



## Working Papers in Educational Linguistics (WPEL)

---

Volume 22  
Number 2 *Fall 2007*

Article 4

10-1-2007

# Privatizing Schools: The Struggle over How We Define Democracy and the Role of Public Institutions

John Weathers

*University of Colorado-Colorado Springs*

---

# Privatizing Schools: The Struggle over How We Define Democracy and the Role of Public Institutions

# Privatizing Schools: The Struggle over How We Define Democracy and the Role of Public Institutions

John Weathers

*University of Colorado-Colorado Springs*

In this paper, I analyze the discourse generated during one public debate and associated news coverage over the merits of privatization and choice policies for public schools. I explore discourse-based techniques policy advocates use to construct public perception of these issues. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides a theoretical grounding and influences the frame for the analysis. Using this public text, I begin building a discourse grounded micro-level understanding of the means through which radical shifts in our understanding of the role of the public in public institutions are accomplished. Much of the debate centers on attempts to influence public perception of the problems of education, their severity, who is responsible for them, and how they should be addressed. However, my analysis reveals that discursive moves employed by the pro-privatization advocate go beyond attempts to define the problem, improve school efficiency or performance to the colonization of democratic discourse, infiltrating it with the relatively simple logic of the marketplace. The principles of freedom and democracy are also used in the service of this pro-privatization argument but are based on their realization in the economic sphere. This discursive move leads to the construction of not only discourse about the purposes of public education but also about the public's role in government institutions and by association, the very nature of a democracy.

## Introduction

Reformers and policymakers have introduced economic theory, corporate business practices, and the discourse of economics and business management into U.S. public education since its establishment on a wide scale in the mid-1800s. The most acknowledged example of this crossover or hybridization (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999) was in the application of Frederick Winslow Taylor's principles of scientific management, which had revolutionized the industrial world. Reformers incorporated his ideas into the theory and practice of educational management by the early 1900's. It was argued at the time that schools should follow the industrial model introduced by Taylor to

increase the efficiency of their production of educated students. This top-down management approach, which attempted to dictate the work of teachers and students down to the minute details, caught on and has had a significant influence on the functioning of public schools, although there were periods of resistance to such approaches during the progressive era of the 1930s and again in late 1960s. The perception that market driven enrollment would directly impact schools, leading them to boost efficiency and production of better student outcomes has also been prevalent and influential in education policy, particularly in the last decade.

Despite this link between business principles and education, the vision of public schools as central to the maintenance of our democratic society has retained a prominent place in the society's perception of the purpose of public schooling. In fact, the 32nd Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, administered in 2000, found that Americans indicate that "preparing people to become responsible citizens" is the most important purpose of the nation's schools (Rose & Gallup 2000). Fundamental to this vision of the role of public schooling in ensuring the democratic functioning of our society have been the fairly widely accepted premises that public schools should be: open to all students; public institutions run by the government whose affairs should be determined by a democratically elected body of representatives from the local school district; and non-profit. In addition, it has become part of our enacted social policy that public school money should not be used to pay the tuition of private or parochial schools. Even though these fundamental premises have been generally accepted by the majority of citizens throughout the history of public schooling in the United States, they certainly have not gone untested (Perkinson 1977). Most recently, they have been challenged by policies to privatize the management of "failing" schools and/or offer vouchers for private or parochial school tuition to the students in these troubled public schools.

The way in which these market-based ideas about how public institutions should function have most recently made their way into education discourse and policy is through the debate over the performance of schools, especially impoverished urban schools. As schools and school districts attempt to grapple with a perceived educational crisis,<sup>1</sup> the very existence of a crisis, the construction of the proportion of the crisis, its root causes, and how it should be solved are being fought over in the public arena. Advocates for privatization and choice appear to be winning this struggle to define the problem and its solution, which they argue is the bureaucratic and monopolistic nature of public school systems that can only be solved by bringing in the efficient functioning and

---

<sup>1</sup> I do not mean to suggest that there is no crisis, but that its nature (e.g., severity, etc.) is constructed through public discourse. See Berliner & Biddle (1995) for one perspective on how an educational crisis may be overblown.

productivity of private companies and a competitive market-based parental choice system. A 2002 survey of black and white Americans by Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that a majority of African Americans and poor inner-city residents support school vouchers. This support of vouchers is present although insignificant data exists to support the positive effects of either privatization or choice systems on achievement.

In this paper, I do not go into the potential practical problems with these reform ideas such as limits to enrollment at the best schools, which could potentially reinforce or even exacerbate current resource disparities and achievement gaps, as this is done elsewhere (e.g., Ferguson 1998). However, I do ask why a majority of people in typically disenfranchised communities have been eager to give up traditional democratic control over public institutions and trade it for the market-based control of the consumer. This question seems important given the potential consequences for broader trends in limiting the role of individuals in public institutions that might follow choice and privatization in public schools, and given the lack of evidence pointing to the success of privatization and choice. There is also a very strong and organized chorus of policy advocates, traditionally aligned with poor inner-city African Americans (Democrats), who are arguing that this is the end of democracy and will only exacerbate current achievement gaps and societal inequalities. Additionally, it is surprising that those who have typically come out on the bottom of market-based competition are so eager to make use of that same system and abandon public safeguards to guarantee at least minimal standards. The easy but uncertain answer is that 1) such policies will provide better education for these children; and 2) traditional forms of representative democracy in urban centers either feel like a lack of control or in actuality, provide less control over institutions than market driven systems. However, I would argue that positive outcomes from these policy shifts are so uncertain as to be a considerable risk, especially given unknowns about market functioning around public goods and potential government regulation. Consequently, support could be considered by some as radical faith in economic theory.

I examine how in the context of an urban school setting with a majority minority and working poor residents pro-privatization arguments may be winning out. The analysis of the language in public texts produced in this struggle over the direction of educational policy around the issues of privatization and choice is one means of uncovering discourse-based techniques policy advocates use to construct public perception of what the problems are, how they should be addressed, and their ramifications (or lack thereof) for the wider society. This paper primarily uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) as its theoretical grounding and as an influence on its frame of analysis. CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce and/or challenge relations of power and

dominance in society (Van Dijk 2001). The premise of this approach is that discourse performs ideological work and in so doing, constructs our perceptions of society and culture. In other words, discourse mediates between phenomenological text (events and interactions as they are encountered by a person), society's culture, and individual cognitive frames that influence our perception of this text.

I also begin to examine how arguments used to bolster this privatization position may serve to ultimately alter the way we think about the role of the public in public institutions, moving us away from a view of voice as right and acceptable to a more market-based view of choice as right and acceptable. Although there have been a growing number of theoretical treatments on these consequences for the role of the public in public institutions (e.g., Engel 2000; Margonis & Lawrence 1999), there has been little work to empirically examine the role of language in constructing societal perceptions on the implications of these policies. I attempt to begin building a discourse-grounded, micro-level understanding of the means through which radical shifts in our understanding of the role of the public in public institutions, specifically in public education, are accomplished. A focus of this paper is therefore to uncover the discourse-based techniques used to control symbolic space and eventually influence public policy and our understanding of the public's role in civic institutions within the particular realm of educational policy debates over public school choice and privatization.

For this study, I analyze one public debate and associated news commentary over the merits of privatizing<sup>2</sup> schools between one pro-privatization advocate and a former head of the Philadelphia public schools who is against privatization. This conversation has particularities unique to the history and trajectory of this particular district, as the state government took over Philadelphia's schools in late 2001, leading to a state appointed commission to run the district. This School Reform Commission (SRC) has given a large contract to Edison Schools, Inc. to run 20 troubled schools in the district and six other non-profit or for-profit organizations to run another 26, which was a significant reduction in the number originally planned for Edison to run. Regardless, there are common themes that emerge and have relevance to similar efforts occurring across the county. Using this public text, I argue that discursive moves employed by the individual representing the pro-privatization view go beyond attempts to improve school efficiency and performance to the colonization of democratic discourse, infiltrating it with the relatively simple logic of the marketplace. The principles of freedom and

---

<sup>2</sup> I will use "privatization" throughout the rest of the paper to represent both efforts to hand over the management of schools to private companies and to create systems of choice based on vouchers, charter schools, or other means. Importantly, in Philadelphia, these options coincide with choice being coupled with options for attending schools run by private for-profit education companies such as Edison, Inc.

## PRIVATIZING SCHOOLS

democracy are used in the service of this pro-privatization argument. This discursive move leads to the construction of not only discourse about what public schooling should mean and what its purposes should be but also what the public role in government institutions and by association, what the very nature of a democracy should be.

### Data

#### *The Text*

The contours of this very public debate emerge in many different forums but take on a sharp focus in public debate about privatization. Consequently, such a public text that emerges from this debate should contain clear examples of the means through which the discourse around privatization and its link to democracy and freedom are constructed. The text I chose in order to explore the discourse around school privatization comes from a debate on National Public Radio's (NPR) show *Justice Talking*. It was conducted in front of a live audience on February 4, 2002 at the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which is part of the University of Pennsylvania. However, the Institute broadcast the debate over a local public radio station and syndicated it to other public radio stations throughout the country. The radio listening audience of NPR is not representative of the general population, but is typically more wealthy, educated, liberal, and whiter than the general population (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2006).

*Justice Talking's* schedule (<http://www.justicetalking.org/programarchive.asp>) listed the topic of the debate as the "Privatization of Public Schools." From the context of current school reforms in Philadelphia as in other large urban centers, and from the use of the term "privatization" in the debate itself, it can specifically be defined as the contracting out of the management of public schools to private for-profit companies. However, as a reform issue more generally, "privatization" is also closely linked with school choice reforms such as vouchers and charter schools, and the use of the term encompasses these areas as well. The two issues are typically linked through the ability of private companies, both for-profit and non-profit, to offer alternative school options under a choice system. All of these areas overlap in the debate itself.

Prior to the moderated debate, a news segment plays, which serves to establish the context and frame the debate. Immediately following this news segment, the debate begins. The debate is between Philip Goldsmith, former CEO of the Philadelphia School District who represents the anti-privatization view and David Salisbury, Director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the Cato Institute, who represents the pro-privatization perspective. Margot Adler, a National Public Radio correspondent, moderates the debate and regular moderator for the *Justice*

*Talking* debates. The transcript is 553 lines long and contains the entirety of the broadcast from WHYY around this debate, and due to its length, it is not appended to this article. The transcript attempts to capture nuances in speech that would not be apparent without the use of symbols commonly used in discourse analysis and Appendix A includes a key to the symbols used and a list of the speakers with the key to the shorthand for their names. The transcript has two primary sections, the news report and the debate itself. In the news report, other than the reporter, only the comments of James Nevill, the head of Philadelphia's School Reform Commission, at the time of the debate are excerpted. For the debate, the primary speakers are Goldsmith, Salisbury, and the moderator, Margot Adler. However, toward the end of the debate, six audience members are given the opportunity to ask questions and they are noted in the text by number. The debate and the associated news report are not just about the possibility of privatization of school management, the impact of privatization on student achievement, and/or the creation of choice or voucher systems as possible solutions to the woes of urban education. These topics are certainly the focus of many of the moderator's questions and a good deal of the participants' discourse. However, as previously suggested, the debate over these issues obscures the more fundamental struggle taking place to redefine the concept of democracy, public versus private domain, and traditional notions of citizen power and control in government decisions. Relatedly, the pro-privatization discourse challenges the notions of government as an institution representative of society's interests, as a provider of public services, and as a locus of citizen control over the provision of public services. At its core, the debate is about the very fundamental way in which we view our individual relationship to the general interests of other members of society through public institutions and our democratic system.

Privatization in particular was a very timely issue at the time of the debate. The Philadelphia Reform Commission (PRC), which was appointed by the governor to replace the elected school board, had already commissioned Edison Schools Inc. to conduct an analysis of the school district to determine what could be done to improve its management and student performance. There were also indications that the PRC had plans to give control of a substantial number of schools to Edison. Plans for allowing a private for-profit company to run approximately 60 district schools was a contentious issue at the time of the debate.

#### *The Context of Privatization Efforts in the Philadelphia School District*

Pennsylvania state law provides for the right of the state to take over the "failing" school district of Philadelphia, remove the elected board of education, and institute a SRC, whose members were appointed by the governor. The governor of Pennsylvania did just that in late 2001. The majority of the appointed members of the SRC shared the policy interests



of the governor to move toward vouchers and allow for the privatization of at least some public schools (Reiser 2003). There is a political history to the attempts of Republican state governors and legislators, including Pennsylvania's former governor Tom Ridge (his attempts to get this legislation passed failed on more than one occasion) to pass legislation creating the possibility for voucher systems in school districts, so that students, typically in schools determined to be "failing," could get a voucher to attend a private school. Early moves by the SRC provided another layer to the web of pro-privatization and pro-voucher policies. Early on in their tenure, plans were being developed for Edison Schools Inc., a private for-profit educational management company which operates 150 schools in 20 states as of May 2003, might run many of the schools in the district, if not the district administration itself. However, these policies met fierce resistance by a wide array of local citizens, and it is likely that the SRC scaled back initial plans to give Edison Schools, Inc. such a large number of schools to run due to the protests of local residents.

Education policy decisions made at the state level by the governor and legislature are theoretically subject to democratic control via elections every two to six years. School boards are also typically controlled in a similar manner. However, by installing the SRC, the governor removed the possibility for local democratic accountability of the city's school board. The perception created by forcing a political agenda on the citizens of Philadelphia through undemocratic means could have potentially threatened the governor's future election and in this way, may have tied his hand from going against the will of the people. However prior to this opportunity for democratic recall, the SRC already instituted far reaching structural changes to the school district. The exercise of power by the governor and the state legislature has arguably usurped local autonomy and control to achieve political goals, despite the variety of proposed solutions to the financial and academic problems of the district and the lack of opportunity for the people of Philadelphia, through their elected representatives, to choose which solution they prefer.

Although the Republican-controlled state government seems to have the upper hand in this struggle over control of the schools, its power cannot be exercised unrestrained as a pure force relationship, repressing all resistance. This is especially true in a democratic society, where resistance has an avenue for expression and often has an impact on policy. Power is not something that the state government and the SRC have sole access to and the people of Philadelphia do not possess and as a result are being oppressed. The picture is more complex. Power, in Foucault's (1978) sense, must be understood as a strategy at multiple levels that only takes its final form in law or the state apparatus. It is not held by one dominant group and exercised over another weaker social group. All groups have access to the strategic functioning of power at multiple sites distributed throughout society. The various groups in society are in

continual struggle at multiple sites throughout society over the force relations that end up in their hegemonic form within state policy. This process of struggle over force relations is most fierce when attempts at domination and control are most visible. As Foucault argues, “power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (1978: 86). This is perhaps part of the problem the SRC encountered, and why a small but vocal group opposed them with such fierce resistance. They did not attempt to mask their exercise of power, nor provide the discourse to construct this policy shift as potentially in the interest of those who would be affected. However, the SRC has still been able to move ahead with much of their plans intact (so have a few other districts and states throughout the country attempting to implement similar plans for choice and privatization of “failing” schools) generating protests but not widespread resistance, which would endanger their plans. The question must be asked why there has not been greater resistance by a larger majority of the parents of school age children in Philadelphia. One possible answer to this question lies in the analysis of the discourse used by proponents of privatization and choice and their ability to colonize the discourse of education with the terms and concepts of conservative economic critique of the government’s provision of public services.

## Method

### *Critical Discourse Analysis*

Researchers use discourse analysis in a variety of disciplines, from linguistics to cultural anthropology. Across all of these disciplines and even within them, there are a variety of approaches to analyzing the text of a conversation, speech, newspaper article, or other discourse event. The particular method that I have chosen for uncovering underlying themes and rhetorical devices within the text of a debate over the privatization of schools draws heavily from CDA, as articulated primarily by Fairclough (1995) and Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999). CDA does not attempt to provide an exhaustive and detailed account of everything occurring in a text. However, it is used to uncover aspects of discourse that have been buried through the manipulation of language, meanings which serve the interests of a particular group and non-democratic aims, primarily of those in power. I have chosen this approach to discourse analysis not because I believe that it represents the best methodological framework available, but because it provides advantages in terms of its theoretical foundation, which connects discourse to social practice and places it in a dialectical relationship with social structure. It is this connection to social theory that has influenced my decision to use CDA as a lens into the meaningful issues that arise from the text I am analyzing.

Although, there are some theoretical advantages to CDA, it has received criticism for its discourse analysis method, or perhaps more appropriately, the lack of a rigorous method (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart 1999). It is difficult to make an assessment of the discourse analysis methods of CDA because it does not exist as a delimited sphere of rules and guidelines. Rather, Fairclough encourages adherents to employ methods from a variety of approaches to uncover the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of language. The most pervasive critique of CDA is that in its attempts to pursue an open political agenda aimed at undermining hegemony, CDA lacks thoroughness and systematicity in its analysis of texts. Fairclough (1995) has recognized this deficiency and has advocated incorporating the methods of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) into CDA.

Despite its possible shortcomings, I have chosen CDA as a framework for approaching the analysis of this debate over the privatization of public schools because it best represents a theoretical/methodological approach to uncovering the role of language in the ongoing process of the construction of reality. Just as the meaning should arise from the text, I argue that the type of analysis and theoretical framework to be applied to a systematic analysis should also arise from the text. I do not believe that there is one best universal method or theoretical frame for approaching discourse analysis. Different texts require different tools and are useful for examining the relevant social questions inherent within the discursive event and/or for helping to understand different social problems. CDA is particularly well suited to: 1) the examination of texts generated during events which may contribute to process of social change; and 2) uncovering the role of power, ideology, and hegemony in the construction and reproduction of social structures that unjustly benefit the privileged or dominant group(s). The move toward privatization of schools and the establishment of choice or voucher systems represents an important arena of social change and social struggle where issues of power, privilege, ideology, and hegemony come to the fore.

CDA follows the theoretical grounding found in sociology and semiotics in claiming that people's understanding of reality is socially constructed through interaction, and that this interaction and therefore, people's reality is mediated by the use of semiotic systems, primarily language. CDA attempts to reveal through textual analysis, the way that the dominant groups in society attempt to construct a particular version of reality. This construction is accomplished through the manipulation of language in the production of texts, which favor their interests at the expense of others. The struggle over hegemony with its focus in a democratic society of control of not only the functioning of the state apparatus, but also the consent of the governed, enables its operation and policies to at least appear to be the will of the people. This garnering of consent by neoliberal market forces often occurs through the construction, dissemi-

nation and acceptance of ideology, or what Engels, drawing on the work of Marx, labelled false consciousness (Eagleton 1991). An understanding of ideology is therefore important here. According to Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999):

Ideologies are constructions of practices from particular perspectives (and in that sense 'one-sided') which 'iron out' the contradictions, dilemmas and antagonisms of practices in ways which accord with the interests and projects of domination. The effect of ideologies in 'ironing out' (i.e., suppressing) aspects of practices is what links ideologies to 'mystification' (Barret 1991: 167) and 'misrecognition' (Althusser 1971; Bourdieu 1991). Ideologies are discursive constructions, so the question of ideology is part of the question of how discourse relates to other moments of social practices... We say that the discourse of one practice colonises that of another... So ideologies are domination-related constructions of a practice which are determined by specifically discursive relations between that practice and other practices (26-7).

Having control over ideology construction means control over how people view the world. The struggle over control of the symbols, which comprise the discourse of a particular field is typically indirect, conducted through the various forms of media, most notably print, radio, and television news and news analysis programs. Many forms of news media attempt some semblance of objectivity, but it is widely recognized that various outlets have a clearly discernable political slant. Then there are the talk shows, many of which do not even attempt to remain objective. Their popularity has grown in the last decade (e.g., Rush Limbaugh), partly because they only present one side of an issue. It is a bit rarer to get an opportunity to witness the struggle over control of the symbolic realm directly, and thereby be afforded the opportunity to witness the attempts at (de)legitimation, positioning, and rhetoric, all of which are subject to direct and immediate challenge. This aspect of a debate helps to bring forth the central issues which policy advocates battle over in the attempt to dominate the discourse and eventually the social and institutional aspects of a particular field.

As discourse analysts believe that this mediation of events contains ideological filtering by the person acting in the world, they would be remiss not to disclose their own personal and political context. As Van Dijk (2001) explains:

Crucial for critical discourse analysts is the explicit awareness of their role in society. Continuing a tradition that rejects the possibility of a 'value-free' science, they argue that science, and especially scholarly discourse, are inherently part of, and influenced by social structure,

## PRIVATIZING SCHOOLS

and produced in social interaction. Instead of denying or ignoring such a relation between scholarship and society, they plead that such relations be studied and accounted for in their own right, and that scholarly practices should be based on such insights. Theory formation description and explanation, also in discourse analysis, are socio-politically 'situated', whether we like it or not (353).

Disclosing such context is not a simple process, and should go well beyond what typically stands for such disclosure in some (sub)fields of social research—e.g., “white male from a suburban background middle class”—to address relevant social and political views. I will try to lay out my perspective briefly here.

In this paper, I take an approach that is in line with traditional CDA, which by definition is in support of those on less equal sides of social inequality by attempting to expose discursive power moves that would tend to reproduce inequality rather than put an end to it. However, my particular views about the value of radical changes to the public schooling system, even influenced by ideas from business and economic theory, are a bit more open than most taking this approach. In my view, the practical effects of such policy shifts should be an empirical question and, although skeptical, I am open to careful study of limited attempts to change the fundamental structure of the way that the public interacts with schools. However, I want to point out what I believe may be potential side effects of even such limited moves as they tend to remain hidden from public discussion and yet, may eventually have a very substantive impact on society. Politically and socially, adopting this critical position makes sense to me as I believe that the discursive work being accomplished in such public debates and discourse more generally indirectly works to reframe the role of the public in civic society and thereby democracy itself and may obscure full understanding of all of its ramifications by those who are the target of such policies—poor inner-city families. As policies for privatization and choice are eagerly adopted in these areas, where families are desperate for solutions to improve educational outcomes, they stand a greater chance of becoming integrated into the wider fabric of school systems. In other words, such practices may become legitimized and the focus on their consequences for broader societal issues may be pushed to the side. Consequently, the impact on how the public comes to understand and interact with civic institutions and the very concept of civic participation may be reframed, which has broad consequences, albeit unknown for our society. These issues need to be addressed and considered carefully as part of the pros and cons of allowing the privatization of public schools.

## Analysis

### *Characterization of the Problem*

Reform, especially that which involves far-reaching paradigmatic shifts typically requires a problem that is of crisis proportions. Reform in education has typically been piecemeal and has occurred at the edges of the system, rather than focusing on fundamental alterations of the education system itself (Smith & O'Day 1991). This tinkering is not due to the lack of articulation of problems that are arguably of crisis proportions. The 1983 publication of *Nation at Risk* by the nation's governors is one early example (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983). One question that must be asked of the situation in Philadelphia, a city undergoing a reform that fundamentally alters the way public schools are understood and operated, is whether or not the performance of students and the functioning (or lack) of the school system reached a crisis state in need of a drastic paradigmatic shift through privatization. If it has, what are the problems underlying this crisis? And if the performance of this demographic sector of students has been so low for so long, how is it that it has come to be understood only more recently as a crisis?

Because such questions are difficult if not impossible to answer in terms of an objective reality, as views would be so relative and proportional to one's outlook or connection to the system, the answer to these questions lies in a careful examination of the media discourse and discourse of those advocating for privatization and choice systems. In other words, has a crisis been successfully constructed? Being able to define the situation as a crisis is the first and one of the most vital moves in the struggle over control of the discourse in the symbolic realm where market discourse and more traditional education discourse meet. But establishing whether or not the situation is a crisis is only the beginning, although perhaps one of the most important discursive constructions in gaining control over public opinion of the state of the education system and the need for a radical reform. Policymakers and educational leaders can solve a crisis in many ways, even if it comes to be perceived that solving it requires fundamental transformation of the system. The solution must stem from an understanding of the problem(s). Therefore, whoever is able to gain control of the discourse over what is causing the students to fail—the problem—will be able to dictate the solution. As Fairclough argues, this control of the symbolic realm will inevitably lead to control over the actual creation of policies and institutions, which in this case will benefit the forces behind marketization of the public sphere.



*Framing the Debate: The Opening News Report*

In the news report, which provides context and background to the debate, the reporter sets the tone for constructing the performance of the students and the school district to be so poor that something drastic must be done. In lines 3-5 of the text<sup>3</sup> she says:

**R:** Philadelphians concerned about the city's public schools can agree on this much, something drastic needs to be done. The district is \$200 million dollars in the red, though test scores are rising, over half of all students read below basic levels.

The reporter characterizes the problem as so severe that "something drastic needs to be done" and couples the characterization with an emotional and moral component to support this view. The underlying message is that those who are concerned believe that the situation in the schools is in crisis and that this crisis requires immediate and drastic action. The implication is that these concerned Philadelphians often cannot agree on issues of importance to them, but the magnitude of this problem is so clear that they all can "agree on this much." The statement also sets up an in and out group, and those who do not think that something drastic needs to be done are part of the non-caring out group and by association, are not even part of the Philadelphia community. This structure insinuates without being direct, or as Hodge and Kress explain in Huckin (2002), it sets up an ideological complex, which is perhaps more effective due to its deniability than an indexical presupposition. However, the out-of-context information given by the reporter about student achievement and the financial status of the district do not in and of themselves lead to the conclusion that there is a crisis so severe that the current education system must be abandoned in favor of privatization and choice.

There are other potential explanations worth considering. Perhaps the schools need more money from the state because unlike suburban districts, cities tend to have less of a tax base due to the poverty of many of the residents, the large number of government and non-profit institutions which do not pay taxes, and the loss of their tax base due to suburban flight by both residents and businesses (Orfield 2002). Perhaps the funding system for the entire state needs to be systematically reformed so that it is not based on local property taxes and all students receive equal funding, but this is not considered. However, what is not being discussed here is perhaps more revealing than what is being discussed, especially the mention that test scores are rising. Perhaps the solution lies not in untested, radical reform, but in shoring up and improving the mechanisms that are leading to improving test scores. These and other omissions form part

---

<sup>3</sup> Text line numbers refer to the data as collected, not as represented here.

of the hidden text that underlies our interpretation and attempt to make causal connections, thereby having as much if not more of an influence on our understanding of the issue at hand.

This construction of the problem as a crisis continues at a number of other points in the news report prior to the debate and then also during the debate. This characterization typically is offered by those who are promoting privatization and choice as an alternative to this perceived crisis. James Nevill, an African-American businessman and the appointed head of the SRC adds to this characterization just a few lines (lines 11-13) later when he is interviewed by the reporter:

**JN:** We are in a very dramatic (1) very serious situation. We have to try any means necessary, within reason, to help these children, and ... privatization is ... one of those options

The most noticeable aspect of his statement is the intonational stress he adds to the construction of the situation as a crisis, which further heightens his use of augmenting amplification (Eggs & Slade 1997) with the terms “very dramatic” and “very serious”. His repetitive and double amplification to modify the term “situation”, which is a neutral lexis, adds a level of evaluation that is meant to heighten the alarm the “concerned” listener should feel. Nevill then goes on to link the gravity of this crisis with a range of other social issues such as inequality, racism, black power, justice, radicalism, and the politics of Malcolm X, when he argues that “We have to try any means necessary, within reason, to help these children”. “Any means necessary” is a reference to the larger Conversation (Gee 1999) of radical racial struggle in the United States and presupposes a number of connections likely to be made by many of the African American listeners and others who are familiar with the words of Malcolm X. In many ways, this phrase is likely the most recognizable aspect of Malcolm X’s philosophy—a radical soundbite, whether its author intended to make this connection or not. The statement forcefully adds to the crisis construction of the educational situation in Philadelphia, by its reference to a turbulent time in which African Americans felt that their backs were up against the wall, to reference another phrase attributed to the black power movement, which when coupled with an often cited phrase used by Malcolm X, “by any means necessary” (Breitman 1998), performs a powerful discursive threat. It is likely that Nevill’s appeal is directed more toward African American parents whose children comprise the majority of students in Philadelphia. It is important that Nevill mitigates this phrase with “within reason”. Reason of course is a concept open to interpretation, but the choice of this word seems to be implying here that the violence and non-legal means advocated by Malcolm X are not being suggested by Nevill himself. This might be to soften the fears that white and less radical black listeners



might feel from such a statement, by disassociating it from violence. By citing these historically charged words, Nevill is also choosing the more radical side of 1960's racial struggle that was associated with Malcolm X, although without fully associating himself with all of the violent implications of such an association. His radical position's connection to the words of Malcolm X may take on even more significance given that many in the African American community view the struggles for racial equality in the 1960s to have failed for the majority of poor inner-city African Americans (Wilson 1978). The association to be made from his statements is that since their backs are up against the wall they must resort to radical action, not the conciliatory path of the white elites who are opposing privatization and school choice. Are there other "radical" options? There certainly may be, but Nevill isn't letting on what they are—what is not said is just as important as what is being said here.

These two previous statements are part of the news report, which precedes the actual debate. It is likely that many listeners would assume that this report is fairly unbiased, unlike the debate which will follow. The report does have this appearance of being neutral and it is likely that most NPR reporters have at least industry average journalistic standards. The report interviews those on both sides of the issues, and as with much journalism, this presentation of two sides of the main issues suffices (those for privatization and those against it) for objectivity. However, the construction of the situation as a crisis in need of a radical solution goes unchallenged and this sets the stage for the debate, likely giving more weight to Salisbury of the Cato Institute, who supports this position. Positions that do not see the situation as a crisis requiring a far-reaching transformation, such as ones that believe the situation is part of a larger system of inequality of which schools are only one causal or symptomatic piece are effectively marginalized. This marginalization sets the stage for focusing on the struggle over the definition of the problem and the solution that should follow, and not whether or not the situation has reached such crisis proportions that dramatic action is required immediately by incorporating radical and untested reforms.

Other statements by Salisbury during the debate itself continue to support the notion that the problem with the schools is a crisis of colossal proportions, which requires immediate systemic change. The message he conveys during the actual debate continues to follow those outlined previously from the report prior to the debate, that in drastic times, drastic measures are required. In this process of confirming that the education system in Philadelphia is in crisis, he is also beginning the process of defining what kind of crisis it is (the problem) and how it can be solved. For instance, on line 108, he asserts that the problems in the Philadelphia School District are so severe that parents will have to look outside the system to solve the problems. He says in his opening statement, "If Philadelphia parents want to solve the intractable problems that have

plagued their schools..." Salisbury is constructing a medical or public health metaphor that is readily accessible to most people and relies primarily on the attitudinal coloring of the augmenting amplification of the stressed modifier "intractable" and "plagued" modifying the lexis "problems". A plague is certainly a crisis in medical terms, and by implication, if it is intractable will kill the entire populace if not addressed immediately by some drastic measure—this is the underlying message being presupposed by this construction and conveyed to the listeners. He is more explicit in his statement on lines 282-285, when he says:

**DS:** I think the problem with that is that the situation is already too drastic to wait much longer and it's because we're dealing with kids' lives that I think it's ah...imperative to move ahead (.) quickly and do something (.) where we're not going to lose another generation of kids to um a failing school system.

Again, a similar appraisal construction of amplification through the use of "too" is being used to heighten the already dramatic tone of "drastic", which is augmenting and amplifying the lexis "situation". This construction implies that this is a crisis situation that requires more than what Salisbury characterizes as the getting your toes wet proposal by Goldsmith. Goldsmith's suggestion was to wait to see what happens to some of the schools in the Chester School District that are already privatized. In Chester, there are several private for-profit management companies running schools and parents may choose amongst them, creating in essence the very program that Salisbury is calling for in Philadelphia. Not only is not jumping fully into the water to address the problem the favored metaphor constructed by Salisbury, he also adds a moral element here by arguing that "because we're dealing with kids' lives" that some kind of drastic measure must be taken. The insinuation here is that you do not care about kids if you don't believe that this is a drastic situation that cannot even wait to see the results of a similar program in a neighboring city. Again, there is the establishment of in and out groups based on ethical standards of who cares for children—a very compelling construction. This statement further supports the life or death urgency of his previous statement, which used a metaphor to link the crisis to the plague.

In the analysis of this discourse, the questions that must be asked are: What is missing?; What is not being talked about? Any discussion of how privatization and choice systems may hurt children or how a society should make public policy decisions based on the best available evidence that comes from careful analysis from pilot studies are not being talked about. The operative approach is marginalization—you are either with the privatization approach or against the children of Philadelphia and other struggling cities. Discussion of these alternative ideas are not being discussed due to the very effective structuring of discourse first by the

reporter, and then by Salisbury as they construct the education system in Philadelphia as in crisis with immediate life or death consequences that requires a drastic solution and the only possible candidate being a system of choice and privatization. The way this “crisis” is set up leaves little room for discussion of non-radical solutions, and solutions which do not address privatization and school choice. From the outset of the debate, Goldsmith is at a disadvantage, the terms of the debate already having been laid out.

*Situating the Problem*

The struggle over the characterization of the problem(s), which has led to this “drastic situation” comprises a fairly large segment of the text of the debate. There are at least nineteen different instances throughout the debate that are directed toward either attempting to define or characterize the problem(s). In these attempts to control the symbolic space, a number of issues are also raised concerning the functioning of markets and democratic government institutions. It is in these statements where the hybridization of discourse (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999) begins to occur and where market-based ideas of how education and government should be operated begins to replace more traditional notions of the democratic functioning of these institutions. In the focus on the problems of education, a discursive construction of the public sphere as a market and citizens as consumers occurs, which begins to replace the traditionally understood democratic public sphere.

The strategy employed by Salisbury in expanding the marketization of education discourse while arguing his position on the problems with current schools that require the privatization and choice involves several techniques which have been revealed by other critical discourse analysts in texts where social change, hybridization, and colonization of discourses occur (Gee 1999; McKenna & Graham 2000). One of these techniques includes the use of nominals and nominal groups to compact large amounts of information and historical/social context into a few abstract words, thus obscuring causal links and relations and technocratic discourse. According to Gee (1999), “The trouble is this: once one has made the compacted item (the nominalization), it is hard to tell what information exactly went into it” (31). Nominalization is also one of the primary lexico-grammatical features of technocratic discourse. Technocratic discourse attempts to normalize classical economic theory through its quasi-technical application to solve various social problems, combined with smatterings of statistics and other quasi-technical information to support its use (McKenna & Graham 2000). The use of nominals in technocratic discourse is best described by McKenna & Graham (2000):

...technocracy uses nominals to hide semantic relations without ever making their content explicit. As a result, technocratic propositions

become less negotiable or contestable because ‘you can argue with a clause, but you can’t argue with a nominal group’. In other words, technocratic nominalizations close off debate by eliminating, or at least presuming, causal and relational process that would be evident in a clause. Thus, in technocratic discourse, the nominal ‘becomes a declaration to be accepted – it repels demonstration, qualification, negation of its codified and declared meaning’ (227).

The use of nominals is one marked strategy employed primarily by Salisbury and rarely by Phil Goldsmith. His use of nominals is consistent with the observations of Gee and McKenna and Graham, and appears to be used as a fairly effective rhetorical strategy to both explain the problems of the Philadelphia public schools, while at the same time suggesting solutions consistent with classical economic theory. Both of which become the basis for discussion, rather than propositions which are open for discussion.

The core problem is established as a given for everyone involved in the debate, and is outlined by the moderator at the very outset when she asks “Why are public schools failing so many kids?” (line 126). The problem or perhaps more appropriately, the symptom of an underlying problem is that kids are failing. But importantly, she frames the rest of the debate by insinuating that it is the public schools’ fault that these kids are failing. This questioning feeds right in to Salisbury’s position that it is the public (read government controlled) in public schools that is the problem. He makes extensive use of nominals to not only frame ensuing discourse, but to also make effective use of a well researched rhetorical strategy. The following nominals and nominal groups are typical of the language used by Salisbury in his effort to promote privatization and choice by defining the problem: “government school monopoly” (line 100); “established education bureaucracy” (line 110); “government run bureaucracy or monopoly” (line 129). The particular words are occasionally substituted for or equated with each other, effectively linking them together so that government=bureaucracy=monopoly. This device limits questioning of these links, which are quite contested assertions under other conditions. By no means are these connections established facts, but they do tap into popular distaste for impersonal and ironically, anti-democratic institutions and policies (Marsden, Cook, & Kalleberg 1996). Salisbury repeats these and similar phrases often, and through this repetition, they have the effect of a mantra or advertising jingle. They therefore go beyond the work of limiting debate over the validity of these ideologically laden claims as nominalizations; they serve the purpose of clarity and reproducibility—techniques well established in advertising and political campaigning. As McKenna and Graham (2000) explain:

The fact that a specific noun is almost always coupled with the same ‘explicatory’ adjectives and attributes makes the sentence into a hypnotic

## PRIVATIZING SCHOOLS

formula which, endlessly repeated, fixes the meaning in a recipient's mind. He [sic] does not think of essentially different (and possibly true) explications of the noun[s]. ...It is a well-know technique of the advertising industry where it is methodically used for 'establishing an image' which sticks to the mind and to the product (232-3).

This technique has been transferred into the political arena, where there is explicit coaching in its use. Pardo (2001) points out that "It is very important that the arguments deployed in order to persuade through political discourse be 'catching', thus enabling a high degree of re-production chiefly at the media level" (97). Salisbury effectively accomplishes this technique to the distinct disadvantage of Goldsmith, who attempts to explain the problem as more complex and difficult to pinpoint or solve.

Goldsmith does not elaborate as clear of a conception of the problem as Salisbury, primarily because he offers a number of possible ideas as to why students may be "failing" in inner city schools—he attempts to represent the complexity of the problem. He in fact argues that the problem of poor student performance is not endemic to the school system itself, but that schools are merely places where societal problems can be found, indicating that poor student achievement is not a problem to be solved in the education arena, but a larger societal problem. Placing the problem outside of the education arena makes it much more difficult if not impossible to solve, because in essence, problems of poverty are viewed as beyond the scope of policy. He does offer some disconnected ideas for solutions, but unlike Salisbury, they are not linked to his assessment of the problems of Philadelphia's public schools. Salisbury has clear and cogent connections between what he argues as the problem and what he proffers as a solution. More importantly, Goldsmith's assessments of the problem do not take on the slick simple nominalizations that ring in the mind of listener's like an advertising jingle—like his understanding of the problems of education, the solutions too are very complex and cannot be reduced to one word answers like "choice" or "privatization." In response to the moderator's question "Why are public schools failing so many kids?" he responds in lines 137-152:

**PG:** Well I fundamentally believe that the problems uh... e... let's say of our public schools are simply a manifestation of the problems of our society. I know of no public school in this city that manufactures guns, I know no public school in this city that manufactures drugs, I know of no school in this city that has caused children to be born out of wedlock or to be raise in single family homes. I know of no school in this city that has resulted in a 70% poverty rate (.) in this school district, which I might say to get away from Philadelphia, is no different than Chicago, New York, Houston, Detroit, or any other urban school district. So, I

think the real issues uh do not rest with the public education creating the problems, uh they are where the problems come each and every day, and as I am fond of saying, you can close the windows of the schoolhouse as tight as you want (2) but the problems sort of find there way into those schools

Returning to the nominalizations of Salisbury (e.g., “government run bureaucracy or monopoly”), through these constructions, he seems to be attempting to establish that the government run schools equals monopoly and bureaucracy, both very negative concepts in the larger historical Conversation over efficiency and productivity, which he is evidently purposively tapping into. On line 174 he goes about making an explicit connection between government, bureaucracy, and mediocrity in an attempt at defining the terms that he uses: “What we have found in our experiment with government provided education is that (.) it creates bureaucracy and mediocrity.” The key point here is that government is the problem and it is a barrier to progress, but he also gets in a point that is an attempt to draw into question the nature that government run schools, despite their 200-year history are no less of an experiment than trying privatization. His use of the term experiment in such an unexpected way really stands out and serves as an effective device for calling attention to long held assumptions about the inherent good of government run institutions. This point also seems to be a direct response to Phil Goldsmith’s insinuation that any changes toward privatization are based more on half-baked theory than scientific critical thinking. His use of these interchangeable mantra-like nominal groups seems to permeate the discourse of the whole debate to the point that even the moderator adopts this position in her questioning of Phil Goldsmith, effectively putting him on the defensive to prove that public schools are not a monopoly. The incorporation of the belief that the government has a monopoly on education by the moderator, who otherwise throughout the balance seems very balanced in her treatment of both sides, attests to the success of Salisbury in establishing control over the discourse and structuring where the debate would go. In lines 261-262, the moderator asks:

**MA:** Phil, education is a very big business in America, hundreds of billions of dollars a year. Why should (.) the government have a monopoly on education?

Phil Goldsmith’s response further attest to the success of Salisbury’s use of these nominal constructions in structuring the direction of the debate. He somewhat defensively and acquiescingly responds (lines 265-273) to the moderator’s question:

**PG:** ...And again, I’m not opposed to having (.) some (.) level of (.) trying privately run public schools or whatever we call them. We have in (.)



## PRIVATIZING SCHOOLS

Chester Upland School District, which is uh (.) twenty miles south of here—we have the Edison company in there right now. It's about five or six schools. I say let's see how they do down there, before they come north here to Philadelphia and take over sixty schools or a hundred schools or 264 schools or whatever the number is. We're dealing with kids' lives and uh I think before we rush (.) into something, we better try it.

Salisbury's seemingly more effective use of rhetorical strategies would not seem so troublesome on their own right in friendly exchange of ideas of what policies should be employed to improve the education of students in Philadelphia and other similar urban centers. However, there is an even more subtle discursive attempt at controlling the symbolic arena through his attempts to incorporate market ideology into how the democratic sphere should function.

### *Redefining Democracy*

In an early move to elaborate on the nature of the problem and to link this problem of government bureaucracy/monopoly to his preferred solution—consumer choice and privatization of government services—Salisbury (lines 128-135) summarizes his position:

**DS:** Well I think that one of the reasons that public schools are failing many kids is the inherent problem of a government-run bureaucracy or monopoly. The problem is that nobody is in charge. In a government type of system or bureaucracy, responsibility is shared between a principal, a superintendent, and a school board. When there's failure, they simply ask for more money. With a private company or contract, they can't pass the buck to someone else. There's a specific responsibility and the company will lose the contract if it fails to perform. When you have choice for consumers, you have even more incentives, properly placed that create the dynamics for success.

The primary message conveyed here is that in a democratically run institution, there is no one in charge—there is no accountability because the government is a monopoly—government=monopoly=bureaucracy=not accountable. True accountability comes about through competition, which forces some businesses to fail. This is step one in defining the problems of government, and essentially democracy, that can be solved by allowing market mechanisms to handle the government run institutions. Again, what is missing from his argument is important to note, including the fact that public officials are held accountable—the institutions themselves do not fail, but an official can be voted out of office. If they did, the upheaval and displacement would be too costly in terms of dollars and the impact on students, which is a potential downside to a potential cut-throat world of businesses which may actually completely go out of

business. Shared knowledge, cultures, and practices and the positive momentum associated with a stable learning institution would be lost and scattered to the wind as teachers and administrators scramble to find new positions. The irony here is that Salisbury is attempting to construct a view of democratic institutions which makes no mention of where the role of accountability actually lies, which is with the citizens. Instead, he replaces the role of “voice” with one of choice (Hirschman 1970).

Salisbury actually addresses the role of citizens in making their voices heard in a democratic forum directly. However, he uses this as an opportunity to demonstrate the futility of acting within government-run institutions. A couple of passages (lines 243-250 and 370-376, respectively) are illustrative of how he constructs this view:

**DS:** In the public school system, it's very difficult for you to make a change. You can elect a new board member, every so many years. You can be involved in the school and try to make some changes, but many parents who have tried those avenues have come away very frustrated and repelled by the bureaucracy. And... in the other kind of system, where you uh have a choice, your decision is final, and if you don't like uh the service you're getting, you can take your money and go somewhere else. That's power.

And later, he makes a similar point::

**DS:** I think on this accountability question there's two kinds of accountability. One is where there is accountability to boards and government bodies. The other kind of accountability which I think is real accountability, is where there is accountability to you, the consumer. And uh when you have a problem, you don't have to go before a board or a government body or some regulatory agency to get the problem fixed. You have total control as a consumer and you can leave and go somewhere else. That's real accountability and that's the kind of accountability we ought to have in education

In the first passage, he is not exactly voicing the parents who have been “repelled by the bureaucracy”, but in a similar move, he is speaking for them. In doing so, he is tapping into a familiar cultural conversation about how frustrating governments (read bureaucracies) are and how powerless someone who has to deal with them often feels. Along with the powerlessness one might feel in actually making any changes, comes the lack of accountability, a type of power, to individual parents. Overall, these passages are very effective in creating connections to commonly held view about frustration with governments and then turning that frustration toward a solution, that is immediate, “final”, “real”, and “total”. And most importantly, it gives parents power. But what is missing here? He is not discussing how this power remains limited by the choices being



offered, over which they will have no power. Power is limited within the privately run institutions in terms of influencing decisions about what is done in those institutions. Power is actually curtailed and strictly limited to choosing between whatever options may or may not be available. Of course, there is also the option of starting your own private company to run a school. In this very well crafted discursive move, which these two passages highlight, the marketplace has become the public sphere and democratic action has become not participating in institutional decision making but choosing to buy a particular educational product.

If the problem is failing schools, for Salisbury, this failure is due to them being run by the government. And why are government run schools a barrier to progress and a source of mediocrity? He is basically saying they block individual choice and limit power. The insinuation here is that individual choice is democracy and that the government, which is both a monopoly and bureaucracy, effectively limits individuals input, by its very nature. Therefore, the only true democracy can be found in the marketplace where individuals can do what they want without having to confront the massive powerful maze of government. If the connection is made to other pro-privatization statements throughout the whole transcript, the move toward privatization and choice is in fact being constructed as a revolution of sorts. This is especially the case if Salisbury's arguments are linked to the comments of SRC chair Nevill, who talked about Philadelphian's backs being against the wall and radical action was required to solve the intractable (due to government bureaucracy) problems of education. The traditional way that education has been viewed and conducted as part of the public provision of government services where decisions about educational policy are made in an open democratic forum is being challenged on a number of levels in the pro-privatization discourse.

### Conclusion

The discourse in this debate over privatization and school choice captures in one brief exchange the larger struggle over control of the symbolic space of how we view not only education, its problems and potential solutions, but also how we understand the role of citizens in a democracy. Prior held beliefs are challenged and commonly held views are tapped into in the effort to rearrange how we view power and accountability within a democracy, taking past notions of debate, engagement and voice, and moving toward market-based notions of choice and the accountability of economic principles. This transformation of ideology is accomplished through the fairly effective discursive moves of Salisbury, the proponent of privatization in this debate. His use of nominals as a mantra employ the direct tactics of the markets themselves through research-proven methods of advertising and attitude influence,

thereby moving the debate from rational discussion of the more complex issues underlying the perceived problems of education in urban centers like Philadelphia. The whole discursive move is much more involved than his sales pitch for government=monopoly=bureaucracy=mediocrity, and therefore is in favor of privatization and choice. It first involves the construction of a crisis of dire consequences involving the risk of losing a generation of children—he receives some help in this regard. In carefully carving out sides, those not on board with the needed radical (but not too radical) reforms privatization and choice are depicted as uncaring. And if this bandwagon move is not enough, then the popular beliefs about ineffectiveness of bureaucracies and the messiness of democratic functioning are tapped into in order to appeal to our modern sensibilities for quick solutions. The power and accountability he offers through the market based mechanisms do not come with explanations of the potential loss of power and accountability that parents might find in the market for their child's education. These moves are appealing to parents who do want more choice and control over their child's education, but they come at the expense of addressing how current democratically run institutions may be improved to be more accountable and provide for more parent control. The potential loss is the loss of democracy: where people engage with each other to improve their joint situation rather than one where they disengage when they do not like a situation and leave it to market researchers and businesses with declining profitability. These individuals shape not only what we do and don't want, but also become even more involved in attempting to construct what we should want.

As ideas about public school privatization and choice have begun to make their way into education discourse and policy, these moves represent an attempt to not only alter the landscape of public education funding, but perhaps more importantly, to reshape our understanding of the purpose of schools, the public's role in school governance, and the very meaning of democracy itself. These changes strike at the foundation of the public school system by attempting to alter the notions of "public" and "democratic participation," while transforming at least parts of it into a system of privately run, choice-driven schools. In the process of pushing for and enacting privatization and choice policies, the role of the public in public schools is being challenged. This challenge occurs by way of logic behind the need for and value of such policies, which call for altering the structure of interaction of the public with schools from one that involves 'voice' in matters relevant to the education of their own and society's children, to one that primarily involves 'exit' or in more current terms, 'choice' of whether or not to keep one's own children in a particular school (Hirschman 1970). In this world, democratic participation in public institutions is based upon consumer choice rather than public involvement in the institutions themselves. This move also represents a shift in the relationship between schools and the larger society through

the education and socialization of all of its children to one that is much more narrowly focused on the aims and desires of particular families for their own children.

However, cautions and limitations must be considered in drawing such broad conclusions. This is just one small exchange. Therefore, making such conclusions is tenuous at best without a much broader study, not only of the discourse used in a wide variety of other forums and media, but also of the long-term effects of such discourse on both the construction of how individuals see their role in a democracy and of the effect of experience of participating in privately run schools and choice systems. Additionally, this debate, which occurred five years ago, is seemingly dated. However, these issues are as important now as they were then. States and districts continue to develop and implement policies. Furthermore, research and advocacy coming from both sides of this debate have only strengthened and grown. The broader ramifications are still unclear and will not be for years to come. This work is part of a larger trend to critically monitor such policy moves and as such, a cautionary note to consider not only the immediate impacts on student achievement, but the broader implications of altering traditional public institutions for the sustainability of our democracy.

*John Weathers is an assistant professor in the Department of Leadership, Research, and Foundations in the College of Education at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. John received his Ph.D. in Education Policy from the University of Pennsylvania. His research has focused on the effects of school policy and leadership on teacher communities and parent involvement, the effects of internally generated performance and process data systems on improving organizational outcomes, and the role of policy supports in teachers' use of formative assessment practices. His current research interests include organizational learning, professional learning communities, formative assessment, data-driven decision-making, and performance management.*

Email: [john.weathers@uccs.edu](mailto:john.weathers@uccs.edu)

### References

- Berliner, D., & Biddle, B. (1995). *The manufactured crisis: Myths, fraud, and the attack on America's public schools*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Bositis, D. A. (2002). *National opinion poll. Education*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.
- Breitman, G. (Ed). (1998). *Malcolm X: By any means necessary*. New York: Pathfinder Press.
- Chouliaraki, L. & Fairclough, N. (1999) *Discourse in late modernity: Rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press.
- Eagleton, T. (1991). *Ideology: An introduction*. London: Verso.
- Eggs, S. & Slade, D. (1997). *Analyzing causal conversation*. London: Longman.

- Engel, M. (2000). *The struggle for control of public education: Market ideology vs. democratic values*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1993). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1999). Global Capitalism and Critical Awareness of Language. *Language Awareness* 8(2): 71–83
- Fairclough, N. (2000). Discourse, social theory, and social research: the discourse of welfare reform. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 4, 163-195.
- Ferguson, B. (1998). *School choice: A solution in search of a problem*. University of California Davis. Retrieved July 3, 2007, from the world wide web: [http://www.sdavjr.davis.k12.ut.us/~brian/ferguson/pdf\\_files/School%20Choice.pdf](http://www.sdavjr.davis.k12.ut.us/~brian/ferguson/pdf_files/School%20Choice.pdf)
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. New York: Pantheon.
- Gee, J. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis*. New York: Routledge.
- Hirschman, A. (1970). *Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Huckin, T. (2002). Textual silence and the discourse of homelessness. *Discourse & Society*. 13(3): 347-372.
- Margonis, F. & Lawrence, P. (1999). Choice: The route to community control? *Theory into Practice*, 38(4), 203-208.
- Marsden, P., Cook, C., & Kalleberg, A. (1996). Bureaucratic structures for coordination and control. In A. Kalleberg, D. Knoke, P. Marsden, and J. Spaeth (Eds.), *Organizations in America* (pp. 69-86). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press.
- McKenna, B., & Graham, P. (2000). Technocratic discourse: A primer. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 30, 219-247.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Orfield, M. (2002). *American metropolitics*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Pardo, M. (2001). Linguistic persuasion as an essential political factor in current democracies: Critical analysis of the globalization discourse in Argentina at the turn of the century. *Discourse & Society*, 12(1), 91-118.
- Perkinson, H. (1977). *The imperfect panacea*. New York: Random House.
- Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. (2006, July 30). *Maturing internet news audience – Broader than deep*. Retrieved July 3, 2007, from the world wide web: <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/282.pdf>
- Reiser, L. (2003). *Understanding the state takeover of Philadelphia's schools*. Penn GSE Urban Perspectives on Education. Retrieved July 3, 2007, from: <http://www.urbanedjournal.org/archive/Issue4/notes/notes0010.html>.
- Rose, L., & Gallup, A. (2000). The 32nd annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(1), 41-58.
- Van Dijk, T. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Shiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. Hamilton (Eds.), *Handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 352-371). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

## PRIVATIZING SCHOOLS

- Smith, M., & O'Day, J. (1991). Systemic school reform. In S. Fuhrman & B. Malen (Eds.), *The politics of curriculum and testing* (pp. 237-267). New York: Falmer Books.
- Wilson, W. (1978). *The declining significance of race*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wodak, R., de Cillia, R., Reisigl, M., and Liebhart, K. (1999). *The Discursive construction of national identity*. Translated by A. Hirsch & R. Mitten. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.