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School Choice, Religion and the Public Good

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Abstract

This paper discusses the issue of school choice. I contend that arguments for choice through vouchers based on the perceived benefits of religious schooling is based on a narrow set of research, which is potentially misleading with regards to the role religious schools play in establishing democratic values and the common good. This paper seeks to demonstrate through a comparative discussion of U.S. and Australian examples the problematic nature of arguments for school choice based on the perceived advantages of religious schools.

Introduction

School Choice is a growing political response to perceived educational problems with public provision of schooling. The term school choice is itself open to various interpretations. Some critics of public schooling view it as inconsistent with a free society. Others argue that public schools no longer provide academic excellence for students. Many others contend that the values of the public school are inconsistent with the democratic aspirations of many citizens. Choice is driven by, a growing demand for religious influence in schooling, as well as an ever-present populist democratic demand for parental say and control, and, finally, a continuing and ongoing critique of the democratic nature of schooling and how this precipitates poor results.

Some religiously inspired critics contend that public schools are controlled by secular elites that ignoring the wishes of religious parents amounts to a form of exclusion. Religious conservatives such as Paul Weyrich, Carl Thomas and Ed Dobson in the American example are now arguing for disengagement from the public sphere (Weyrich 1999; Dionne 2000; Dobson and Bauer 1990). Only through individual choice can parents make good their 'God given right' to educate their children according to their values.

For some critics of the public school public schooling circumvents individual autonomy and disallows the proper articulation of people's true beliefs, in this case educational beliefs (Arons 1983). In the Australian tradition, this dissent manifests in demands for further state funding of private schools and the slow growth of a Homeschooling movement. In the U.S., it manifests in tough fights over church state, vouchers and a rapidly growing Homeschooling movement.

Advocates for choice argue that parental control is a key right that is truncated and abused in the current system. Critics argue that public schools allow little real chance for parents to change policies and procedures (Friedman and Friedman 1980). For religious critics of the public school, choice provides parents with the ability leave the 'naked public square' and go to schools that espouse their beliefs or school at home in the attempt to maintain religious values they feel threatened in the public school (Neuhaus 1997; Neuhaus 1984). Many religious parents feel unrecognized and disrespected in public education. (Herrington 2000). This paper interrogates the arguments of those who support vouchers to send children to religious schools as a way of expanding the principles of the common good and democratic values.

I seek to demonstrate through a comparative discussion of U.S. and Australian research that the arguments for the civic and democratic value of religious education are drawn from a particular band of research mostly in respect to Catholic schooling. My contention is that, this research does not necessarily demonstrate the value of all religious schooling or private schooling for that matter. Given the rise in both high fee independent schools and low fee Christian academies the significance of this research into Catholic schooling as an indicator of the benefits of private schooling and religious schooling needs to be interrogated.

Specifically the democratic values of the new wave Christian academies in both the U.S. and Australia must be closely scrutinized. Given the above argument, I contend that vouchers are an inaccurate and clumsy way of achieving the public good through schooling and their use may in fact exacerbate social division and lead to patently undemocratic outcomes for children and the broader society. Finally, the theories that inform my argument centre on the work of Amy Gutmann and deliberative democratic theory.

School Choice and Religion

In the U.S. school choice when argued from the Left is an antidote to racial inequality and crumbling urban public school systems. In the 1970's educational liberals such as Christopher Jencks, Sugarman and Coons, and TheodoreSizer put forward proposals for vouchers. Henry Levin points out that the liberal voucher proposals should be seen within the context of 'the war on poverty' and a search for equity (Coons 1997). Jencks's voucher plan in the U.S., for example, under the mantle of the Center for the Study of Public Policy was designed and administered by the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity as part of an anti-poverty program (Levin 2000).

School choice represents the marketplace model in educational reform and includes alternative and magnet schools, the voucher movement home schooling privatization and charter schools. Charter schools, vouchers, and home schooling have over the last twenty years risen to become major alternatives to the public system. Their advocates see these reforms as correctives to the excesses and failures of the public education system. These reforms have advocates in both the American and Australian context. Yet the arguments for choice and critiques of public education are far more complex and nuanced than simply arguments over markets versus government provision. The completely public nature of public schooling is under question.

One particular argument for school choice in education stems from the perceived positive civic influence that religious schooling has for students and the positive role this plays in democratic society. The argument of choice advocates is that private religious schools often provide, a stronger civic sense, better academic results and are more racially and socially integrated. The social capital presumably found in private religious schools is a significant argument for choice. Even in the most apparently private realm of home schooling, the power of religious commitment and its effect on social capital are strong arguments for choice (Alexander and Pallas 1984; Alexander and Pallas 1983; Cain and Goldberger 1983; Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Taeuber and James 1982; Taeuber and James 1983; Wrinkle, Stewart, and Polinard 1999).

The arguments for religious schooling and the advocacy of vouchers is supported by a body of research that engages with religious schools and argues that religious schools provide important civic values and improved educational standards. In other words, students do better in religious schools and are taught values, which are more positively appreciated in the broader community. Thus, religious schools arguably provide important openings to both the plurality of society and to positive democratic norms, which underpin democratic society. The individualist and privatized arguments of school choice blend easily with support for religious schooling. This is because withdrawal from the public system centres on individual and parental rights.

The following discussion will closely examine the argument for choice from the point of view of religious schooling.

Numerous studies 'find that religiosity or religious activities are positively correlated with improved educational attainment' (Johnson, Tompkins, and Webb 2002). Some of the most important studies making the link between religious private schools the common good and democratic values centre on Catholic schools. Significant arguments asserting the importance of Catholic schools to the common good ought to be noted (Gamaron 1996). The research of Evans and Schwab (Evans 1995) Neal (Neal 1998; Neal 1997; Neal 2000) Sander (Sander 1992; Sander 1995; Sander 1996; Sander 1999; Sander and Krautman 1995) and Krautman support the finding that Catholic schools increase achievement. Studies by Altjoni, Elder and Taber find that Catholic schools do have significant positive affects on educational attainment for minorities (Altonji, Elder, and Taber 2000). Jay Greene (Greene and Mellow 1998) makes the claim that civic socialization is more developed in private schools. Hence, school choice rather than leading to a breakdown of civic virtue may in fact engender it. Greene argues that civic values are taught more effectively in private religious schools (Greene and Mellow 1998). Greene claims that research shows that the values of citizenship can be accentuated through choice. In this sense, choice is not anti democratic; rather it enables proper democratic values to flourish (Peterson 2002). Greene argues that the evidence so far,

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

Some critics also point to studies, which show greater parental involvement in private religious schools (Finn 1992). Much of the evidence for these types of propositions comes from Catholic schools. Greene's analysis for example of the Cleveland scholarships program was based on the fact that 32 out of the 43 participating schools were Catholic schools (Greene 1999). Proponents of school choice use several research findings from some important studies mostly conducted in the U.S. James Coleman's important research into Catholic schools found that there is considerable evidence that catholic schools have higher achievement in basic cognitive skills and abilities. Coleman's research is the most persuasive. A critical argument for Catholic schooling and by inference private religious schooling has been the role it pays in the creation of social capital. Coleman's use of the term brought it to widespread public attention (Coleman 1988).

In his research into Catholic schooling, Coleman found several important things. First, he found that there was considerable evidence that Catholic schools have higher achievement in basic cognitive skills. Coleman, drew his conclusions from the data provided by the *'High School and Beyond'* survey. According to Coleman, '[c]omparison of the public, Catholic and other private sectors shows that the private sector sophomores are about at the level of the public sector seniors' (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1982b) (Coleman 1988).

Second, that aspiration for higher education among students at Catholic schools is higher than the non-Catholic sector. Coleman found that attendance at private schools and Catholic schools shows 'greater self-reported increases in the proportion of students planning to attend college' (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1982a). Coleman found that, Catholic school students had greater confidence in going further and higher expectations on average than students in the public sector. Third Coleman found that whilst the number of African American students at Catholic schools was half that of public schools, Catholic schools were more integrated. Coleman writes, '[t]hese are the results from our research on public and private schools that raise questions about certain fundamental assumptions of American education. Catholic schools appear to be characterized by both higher quality, on the average, and greater equality than the public schools'(Coleman 1990). According to Coleman, on average, Catholic schools are more effective than public schools. There is a 'differential advantage' to disadvantaged students in Catholic schools. There are also 'higher levels of discipline and academic demands' that go some way in explaining achievement in Catholic Schools. Finally, Coleman argues that, Catholic 'schools do not have a segregating effect beyond that which already exists in public schools' (Coleman 1990).

What basic reason does Coleman suggest is the cause of these differences? This is a difficult question, but Coleman's answer is deceptively simple: student behaviour (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1982a; Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1982b). Coleman's argument is that Catholic schools appear to provide the answer to equity and excellence that the public school does not (Goldberger and Cain 1982; Alexander and Pallas 1982; Alexander and Pallas 1983; Alexander and Pallas 1985; Heyns and Hilton 1982; Morgan and Sorensen 1999; Noell 1982; Noell 1983; Sernau 1993; Wilms 1985). Coleman's argument is that Catholic schools appear to provide the answer to equity and excellence that the public school does not. However, Coleman argues that education is a public good. To simply privatize and throw open the doors to market forces could undermine the values he sees as essential in schooling and the creation of positive social capital (Coleman 1988).

Critics such as Bryk support Coleman's observations in regards to Catholic schooling (Gamaron 1996). Bryk argues that Catholic schools add to the common good. This approach accepts the concept of a common good but believes that private institutions best foster it. William H. Jeynes makes a similar point in his call for greater attention to the positive aspects and outcomes that occur for African Americans in religious schools (Jeynes 2002). This argument has historical precedent. David P. Baker's research shows how Catholic schools constituted an extremely considerable proportion of urban schooling in late nineteenth century America. Baker's thesis was that Catholic schools were an important part of provision of schooling for the poor and by inference, their historical role has been significant for the common good (Baker 1999).

When dealing with the Catholic system, the language of the common good is prominent. While there is, debate as to the merits of Catholic education the weight of evidence tends to support the assertion that Catholic schools help marginal students and provide much needed support for the urban poor (Downes and Figlio. 1999; Figlio and Ludwig 2000; Figlio 1999; Figlio and Stone 1997). Stephen L. Morgan points out in keeping with research presented above that the Catholic school effect

seems to be strongest with students from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially Hispanics and African Americans. According to Morgan, 'Catholic schools may be common schools that distribute opportunities for learning more equitable than do public schools' (Morgan 2001).

Marvin Lazerson points out, that Catholic schools in the U.S. are modelled on public school lines and that there is a significant overlap in personnel between the public and Catholic school sectors. According to Lazerson, 'the distinctions between the two systems are less important than their similarities' (Lazerson 1977). The NCES points out that, 'compared to other private schools, Catholic schools often have more similarities with public schools. School sector is not a simple organizational fault line running through the nation's schools' (Baker, Han, and Brougham 1996).

The advantages of Catholic schools are an argument for choice because they apparently prove that religiously inspired education in keeping with parental values best serves the child's interests. However many Catholic schools in the U.S. are characterized by very inclusive pedagogies, openness to diversity (ethnic and racial) and are organizationally similar to many public schools. In other words, good Catholic schools serve the common good, much like good public schools. They have much to teach public schools, not so much because of their religious characteristics, but rather due to the sort of characteristics that are supposed to characterize good public education.

The discourse over the Catholic school offers useful advice on how to reform the public system: smaller schools, core curriculum, high expectations, and cohesive ideology (Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993; Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Gamaron 1996; Hoffer, Greeley, and Coleman 1985). Nonetheless, as McEwan notes, 'We have little evidence on the potential effectiveness of "new" private schools' (McEwan 2000). A close look at much of the positive literature on private religious schools reveals that it centres on the virtues of Catholic schooling.

The research in Australia paints a similar picture. In Australia, the drift to private schools is far more accentuated. Research by Peter Sheehan among others into Catholic schools in Australia has pointed to the significant public good that Catholic schools have played in Australian society (Pascoe 2004a). Similar to the U.S. experience Catholic schooling was largely built in the nineteenth century, and like the U.S. experience, Catholic schooling educated many of the poor and working class migrants (Sheehan 2004). Peter Sheehan's research is supported by important studies by Selleck (Selleck 1971). Sheehan points out that the Catholic system was in part established, 'by a determination to provide education to the poor and needy within the flock.' (Sherman 1982) Sheehan continues:

It has long been a tradition of the Church that priority in education should be given to the poor and to those in need'. (Sheehan 2004) We should also take note of the fact, that according to Sheehan, many 'Catholic schools are accepting an increasing proportion of non-Catholics, including many adherents of religions other than Christianity. Some schools seek to provide a religious educational environment that, while

Catholic in substance and orientation, is especially open to a diversity of religious faiths and tradition (Sheehan 2004).

Current research into Australian Catholic schools also paints a similar picture to the American experience. Studies by Vella (Vella 1999) Williams and Carpenter (Williams and Carpenter 1990; Williams and et al. 1980) Praetz (Praetz 1974) Le and Miller (Le and Miller 2002) and Lamb (Dorman 1997; Fullarton 2002; Graetz 1990; Jones 1983; Lamb 1994) among many support the proposition that Catholic schools contribute to high standards and the common good. Much like many state public schools in Australia Catholic, schools are also 'community schools' often with a strong commitment to social justice and inclusion (Pascoe 2004b). However not all research is uncritical of Catholic school effects and results. Important research by Lawrence Angus points to significant conservative outcomes in Australian Catholic schooling (Angus 1986; Angus 1984; Angus 1985).

Research points to superior academic achievement in Catholic schools in Australia. For example, Gannicott argues that Catholic schools overall outperform state schools (Gannicott 1997). A study by the *Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research* also seems to confirm the academic quality of Catholic schooling. (Kelley 2000; Kelley 1995; Kelley 1999) Bill Daniels argues that values and discipline are significant attributes of Catholic schooling in Australia. (Daniels 2004) Irving Saulwick's research into parental attitudes and school choice also supports the above analysis (Daniels 2004). ACER research also supports the civic values found in Catholic schooling (Brown, Lipsig-Mumme, and Zajdow 2003; Marks, McMillan, and Hillman 2001). An interesting corrective to this research would be to correlate school type with neighbourhood effects to get a better picture of what really drives outcomes in schools (David, Ben, Simon, and Ben 2004).

Does it follow from this that all religiously inspired schooling whether at home or in larger institutions can claim the same advantages. In fact, the advantages of the Catholic school lie in its support of inclusive values. Do all examples of religious education serve such ends? Are the characteristics of Catholic schooling advantages and commitment to social justice and inclusion the same for all private schools? Does the U.S. evidence support the contention that religion necessarily leads to more morality, to improved social capital? Do these private choices and consciences always produce recognizably positive outcomes? (Ellison, Burr, and McCall 1997) On the positive side the Center for Religion and Civic Culture, University of Southern California, for example provides a report on *Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches Organizing Congregations to Create Change*. This report shows how initiatives such as the *One Church One School* program bring necessary resources to public schools (Miller and Sato 1999). Nonetheless, we ought to be wary before we accept uncritically the role religion plays in the public sphere.

One of the critical arguments of choice advocates in the U.S. is that religious organizations are unambiguously committed to helping the inner city poor. However, the relationship of religion to urbanicity is far more complex (Dodson 1959). This may at first seem controversial, given the arguments put by supporters of religious belief in the public square. However, there has been a steady decline in the power of the Catholic Church in the inner cities of America. There has also been a corollary

decline in the importance of Catholic private schooling as a percentage of overall private schooling. Sugarman and Henig point out:

In 1970, about 70 percent of private schools were Catholic. In 1998 Catholic schools accounted for about half of private school pupils; other religious schools accounted for about 35 percent. The largest growth in private education over the past thirty years has been among conservative Christian schools, which enrolled around 14 percent of all private school pupils in 1995–96 (Henig and Sugarman 1999).

Gerald Gamm argues that the period between 1950 through to 2000 has witnessed the decline of Catholic ‘exceptionalism’. Gamm points out that, ‘[f]rom the colonial period through the 1960s, Catholic parishes made credible, long-term commitments to their neighborhoods. In recent years, though, dioceses across the country have been consolidating their parishes, closing churches in unprecedented numbers’ (Gamm 2001). Gamm points out; many Catholic Churches ‘have become congregational churches, similar in most respects, except their governance structure, to synagogues and Protestant churches. And, as a consequence, their effectiveness as neighborhood anchors has declined’ (Gamm 2001). Gerald M. Cattaro notes:

The future efforts of Catholic schools to serve the educational needs of underprivileged urban youth may become moot as the coffers of religious orders dwindle from taking care of their own needs, such as their sick and elderly members, university cutbacks, and the economic downturn of the present day (Cattaro 2002).

None of this should however negate the important work that Catholic educators undertake in helping the poor in inner urban America (Wolfe 2000). However, it does point to significant problems in generalizing from the Catholic experience. Mark Chaves points out that congregational involvement in social service in America is uneven ‘The basic picture is clear: although most congregations do some sort of social service activity, only a small minority actively and intensively engage in such activity’ (Chaves). In fact, many churches have shifted to the suburbs and in many respects have followed the morality of the middle classes.

Individual choice is not always correlated with virtue. Religion is not always correlated with community spirit. Nancy T. Ammerman, points out that: ‘Social activism is related to poverty and ethnic diversity in the congregation’s Neighborhood.’ (Ammerman 2001) Equally importantly, ‘Activist congregations most likely belong to liberal denominations.’ (Ammerman 2001) As Ammerman points out, ‘[b]eyond denominational affiliation, self-described theologically liberal congregations also do more social services than self-described conservative congregations’ (Chaves). Ammerman goes on to argue that, ‘in the years after World War II, the religious center of gravity, like everything else in American cities, shifted outward. As new suburbs were built, new congregations were built along with them. Fueled by the Baby Boom, church attendance reached new highs, and family-centered congregations grew alongside the family-centered schools and parks and neighborhoods of the new suburbs’ (Ammerman 2001). Ammerman points out:

Our 1997 survey of congregations in five urban regions found that nearly one third of today's congregations were founded in the 25 years following World War II. Like the suburbs themselves, these churches are disproportionately white and middle class. And they remain today the most organizationally healthy congregations, with higher average attendance and fatter yearly budgets than congregations founded either earlier or later (Ammerman 2001).

Ammerman goes on to say:

these new congregations are far more likely to be in conservative or pentecostal traditions than in more liberal Protestant ones. The bottom line is that there may be as many as 50,000 new congregations being founded every decade, and it is conservative entrepreneurs who are most actively involved in that process (Ammerman 2001).

The point that comes through the previous discussion with regards to the U.S. example is that we ought to be careful before we assume that all religion correlates with social service or broader democratic values. Essentially religious sensibility and culture is as diverse as the world within which it exists. Some religiously inspired traditions are inclusive, empowering and open and some religious traditions are exclusive disempowering and closed. This is of course obvious in discussions of, say, the Aryan Nations Church. It is however more important in discussions of suburban churches, the sociology that underpins them and the theology that informs them.

What then of the Australian example. Geoffrey Partington points out that there has been a significant expansion of religious diversity in Australian society. This manifests in the creation of Islamic Schools and New Christian schools (Partington 2004). Many though not all of these schools according to Kevin Andrews have expanded in the suburban growth corridors of the major cities (Morrow 2005). Further research needs to be done concerning the values of suburban religious schools and the values of the growing suburban Christian religious movement in Australia.

In 1958, the percentage of students in Australia attending non-government private and independent schools was around 24%. By 2000, this had risen to approximately 31% of student enrolments nationally. The interesting point to note from this is that the growth in the proportion of students who attend non-government schools that are not Catholic or Anglican is significant. The proportion of enrolments in this sector rose from 2.7% to 7.8% of all students (Justins 2002). Indeed according to projections a further 7% of students will transfer to non-governmental schools over the next decade.' (Notoras 2004) According to P. Bently the weight of new enrolments in non-governmental schools occurred with the new Christian school movement (Bently 1997). This trend is expected to continue. According to Ryan and Watson:

The private school sector is not homogeneous and has itself been subject to changed enrolment patterns over the same period. Catholic schools accounted for more than 80 per cent of private school enrolments in the early 1960s but just over 60 per cent in

2002. Their share of primary enrolments is greater than of secondary enrolments. The social backgrounds of students who attend Catholic schools and those who attend schools described as 'Independent' differ substantially, as do levels of government subsidy (Ryan and Watson 2004).

These trends are also noted by voucher supporters such as Jennifer Buckingham who claims that, 'Catholic schools have maintained their majority share of non-government school enrolments, but the fastest growing category of non-government schools is low-fee, independent (non-Catholic) schools' (Buckingham 2000). Buckingham's observations are supported by Sheehan. According to Sheehan:

While the maintenance of Catholic schools has been an important consequence of government funding, an even more striking one has been the expansion of other non-government schools. Enrolments in these schools, many but not all of which are high income, high fee schools serving families of high socio-economic status, rose from just over 5% of all Victorian enrolments in 1960 to 12.7% in 2003 (Sheehan 2004).

As for the social and economic diversity of independent schools, Jack Keating points out that:

Independent schools have high levels of enrolments amongst higher SES groups. Catholic schools enrolments tend to be spread across SES groups, with a hump in the middle groups. Government schools also have a spread, but with a higher concentration amongst lower SES groups (Keating 2004).

The important point to note from the above discussion is the following. First, while Catholic schooling has performed a significant role for the public good and played a significant role in civic education several factors militate against concluding from this that all religious and independent schools will or do play a similar role. The relevant factors here are as follows. First, there is a slow but statistically significant shift occurring within Catholic education. Sheehan argues that,

it does seem clear that the share of lower socio-economic groups in Catholic schools is falling gradually, and there are also some signs that high income Catholic families may be increasingly choosing independent schools (Sheehan 2004).

Indeed in 'Catholic primary schools, where there has been a 25 per cent or more increase in schools fees, students receiving the EMA have declined by almost 14 per cent between 1998 and 2002' (Sheehan 2004). Second, among independent schools there is a much higher skewing to high SES students. Finally, the quick growth of Christian new schools which are not necessarily high fee often in the outer suburbs has been under studied. Not much is known from the literature on these schools. The benefits of Catholic schooling cannot be assumed to flow on to these types of schools.

In essence, a similar pattern is occurring as in the U.S. example with a growth of Christian Protestant schooling and a withdrawal of wealthy parents from certain areas of the public schooling system. The key point to note is that the simple argument from the benefits of some Catholic schools to all independent schools is not supported by the literature either in Australia or in the U.S.

Theoretical Discussion

The points raised in the previous discussion indicate several characteristics of debate over private schooling, religious schools and choice. From the evidence presented above we can see that in fact Catholic enrolments as a percentage of non-governmental school enrolments is declining. The fastest growing sector is new Christian schools often located in the suburbs. These schools are often low fee paying. On the other hand, other independent schools, which have higher fees, are for the most part serving high SES band students. The problematic nature of wealthy independent schools and the critique of them from the vantage point of equity and economic class diversity is well known (Teese 1998). However the civic values effects of the growth of Christian schools is less well known. The apparently democratic virtue of choice can be used to undermine inclusive and deliberative education. Amy Gutmann is instructive on this issue. She writes:

Democratic processes can be used to destroy democratic education. They can be used to undermine the intellectual foundations of future democratic deliberations by repressing unpopular ways of thinking or excluding some future citizens from an education adequate for participating in democratic politics (Gutmann 1990).

Gutmann continues:

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

Can we be sure that all religious schools encompass non-discriminatory values? Research indicates that we cannot. For example, research by the Australia Institute reveals that private schools are not subject to many anti discriminatory laws. While many private schools may uphold anti discriminatory values, 'there is also no doubt that their students and staff who may be subject to discrimination on the basis of their sexuality, pregnancy or marital status have significantly fewer opportunities for legal redress' (Anonymous 2004).

The growth of these schools calls into serious question the relevance of research into the benefits of Catholic schooling as an indicator of the benefits of *all* non-governmental schooling. In other words, the benefits and public good played by the

Catholic sector does not necessarily translate to the entire religiously inspired private sector. The analysis above demonstrates that the shift in private schooling both towards low fee Christian schools and high fee independent schools casts into strong relief the positive role Catholic schooling has played in democratic education. It also draws into question the public value and equity considerations that might result from voucher schemes which occur with the flight from both government schools and Catholic schools of students from high SES backgrounds. Would social division and economic stratification be accentuated under expanded choice programs such as vouchers?

Conversely, the expansion of Christian colleges would also arguably quicken with vouchers and this expansion given both the problematic and under researched relationship of these colleges to inclusive and democratic values gives us pause for thought. How do we balance the right to diversity and plurality with the need to ensure proper respect and articulation of democratic values? What do we do if our commitment to democratic values of inclusion and respect for difference run up against articulations of difference that do not respect our democratic values? The issue of students being exposed to a plurality of beliefs and diversity of opinions is of high order importance for democratic schooling.

I argue that religiously inspired education is not necessarily positive for democracy in *all* cases. Nor are the social and cultural consequences of increased 'balkanization' in education positive for the broader polity. One of my critical arguments in this thesis is that not all religious institutions are cut from the same cloth, nor are the consequences of all forms of religious intervention in schooling the same. It is not clear that withdrawing from public institutions is the solution to the problems of the public sphere.

We ought to be wary of arguments for religiosity and choice that are reductively separated from broader democratic norms and public accountability. Critical distinctions need to be made between those religiously inspired education movements, which can increase balkanization and undemocratic values, and those that do not. Much of what passes for the assumptions and arguments about choice, parental rights, religion and public institutions needs to be untangled.

My argument is that Catholic schooling in both the U.S. and Australian examples (overall) has played and continues to play a significant role for the public good. Many private Catholic schools play a substantively public purpose. In this way not only can formally public schools learn from Catholic schools, but the role that Catholic schools have played is in keeping with the substantive criteria that advocates of public schooling claim as legitimation for their own institutions. However, these benefits and this analysis do not transfer necessarily to other forms of 'private' schooling or too much of what passes for religious home schooling. Do the wealthy independent schools encompass the advantages of educating migrants from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds? Do the new Christian schools uphold the values of democratic diversity and inclusion?

Conclusion

School choice as a mechanism to affect school reform and support the public good is flawed for two basic reasons. First from the point of view of the advantages of religious schooling, the research does not support the conclusion that *all* religious schools or independent schools are of a positive value for the public good. Essentially, there is a need for a far more nuanced and informed debate that takes into account diversity in values that exists in both the private and public sectors. Second, vouchers go to parents to choose as they see fit. Therefore, in principle there is no reason why parents would necessarily choose schools in keeping with civic values. Therefore, vouchers given both the research evidence or lack of it and the nature of individual choice are a poor way to secure the public good. It is far from clear that civic values would be inculcated and that the preconditions for a democratic society (integration etc.) would occur if public monies could follow parents to religious schooling or Homeschooling irrespective of its democratic and public nature. Under the auspices of improving choices, the key characteristic of a democratic society, the diversity within the public school, would, if we were not careful, break down. What is more, the 'choice' to attend religious schools or home school may in *some* cases negate the project of public schooling. The concept of a public that can achieve its common good is very different from a discourse of parental rights and religious exceptionalism from the democratic public sphere (Battani, et al. 1997; Boggs 1997; Boggs 2000; Harris 1997; Ku 2000; Misztal 2001; Somers 1995; Villa 1992).

The existence of plurality and diversity does not preclude democratic discourse. Nancy Fraser's recognition of the positive and empowering aspects of counter publics is testament to the importance of a plurality of publics (Fraser 1990) and the public good that can derive from such plurality. I have argued that to a great extent the role of Catholic schooling in educating the poor and pursuing democratic values is on the whole a positive example of how plurality in schooling can achieve public goods. However as Post and Rosenblum point out: 'With respect to those aspects of associational life that are pertinent to identity formation, we would stress that a key variable is the degree and manner in which the diverse groups that make up civil society are open and permeable' (Post and Rosenblum 2001). With regards to education, Post and Rosenblum's observation regarding the importance of exposure to, and the experience of, pluralism seems to be a useful way of critiquing certain strains of choice theory religious plurality, which fail to address the issue of how children's democratic rights are to be upheld. More nuanced theoretical arguments are required concerning the idea of the public good and democratic values especially in respect to religious schooling. At the moment the case for vouchers based on the perceived benefits of religious schooling is not proven. This paper is an attempt to start this ongoing conversation and is by no means definitive.

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