12 Beyond the Justice of the Market
Combating Neoliberal Educational Discourse and Promoting Deliberative Democracy and Economic Equality

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What public education should be for and how it should be organized has been contested from its inception. One of the central debates has been over whether education is primarily a means to increase the nation's economic productivity or to develop well-rounded democratic citizens. In the early 1900s, some educators built on Frederick Winslow Taylor's (1911) publications on “scientific management,” which promoted efficiency in the workplace through standardization, accountability, rewards, and punishments (Kanigel, 2005). For example, David Snedden, an influential Commissioner of Education, built explicitly on Taylor’s ideas and reconceived education to aid “the economy to function as efficiently as possible” (Wirth, 1977, p. 163). For Snedden, schools should not only serve corporate interests but also be organized like factories; both literally and figuratively—what was good for business was good for education. Snedden, in “Education for a World of Team Players and Team Workers” (1924), compared society to a crew on a submarine, with a commander, a few officers, and numerous subordinates, and asserted that schools should prepare a few students to be leaders, while training the vast majority “to follow.” Fortunately, stated Snedden, deciding which students to select as leaders only required knowing students’ “probable destinies,” which coincided with students’ gender, race, and class. A few white males would be tracked into leadership positions; the rest were consigned to subordinate roles. Schools were to be assessed on how much they contributed to economic growth and not on whether they promoted economic equality or critical citizenship. A democratic society was one in which leaders made decisions that others accepted uncritically. Social justice was achieved when everyone was prepared for and accepted his or her “proper” place.

In contrast, John Dewey opposed proponents of social efficiency such as Snedden, arguing that a primary purpose of education was the development of critical democratic citizens. For Dewey, all social institutions, including workplaces, should facilitate personal growth and be judged on the “contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society” (Dewey, 1919/1950, p. 147). Dewey and Snedden publicly debated one another in The New Republic, where Dewey disagreed with the idea that students were to be prepared for the needs of business and stated that the kind of education in which he was interested was “not one which will ‘adapt’ workers to the existing industrial regime,” but, instead, one which would “alter the existing industrial system, and ultimately transform it” (Dewey, 1915, p. 42). Dewey wanted schools to create citizens who would force workplaces to become democratic. For Dewey, institutions should be assessed based on their contribution to human development rather than to “a senseless pursuit of profits” (Wirth, 1977, p. 169).

For Dewey (1987), schools were essential to developing the “democratic habits of thought and action” necessary for effective participation in the democratic process (p. 225). Dewey’s conception of freedom differed from conceptions in which freedom is the
right to do what one pleases (see Dewey’s *Experience and Education*, 1934). Rather, for Dewey, freedom exists only in relationship with others; with whom, as a community, people engage in the task of improving themselves and society. Achieving this goal requires that individuals deliberate with one another and practice habits of “open-mindedness, tolerance of diversity, fairness, rational understanding, respect for truth, and critical judgment” (Olssen, Codd, & O’Neill, 2004, p. 269). In sum, Dewey believed schooling was essential for the development of deliberative democracy.

While David Snedden and others who promoted social efficiency seem, a century later, to be too easily convinced of the superiority of business and overly pessimistic regarding human abilities, their ideals reappear within the current push to adopt neoliberal economic and education policies. Neoliberalism similarly privileges the economy by assuming that the “economic system works best when individuals are allowed to seek their private interest. The pursuit of self-interest will foster free enterprise, and the operation of the market will always lead to superior outcomes to those achieved through government planning” (Lauder, Brown, Dillabough, & Halsey, 2006, p. 26). For neoliberals, societies work best when individuals are free to pursue their private interests without governmental intervention through public funding of either institutions or individuals. Increasingly, cities, states, and the federal government are restructuring education around the notion that market principles of competition and quantitative measurement best promote educational efficiency and social justice.

This chapter, then, aims to reveal and challenge the current neoliberal ideals and policies that are redefining social justice and reshaping American schools and society. It is crucial that as educators, we understand that different conceptions of society are founded on different assumptions about the nature of social justice. We must determine which conceptions make sense to us and use them as a basis to form the kinds of institutions, including schools, that we desire. I will suggest that neoliberal policies increase economic and social inequality, and degrade the social and natural environment. In short, neoliberal conceptions of social justice harm people and the world around them, and are therefore unjust.

I begin by describing the social democratic liberalism that preceding neoliberalism so that we can appreciate the ways in which neoliberalism redefines the essential characteristics of society. I then show how neoliberal principles of individualism, equality, markets, and choice currently form the basis of recent educational policies at the district (Chicago), state (New York), and federal (No Child Left Behind) levels. I conclude by suggesting some ways in which we might strengthen conceptions of social justice that emphasize equity and deliberative democracy.

**The Attack on Social Democratic Liberalism by Neoliberals**

Prior to the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s, social democratic liberalism dominated, arising in the United States in the 1930s during the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration. Social democratic liberal policies were themselves a response to then prevalent laissez-faire social and economic policies in which the state did little to ensure individual and social welfare. Roosevelt, in his 1935 address to Congress, made clear his view that excessive market freedoms had led to the economic and social problems of the Depression (Harvey, 2005). In contrast, his social democratic liberal policies focused on ensuring individuals at least the necessities for human survival and growth. Roosevelt argued for a liberal conception of social justice, which could be achieved if the state and civil society allocated “its resources to eradicate poverty and hunger and to assure security of livelihood, security against the major hazards and vicissitudes of life, and the security of
decent homes” (Harvey, 2005, p. 183). Roosevelt ultimately envisioned providing more than the basic necessities and in 1944 proposed a second Bill of Rights, which included

the right to a useful and remunerative job...the right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation...the right of every family to a decent home; the right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health; the right to adequate economic protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident and unemployment; [and] the right to a good education. (quoted in Sunstein, 2004, p. 13)

Roosevelt’s policies arose both out of necessity and from political pressure. Clearly, laissez-faire policies would not alleviate the problems of the Depression. The poor, the unemployed, and other citizens were clamoring for solutions. In response, Roosevelt implemented social democratic policies that included deficit-financed job creation, government regulation of banking policy, social security, and other welfare programs. Later, World War II increased state intervention into the everyday economic life of the nation as part of its war effort.

Because governmental planning was central to economic recovery and to victory in World War II, citizens in the United States and Western Europe pressed for continued state intervention and public welfare (Judt, 2005). Furthermore, postwar growth in individual incomes provided for increasing corporate profits, satisfying both citizens and corporations. The decades after the war, then, were characterized by “the historic compromise” between capital and labor. In exchange for improving wages, labor consented not only to capitalist control of the workplace, but also to capitalist control of investment and growth, primarily by multinational corporations.

However, efforts to expand personal and political rights were not uncontested. Social security was denied to many African Americans when Congress surrendered to demands of Southern politicians to exclude agricultural and domestic household workers, jobs typically filled by African Americans (Katznelson, 2005). Even the now venerated G.I. Bill for returning veterans “roused the ire of all but the most moderate business leaders... [who] disliked the liberal agenda and felt that the New Deal traditions associated with the Labor movement and the Democratic Party continued to appeal to American workers” (Fones-Wolfe, 1994, p. 7). Similarly, Roosevelt’s Second Bill of Rights was quickly forgotten and now seems utopian.

Social democratic liberalism, then, was never secure and in the later 1960s increasingly attacked as businesses’ net profits began to fall (Parenti, 1999, p. 118). Because falling profits were attributed primarily to the inability of businesses to pass increasing wage costs on to consumers in an increasingly competitive and open world economy, part of the solution for emerging neoliberals was to squeeze workers’ wages. In 1979, the head of the Federal Reserve Bank, Paul Volcker, stated that “the average wage of workers has to decline” (cited in Bowles & Gintis, 1986, p. 60). Volcker instituted policies that increased the Federal Reserve’s interest rates, leading to a “long, deep recession that would empty factories and break unions in the U.S. and drive debtor countries to the brink of insolvency, beginning the long era of structural readjustment” (Henwood, 2003, p. 208), and a decrease in workers’ real wages.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in Britain began to systematically implement neoliberal policies, turning back social democratic liberalism by reducing state responsibility for individual welfare. Neoliberalism, in contrast to social democratic liberalism, is “a theory of political economic
practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). In a neoliberal economic order, the state is limited to creating and preserving “an institutional framework appropriate to such practices” (p. 2). Thus, nongovernmental organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are permitted to pressure national governments to eliminate trade barriers and reduce social spending.

For neoliberals, the market is essential.

The market introduces competition as the structuring mechanism through which resources and status are allocated efficiently and fairly. The “invisible hand” [as in Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*, 1976/1776] of the market is thought to be the most efficient way of sorting out which competing individuals get what. (Olssen et al., 2004, pp. 137–138)

Moreover, neoliberal policies emphasize “the deregulation of the economy, trade liberalization, the dismantling of the public sector, [including, education, health, and social welfare], and the predominance of the financial sector of the economy over production and commerce” (Tabb, 2002, p. 7). Neoliberalism stresses the privatization of the public provision of goods and services—moving their provision from the public sector to the private—along with deregulating how private producers can behave, giving greater scope to the single-minded pursuit of profit and showing significantly less regard for the need to limit social costs for redistribution based on nonmarket criteria. The aim of neoliberalism is to put into question all collective structures capable of obstructing the logic of the pure market. (Tabb, 2002, p. 29)

Neoliberalism not only changes social structures but also changes the relationship between the individual and society. Under social democratic liberal policies, social inequality is a social responsibility. Social justice requires that inequalities be minimized through social programs and the redistribution of resources and power (Levitas, 1998, p. 14). Under neoliberal policies, inequality is the product of individual choice and should not be remedied by social welfare programs, but by individuals taking more responsibility and striving to become productive members of the workforce. Neoliberal governments accept little responsibility for the welfare of individuals; the individual is held to be the author of his or her own (mis-)fortune. As Margaret Thatcher famously stated, “There is no such thing as society...there are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first” (Thatcher, 1993, pp. 626–627).

Neoliberal societies aim to create competitive, instrumentally rational individuals who can compete in the marketplace (Peters, 1994). They are to become entrepreneurs responsible for themselves, their progress, and their position. Lemke (2002) describes neoliberalism as seeking:

to unite a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational individual. It aspires to construct responsible subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts. (p. 59)
Individuals are transformed into “entrepreneurs of themselves” (Foucault, 1979, cited in Lemke, 2001), who operate within a marketplace that includes commodities such as education, health care, and pensions.

Social Democratic Liberalism, Neoliberalism and Education

During the decades immediately after World War II, education in the U.S. and Western Europe, guided by social democratic policies, expanded to serve more students at more grades. States aimed to increase their secondary school graduation rates and to enroll more students in expanding state supported higher education systems. Education was perceived as a necessary, though insufficient, condition for social justice. Until recently, few people doubted that public education was a public responsibility.

However, neoliberals reject the notion that education should be provided by the State. In their view, education should, as much as possible, be privatized or forced to compete in an open marketplace. Private schools, charter schools, and voucher systems are among the results. Milton Friedman (1995) called for education to be transformed from a “government” (used pejoratively) to a “market system”:

> Our elementary and secondary system needs to be radically restructured. Such a reconstruction can be achieved only by privatizing a major segment of the educational system—i.e., by enabling a private, for profit industry to develop that will provide a wide variety of learning opportunities and offer effective competition to public schools. (p. 1)

Under the market system advocated by neoliberals, schools should be assessed using standardized measures and curriculum standards, so that “consumers” can compare one school to another in making a choice. Neoliberal policies now implicitly or explicitly inform the foundation of education policies at the district, state, and federal levels and call for standards, standardized tests, and accountability. The neoliberal faith in markets and privatization provides the basis for pushing for educational systems in which public funding would go to private business corporations and religious organizations.

Recent reforms in Chicago, New York, and at the federal level with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reflect the prevalence of neoliberalism in education. An examination of the rationale for these reforms reveals the extent to which neoliberals have changed not only how we talk about and organize education, but also how we think about social justice.

Pauline Lipman, in High Stakes Education: Inequality, Globalization, and Urban School Reform (2004), situates her analysis of Chicago’s recent education reforms within the rise of neoliberalism globally, showing how these reforms further efforts by corporate and political elites to remake Chicago into a global financial and tourist center. Neoliberal policies privilege international finance over labor, and promote individual self-interest pursued through markets in all spheres of economic and social life. Chicago’s education policies employ “a corporate, regulatory regime centered on high stakes tests, standards, and remediation” (p. 36).

In its efforts to attract and retain the professional workforce required by a global city, the Chicago City School District has implemented many new programs, including International Baccalaureate and College Prep Programs, to prepare children of the middle and upper classes for university. At the same time, most students of color and children from the working class are being prepared for service and retail jobs through programs that focus on “vocational education, restricted (basic skills) curricula, and intensified regi-
mentation of instruction and/or control of students” (p. 49). Lipman maps out where the different programs started, showing how those that are more academically rigorous tend to be situated in or draw students from upper-income and gentrifying neighborhoods, and those using direct instruction or preparing students for low paying service jobs or the military are situated in low-income African-American and Latina/o neighborhoods.

Lipman (2004) also describes how testing policies, including publicly reporting standardized test scores by school, further legitimize program differences by forcing schools with low test scores (those composed primarily of students of color and students living in poverty) to institute more regimented methods of instruction. She argues that the college prep programs act as an incentive for middle-class families to live in the city and provide a veneer of equal opportunity in a vastly unequal system (p. 56). Although presented as reforms that decrease inequality, the Chicago programs exacerbate inequality and heighten economic and social disparity. She concludes:

The policy regime that I have described is producing stratified knowledge, skills, dispositions, and identities for a deeply stratified society. Under the rubric of standards, the policies impose standardization and enforce language and cultural assimilation to mold the children of the increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse workforce into a most malleable and governable source of future labor. This is a system that treats people as a means to an end. The “economizing of education” and the discourse of accounting reduce people to potential sources of capital accumulation, manipulators of knowledge for global economic expansion, or providers of the services and accessories of leisure and pleasure for the rich. Students are reduced to test scores, future slots in the labor market, prison numbers, and possible cannon fodder in military conquests. Teachers are reduced to technicians and supervisors in the education assembly line—“objects” rather than “subjects” of history. This system is fundamentally about the negation of human agency, despite the good intentions of individuals at all levels. (p. 179)

More recently, Lipman (2005) explains how the Chicago mayor’s newly enacted “Renaissance 2010” policy makes a bad situation worse, as schools for the poor are taken over and administered by a corporate-dominated board. Renaissance 2010 “calls for closing 60 public schools and opening 100 small schools, two-thirds of which will be charter or contract schools run by private organizations” using nonunion teachers and school employees (Lipman, 2005, p. 54). Schools will not be governed by the Local School Councils, to which teachers, parents, and community members are elected, but rather by New Schools for Chicago, a board constituted by corporate and Chicago Public School leaders appointed by the Commercial Club of Chicago, an organization representing the city’s corporate and political elite. New Schools for Chicago will use current corporate models to evaluate schools by developing “performance contracts” based on student test scores. By undermining democratic control of schools, further deprofessionalizing teachers, and transferring public funds to private for-profit corporations, Renaissance 2010 is a renaissance only for some.

Lipman’s (2004) research demonstrates how neoliberal discourse used by policymakers “shifts responsibility for social inequality produced by the state onto parents, students, schools, communities and teachers” (pp. 171–172). Chicago’s policymakers, like those in New York and in the Bush administration (Hursh, 2005), promote their neoliberal agenda by asserting that standardized testing and accountability increase equity and fairness, “holding all students to the same high standards.” However, as Lipman shows, schools in Chicago prepare most students for retail and service jobs, or for the military.
Moreover, in the push to raise test scores, schools cannot develop curricula that build on students’ culture. Consequently, low-income students and students of color are unlikely to do well, not only because of low expectations, but also because the curriculum does not connect to their experience. Yet because policymakers portray all students as being provided the same opportunities, student failure is blamed on individual lack of effort. Lipman shows how the policies shift the blame for student failure away from the failure to provide academically challenging schools and the necessary economic and cultural resources, and onto individual students.

New York state along with federal education officials have followed Chicago in promoting testing, accountability, markets, and choice by arguing that within an increasingly competitive global economy, neoliberal reforms are necessary to ensure that all students and the nation succeed. They link the discourse of the “necessity” of increased educational and economic productivity with a discourse that blames teachers for inadequately instructing and assessing students, a strategy also used by the proponents of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Beginning in the 1990s, the New York State Board of Regents and the Commissioner of Education implemented standards-based assessment and a standardized testing regime, making graduation contingent on passing five statewide standardized exams, and requiring that secondary students enroll in state-regulated Regents courses to graduate, thereby eliminating locally developed courses. While new testing requirements were being developed, the state also passed legislation establishing up to 100 charter schools, usually administered by for-profit business corporations, siphoning students and funds from public schools.

Former New York Chancellor of Education Carl Hayden (1999, cited in Cala, personal communication to Deputy Commissioner of Education, New York, 2000) and current Commissioner of Education Richard Mills justify the new regime on the grounds that standards and standardized testing are the only way to ensure that all students, including students of color and those living in poverty, have an opportunity to learn. They argue that it is these same students who, because of the end of industrialization and the rise of globalization, can no longer be permitted to fail. All students must succeed educationally to ensure that the individual and the nation succeed economically. Hayden (personal communication to Richard Brodsky and Richard Green, New York State Assembly, 2001) described the testing requirement as a means to improving life prospects for “poor and minority children who in the past would have been relegated to a low standards path. Too often, such children emerged from school without the skills and knowledge needed for success in an increasingly complex economy” (p. 1). Furthermore, both Hayden and Mills argue that the curriculum standards were objectively determined and that standardized tests provide a valid and reliable means of assessing student learning. Such objective methods are required, they say, because teachers and administrators cannot be trusted to assess student learning objectively and accurately (Hayden, 1999, 2001).

At the federal level, the No Child Left Behind Act requires states to develop standardized tests and assessment systems in order to determine whether schools are making “adequate yearly progress” (AYP). NCLB became law because it, like the standards, testing, and accountability movement on which it builds, ostensibly aims to improve education, especially for those students who have historically been disadvantaged, including students of color and students living in poverty. President Bush promoted NCLB as a means of replicating at the national level the “success” achieved by reforms in some states. Rodney Paige, former Secretary of Education, has even described NCLB as an extension of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, building on the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.
Forty-four years ago, Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “The great challenge facing the nation today is to solve segregation and discrimination and bring into full realization the ideas and dreams of our democracy.” The No Child Left Behind Act does that. The law creates the conditions of equitable access to education for all children. It brings us a step closer to the promise of our constitution. (Paige & Jackson, 2004)

It is Paige and Jackson’s aim to position opponents to NCLB as anti-civil rights. To this discourse of equality Paige adds the two other discourses prominent in New York’s and Chicago’s reform arguments: testing provides more objective assessments and global economic competition requires education reform. In *What to Know and Where to Go: A Parents’ Guide to No Child Left Behind* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), Paige conveys to the public the purported benefits of NCLB. He informs readers that standardized tests provide a valid and reliable means of assessing student learning, and this approach improves on teacher-generated assessments. The parent guide informs parents that NCLB “will give [parents] objective data” through standardized testing (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 12). Further, objective data from tests are necessary because in the past “many parents have children who are getting straight As, but find out too late that their child is not prepared for college. That’s just one reason why NCLB gives parents objective data about how their children are doing” (p. 12). Teachers, he implies, have neither rigorously enforced standards nor accurately assessed students, thereby covering up their own failures and those of their students.

However, federal and state education reforms have failed to achieve the goals of improved student assessments and increased educational equality. In New York almost every standardized exam has been criticized for poorly constructed, misleading, or erroneous questions; or for using a grading scale that either over- or understates student learning. Critics have charged that the level of difficulty for a standardized exam depends on whether the State Education Department (SED) wants to increase graduation rates or wants to appear rigorous and tough. The passing rate for any exam can be increased or decreased simply by adjusting the cut score, turning a low percentage of correct answers into a pass or a high percentage of correct answers into a failure. On exams that students are likely to take as part of their graduation requirement, the SED makes it easier for students to pass by lowering the cut score. Conversely, the exams for the advanced, non-required courses, such as physics and chemistry, have been made more difficult (Winerip, 2003).

Furthermore, sometimes an unusually low or high failure rate may not be intentional but the result of incompetence. The June 2003 Math A exam (also a test students are likely to take to meet the graduation requirement) was so poorly constructed that all the test scores had to be discarded. Statewide, only 37% of students received a passing score (Arenson, 2003). At Rochester’s Wilson Magnet High School, an urban school with an International Baccalaureate Program, then ranked 49th in the nation by *Newsweek*, all 300 students who took the exam failed (Rivera, personal communication, 2003).

Moreover, educational inequality has increased as a result of these neoliberal reforms. Quantitative evidence from New York suggests that high-stakes testing has harmed educational achievement. Fewer students, especially students of color and students with disabilities, are completing high school. From 1998 to 2000, the dropout rate increased by 17%. A report from the Harvard Center for Civil Rights concluded that New York now has the lowest graduation rate of any state for African-American (35%) and Latino/a (31%) students (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson 2004). Haney (2003) reported that New York’s graduation rate currently ranks 45th in the nation. Standardized tests have
negatively affected English language learners, the highest diploma-earning minority in 2002 (Monk, Sipple, & Killen, 2001). Lastly, dropouts among students with disabilities increased from 7,200 in 1996 to 9,200 in 2001.

NCLB has been criticized for numerous reasons, most significantly for failing to achieve its stated goal of decreasing educational inequality and its more likely goal of discrediting public schools so as to privatize them. Orfield (2006), in the foreword to a study by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University concluded that:

neither a significant rise in achievement, nor closure of the racial achievement gap is being achieved.... The reported state successes are artifacts of state testing policies which lead to apparent gains on state tests [which] do not show up on an independent national test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress. (p. 5)

While recent neoliberal education reformers may not have achieved their ostensible goal of improving educational outcomes for all students, their reforms have significantly altered the discourse and the organization and provision of public education. Education, which is generally perceived as key to economic growth, is being reorganized to develop workers with the skills necessary for their ultimate vocational position. Furthermore, because schools should not only serve businesses but also be exposed to the same market competition as businesses, corporate executives promote themselves as better equipped than educators to organize and run the public education system. Consequently, corporations play a larger role in determining education policy, as evidenced by the Commercial Club’s central role in shaping Chicago’s education policies and the role of corporations and conservative think tanks in developing and passing the NCLB Act (DeBray, 2006). Standardized testing, accountability, auditing, and choice now dominate educational policy discourse.

Furthermore, while neoliberal ideology promotes markets as free from governmental intervention, as Thrupp and Wilmott (2003) pointed out above, all markets require oversight and control. Educational choice, as in Chicago and under NCLB, is a result of corporate and governmental intervention, undermining parent and community control. However, because neoliberals do not control schooling by intervening directly in the daily lives of teachers, but instead indirectly through standards, tests, and markets, makes their interference less noticeable. Standardized tests and other accountability mechanisms allow governing entities to intervene in the classroom indirectly, to focus on output while leaving the means to achieving these goals to the school. Ball (1990) describes this strategy as “steering from a distance,” whereas others have described it as the rise of the “audit” or “evaluative” state (Clarke & Newman, 1997; Gerwitz, 2002; Whitty, Powers, & Halpin, 1998). Consequently, under neoliberalism, control over schools has shifted away from the local level towards state and federal levels (Ball, 1994; Rose, 1999). Parents and students are marginalized as their input into education is restricted to what schools they choose.

Neoliberalism, by incorporating market discourses and systems, has transformed how we think about and engage in democracy. The emphasis on markets replaces deliberative forms of democracy with aggregative democracy. Aggregative forms of democracy focus on tallying individual preferences; families chose which schools they prefer and based on those preferences some schools flourish while others fail and may ultimately close. Such systems, Young (2000) argues, focus on individual choices but ignore the reasons for those choices. She states that “There is no account for their origins, how they might have been arrived at...no criteria for determining the quality of the preferences by either content, origin, or motive...preferences are seen as exogenous to the political process” (p.
20). For example, under NCLB parents and students may be given the choice of attending another school based on schools’ standardized test scores, scores that may largely reflect not the quality of the school but the socioeconomic status of the students. Since such choices are individual family choices, “individuals never need to leave the private realm of their own interest,” that is, they can choose without engaging others regarding the consequences of the choice beyond their own family. Such decision making “lacks any distinct idea of a public formed from the interaction of democratic citizens and their motivation to reach some decision” (p. 20). Gutmann and Thompson (2004) add:

Aggregative democracy is seriously flawed, and cannot serve as a principled basis for democratic decision-making. By taking existing or minimally corrected preferences as given, as the base line for collective decisions, the aggregative conception fundamentally accepts and may even reinforce existing distributions of power in society. These distributions may or may not be fair, but aggregative conceptions do not offer any principle by which they can decide. Even more important, they do not provide any process by which citizens’ views about these distributions might be changed. (p. 16)

Debate over what the purposes of schools should be and how those goals should be achieved and assessed has been eliminated. In contrast, deliberative democracy requires that people participate “in the decisions and processes that affect” their lives and use their knowledge and skills to affect those around them (Young, 2000, p. 156). For Young, like Dewey, social institutions, especially schools, should promote individual growth and change through “communication among citizens, and between citizen and public officials, where issues are discussed in an open and critical fashion” (p. 167). Similarly, Dewey (1916) described democracy as “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicative experience” (p. 87). Mathison (2000), in writing about Dewey’s notion of deliberative democracy, states that this requires that people collectively decide what and how to be and what to do: “Differences of opinion must therefore be settled through deliberation, not by coercion, appeal to emotion, or authority” (p. 236). This does not guarantee resolution but “members of a community can disagree as long as they are willing to engage in discussion about their beliefs, as long as their beliefs are consistent with the best available evidence, and as long as they are open-minded about their beliefs” (p. 237).

The deliberative model provides places in which people can present justifications for their preferences, listen to others, and, where possible, work out new understandings and compromises. Such discussion and debate has the positive outcome of deepening people’s understanding of the purposes and processes of schooling as they engage in defense of their own views and listen to the views of others. The process of setting social and educational goals becomes an educative process in itself as citizens work to refine their views in light of increased understanding. Further, it is important for Young and Dewey that civil society be strengthened and remain relatively autonomous from government, making it possible to “limit state power and make its exercise more accountable and democratic” (Young, 2000, p. 159).
participation in democratic decision making when, as in Chicago and Washington, D.C.,
corporate leaders direct educational policies for the private rather than the public good.

Yet neoliberalism persists in part because its proponents frame their reforms as inevi-
table in a global economy. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1998) noted:

A whole set of propositions are being imposed as self-evident: it is taken for granted
that maximum growth, and therefore productivity and competitiveness, are the ulti-
mate and sole goal of human actions; or that economic forces cannot be resisted. Or
again—a presupposition which is the basis of all the presuppositions in economics—
a radical separation is made between the economic and the social, which is left to one
side...as a kind of reject. (p. 31)

In response, we need to examine the dangers of neoliberal reforms to democratic insti-
tutions and to reinstate deliberative forms of democracy that support individual rights
beyond the right to choose. For neoliberals, social justice merely requires that individuals
be given access to markets. If they fail to achieve educational and economic success, then
individuals only have themselves to blame.

Instead, we need to reaffirm the principles of social justice on which Roosevelt based
his Second Bill of Rights, such as the right to a job, home, medical care, economic protec-
tion from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident and unemployment, and, most
importantly, “a good education” (Sunstein, 2004, p. 13). Harvey, in A Brief History of
Neoliberalism (2005), extends the list to incorporate rights we need to consider in an age
of increased globalization:

The right to life chances, to political association and “good” governance, for control
over production by the direct producers [workers], to the inviolability and integrity
of the human body, to engage in critique without fear of retaliation, to a decent and
healthy living environment, to collective control of common property resources, to
the production of space [to move in and reconstruct the environment], to difference,
as well as rights inherent in our status as species beings [that is, to become fully
human]. (p. 204)

How these rights should be defined and how we might work toward them needs to
be deliberated. We also need, as Dewey wrote, to rethink how all social institutions,
particularly schools, promote conceptions of social justice in which such rights might
be recognized. Schools should be places in which the rational capacities of children are
cultivated; places where children think critically about the kind of persons they would
like to be and the kind of society in which they would like to live. Social justice requires
critiquing neoliberalism for the way in which it exacerbates inequality, and radically
rethinking society and public schooling to promote deliberation, democratic engagement,
and individual autonomy.

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