily public endeavour. Many have held that it is the task of the public in democratic

societies to reproduce and rejuvenate itself through supporting citizenship education and it is believed to be a task best accomplished in settings that bring together individuals in communities that are themselves public, most notably within public schools. Throughout America and across the world, new experiments in public education are taking hold. Many of these take the form of for-profit charter schools overseen by EMOs whose mission and practices are guided by economic models that, by conceptual definition and applied effect, may overlook or contradict the longstanding aim of education for citizenship. As evidenced in the argument presented here, it appears that many aspects of these schools may be irreconcilable with educating for citizenship that involves living publicly and working collectively with others. We've reached an important moment where educational leaders, policy-makers, and educational philosophers must reassess the goals of citizenship education, and adapt or reassert them in response to the shifts in economic and political ideology embodied by EMO schools.

### Notes

1. Available online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mogkk7EeVeA> and <http://edisonlearning.com/el-blog>, accessed 12 January 2012.
2. I borrow this from Higgins and Knight Abowitz, (2011).
3. Boyles (2011: 434) recently made a persuasive argument that even the notion of the public good has become so usurped that it '(1) convolutes and conceals the role of private interests that are increasingly pervading public schools; and (2) it functionally and materially furthers market conditions that support an oligarchic versus a democratic republic'.
4. While many scholars have documented this, it is the moving personal accounts of Jonathan Kozol that have been perhaps the most powerful. For example, see Kozol (2005).
5. Levine (2007) describes different types of citizen education and their connections to notions of democracy across time.
6. Brighthouse (2006) draws upon Amy Gutmann and others to provide a convincing account of the necessity of not teaching children to unquestionably align themselves with their nation.
7. Obviously, US public schools are also concerned with the performance of individual students given the current emphasis on high-stakes testing. However, those schools also consider larger aggregated data geared toward ensuring equality of opportunity. Moreover, many public schools express in their mission statements and philosophies that they focus on developing children who work well together and who are integrated with their communities.
8. Davies and Bansel (2007) describe the neoliberal notion of the individual expertly.
9. I thank Bryan Warnick for reminding me of the distinction between selfishness and self-interestedness.
10. Signal Tree Academy South charter school proposal, page 6. Available online at <http://stateimpact.npr.org/ohio/2012/01/18/read-white-hat%E2%80%99s-applications-to-open-new-ohio-charter-schools/>, accessed 12 January 2012.
11. Note how 'bureaucratic' operates as common sense within neoliberal ideology. Bureaucracies are seen as systems of people who serve to constrain and are themselves constrained by regulations. These are necessarily bad because they are believed to be inefficient and limiting on individuals or corporations.
12. Available online at: <http://www.nhaschools.com/Pages/default.aspx> and <http://www.edisonlearning.com/>, accessed 12 January 2012.
13. For a discussion of Friedman's views see Henig (1994: 60).
14. PBS interview with David Brennan. Available online at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/vouchers/interviews/brennan.html>, accessed 12 January 2012.



15. Forbes 2008 interview with Chris Whittle. Available online at: [http://www.forbes.com/2008/01/22/solutions-education-whittle-oped-cx\\_sli\\_0123whittle.html](http://www.forbes.com/2008/01/22/solutions-education-whittle-oped-cx_sli_0123whittle.html), accessed 12 January 2012.
16. Bryan Warnick rightly pointed out to me that most parents in public schools seem to desire civic education in the abstract, but have much more pressing concerns when it comes to their own children. They don't create a market that would incentivize schools of any type to emphasize civic education. Relatedly, I would add here that the market that is constructed and perpetuated in the EMO context may be even less likely to identify civic education and its markers as worthy of careful measurement and comparison.
17. Apple (2000), drawing on Roger Dale, expertly explains how markets behave in this way. Brown (2005: 41) further adds to this account.
18. Available online at: <http://www.whitehatmgmt.com/>, accessed 12 January 2012.
19. PBS interview.
20. This open, democratic process is certainly not universal across all public schools. Mayoral control in some areas and the presence of corporate interests on school boards in others has limited the influence of the general public on school practice and policy.
21. Ohio, for example, introduced such legislation as part of its proposed budget in May 2011.
22. Signal Tree Academy South charter school proposal. Available online at: <http://stateimpact.npr.org/ohio/2012/01/18/read-white-hat%E2%80%99s-applications-to-open-new-ohio-charter-schools/>, accessed 12 January 2012.
23. For more on this weakened sense of the public, see Henig (1994).
24. To be fair to other EMOs, the Leona Group's website suggests that their schools may do a better job, with the community aspects of their teaching extending beyond personal benefits. Interestingly, the head of Leona, William Coats, is one of the few EMO leaders who actually has a background in education; he was a superintendent and education professor.
25. Available online at: <http://www.nhaschools.com/>, accessed 12 January 2012.
26. I'm following Cuban (2004) in this train of thought.
27. For more along these lines see Biesta (2004: 237–238).
28. Signal Tree Academy Northeast Charter School Proposal, 2011, page 10. Available online at: <http://stateimpact.npr.org/ohio/2012/01/18/read-white-hat%E2%80%99s-applications-to-open-new-ohio-charter-schools/>, accessed 12 January 2012.
29. See Wilson (2008: 8).
30. For more along these lines see Wells *et al.* (2002).
31. It is important to note at the outset of this section that very little empirical work has been done to analyse the differences in content and delivery of civics education in EMO schools vs other charter or traditional public schools. The closest relevant studies are those of Buckley and Schneider (2007) in the US and Campbell (2001), Campbell (2004) in Canada. Clearly much more empirical work needs to be done to determine whether students from EMOs are more or less civically competent and engaged than their peers in other settings.
32. Signal Tree Academy charter school proposal, page 360. Available online at: <http://stateimpact.npr.org/ohio/2012/01/18/read-white-hat%E2%80%99s-applications-to-open-new-ohio-charter-schools/>, accessed 12 January 2012. See also Garcia *et al.* (2009).

## References

- Apple, M. (2000) Can critical pedagogies interrupt rightist policies? *Educational Theory*, 50(2), 229–254.
- Apple, M. (2006) *Educating the 'Right' Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality* (New York: Routledge).
- Barber, B. (1992) *An Aristocracy of Everyone: The Politics of Education and the Future of America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

- Berlin, I. (1969) Two concepts of liberty. In *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Biesta, G. (2004) Education, accountability, and the ethical demand: Can the democratic potential of accountability be regained? *Educational Theory*, 54(3), 233–250.
- Boyles, D. (2011) The privatized public: Antagonism for radical democratic politics in schools? *Educational Theory*, 61(4), 433–450.
- Brighouse, H. (2006) *On Education* (New York: Routledge).
- Brown, W. (2005) *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Buckley, J. and Schneider, M. (2007) *Charter schools: Hope or hype?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Campbell, D. (2001) Making democratic education work. In P. Peterson and D. Campbell (eds), *Charters, Vouchers, and Public Education* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press), 241–267.
- Campbell, D. (2004) The civic implications of Canada's education system. In P. Wolf and S. Macedo (eds), *Educating Citizens: International Perspectives on Civic Values and School Choice* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press).
- Carnoy, M. (2000) School choice? Or is it privatization? *Educational Researcher*, 29(7), 15–20.
- Chubb, J. (2006) The private can be public. In P. Peterson (ed.), *Choice and Competition in American Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).
- Chubb, J. and Moe, T. (1990) *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution).
- Cuban, L. (2004) *The blackboard and the bottom line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Davies, B. and Bansel, P. (2007) Neoliberalism and education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(3), 247–259.
- Dewey, J. (1927) *The Public and Its Problems* (Chicago: Gateway Books).
- Finn, C. (2006) All aboard the charters? *National Review*, Available online at: <http://www.nationalreview.com/nrd/article?q=NGY0NmZmNzVmMmI5Mdc5ODVlZmYxYTBmOTFmMDDmYmY>, accessed 9 October.
- Finn, C., Manno, V. and Vanourek, G. (2000) *Charter Schools in Action* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Friedman, M. (1962) *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Garcia, D., Barber, R. and Molnar, A. (2009) Profiting from public education: Education Management Organizations and student achievement. *Teachers College Record*, 111(5), 1352–1379.
- Gerwitz, S., Ball, S. and Bowe, R. (eds) (1995) *Markets, Choice, and Equity in Education* (Buckingham, England: Open University Press).
- Hahn, C. (2002) Education for democratic citizenship: One nation's story. In W. Parker (ed.), *Education for Democracy: Contexts, Curricula, Assessments* (Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing).
- Hayek, F. (1960) *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Henig, J. (1994) *Rethinking school choice. Limits of the market metaphor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Higgins, C. and Knight Abowitz, K. (2011) What makes a public school public? A framework for evaluating the civic substance of schooling. *Educational Theory*, 61(4), 365–380.
- Jonathan, R. (1997) Liberalism and education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 31(1), 181–216.
- Journell, W. (2011) Teaching the 2008 presidential election at three demographically diverse schools. *Educational Studies*, 47(2), 133–159.
- Kahne, J. and Middaugh, E. (2008) High quality civic education: What is it and who gets it? *Social Education*, 72, 34–39.
- Knight Abowitz, K. (2011) Achieving public school. *Educational Theory*, 61(4), 467–489.
- Kozol, J. (2005) *The Shame of the Nation* (New York: Crown Publishers).
- Labaree, D. (1997) Public goods, private goods: The American struggle over educational goals. *American Educational Research Journal*, 34(1), 39–81.

- Labaree, D. (2007) *Education, Markets, and the Public Good: The Selected Works of David F. Labaree* (New York, NY: Routledge).
- Lacireno-Paquet, N., Holyoke, T., Moser, M. and Henig, J. (2002) Creaming versus cropping: Charter school enrollment practices in response to market incentives. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24(2), 145–158.
- Lauder, H. and Hughes, D. (1999) *Trading in Futures: Why Markets in Education Don't Work* (Buckingham: Open University Press).
- Levine, P. (2007) *The Future of Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of American Citizens* (Medford, MA: Tufts University Press).
- Levinson, M. (2007) The civic achievement gap. In *CIRCLE Working Paper* (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement).
- Lopez, M. and Kirby, E. (2007) *U.S. Civics Instruction: Content and Teaching Strategies* (Medford, MA: The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, Tufts University).
- Macedo, S. and Wolf, P. (2004) Introduction: School choice, civic values, and problems of policy comparison. In P. Wolf and S. Macedo (eds), *Educating Citizens: International Perspectives on Civic Values and School Choice* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press), 1–17.
- McCowan, T. (2009) *Rethinking Citizenship Education: A Curriculum for Participatory Democracy* (London: Continuum).
- McCowan, T. (2012) *Citizenship Education in Commonwealth Countries* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat).
- Miron, G. and Nelson, C. (2002) *What's Public about Charter Schools?* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press).
- Miron, G., Urschel, J., Aguilar, M. and Dailey, B. (2012) Profiles of For-Profit Education Management Organizations: Thirteenth Annual Report 2010–2011. National Educational Policy Center at the University of Colorado.
- Moe, T. (2001) Going private. In P. Peterson and D. Campbell (eds), *Charters, Vouchers, and Public Education* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press).
- Molnar, A. (1996) *Giving Kids the Business: The Commercialization of America's Schools* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press).
- Peters, M. and Marshall, J. (1996) *Individualism and Community: Education and Social Policy in the Postmodern Condition* (New York: Routledge).
- Roberts, P. (2009) A new patriotism? Neoliberalism, citizenship and tertiary education in New Zealand. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 41(4), 410–423.
- Rogers, R. (2011) *Critical Discourse Analysis in Education* (New York: Routledge).
- Saltman, K. (2005) *The Edison Schools: Corporate Schooling and the Assault on Public Education* (New York: Routledge).
- Stitzlein, S. (2012) *Teaching for Dissent: Citizenship Education and Political Activism* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers).
- Tyre, P. (2011) Putting parents in charge. *New York Times Sunday Review*, 17 September.
- Wells, A.S. and Scott, J. (2001) Privatization and charter school reform: Economic, political, and social dimensions. In H.M. Levin (ed.), *Privatizing Education* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press).
- Wells, A.S., Slayton, J. and Scott, J. (2002) Defining democracy in the neoliberal age: Charter school reform and educational consumption. *American Educational Research Journal*, 39 (2), 337–361.
- Westheimer, J. and Kahne, J. (2004) What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(2), 237–269.
- Whittle, C. (2005) *Crash Course: Imagining a Better Future for American Education* (New York: Riverhead Books).
- Wilson, T. (2008) *Negotiating Public and Private: Philosophical Frameworks for School Choice* (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado, Educational Policy Research Center).