Democratic Ideals in American Education Policy, Practice, and Scholarship: A Philosophical Analysis and Reconstruction

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DEMOCRATIC IDEALS IN AMERICAN EDUCATION POLICY, PRACTICE, AND SCHOLARSHIP: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS AND RECONSTRUCTION

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Dissertation
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Democratic Ideals in American Education Policy, Practice, and Scholarship:
A Philosophical Analysis and Reconstruction

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The final copy of this dissertation has been examined by the signators, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
Meens, David Eric (Ph.D., Education)

Democratic Ideals in American Education Policy, Practice, and Scholarship: A Philosophical Analysis and Reconstruction

Dissertation Directed by Profession Kenneth R. Howe

This dissertation consists of three related but stand-alone articles (chapters 2-4) that are framed by an introduction (chapter 1) and some concluding remarks. While the arguments presented in each article are intended to hold up on their own, they also develop common themes and reach conclusions that reinforce and augment one another. The introduction surveys the historical role of democratic ideals in the history of public schooling in the US, and of education policy in the development of American democratic ideals. The first article develops an argument for the importance of empirically-informed normative theorizing in education, and considers the contemporary role of philosophy of education in debates over school policy and practice. The second article analyzes the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and related policies in terms of their impact on democratic decision-making and democratic education. The third and final article offers a similar analysis of contemporary service-learning and civic engagement initiatives in the context of higher education.
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DEDICATION: TO THE PUBLIC EDUCATORS IN MY LIFE

For most of the year 2000 I was 18 years old. At that time there was one thing concerning my future about which I felt absolutely certain: I would never and under no circumstances become involved in a serious way with public education. As the son of two public school teachers, stepson of a long-time Title I elementary school principal, the daily, weekly, and annual rhythms of school, its practices and its politics, provided the backdrop for not only my own formal education but also the whole of my parents’ professional and social lives. In a rebellious spirit and a sincere but somewhat juvenile sense of principle (along with a good bit of unacknowledged race, class, gender privilege, and so on), I was determined to prove in practice that formal education and the good life are not synonymous, nor is the former prerequisite for the latter.

Certainty at age 18 did prove predictive for my subsequent path, but only inversely. I have spent the better part of the last decade working in school settings from the pre-Kindergarten-level up through higher education, and for half of that time pursuing a Ph.D. in a School of Education. This reversal in my relationship to public schooling represents a slow but steady growth in my appreciation of my parents’ remarkable enthusiasm for teaching, and their deep commitment to make schooling a genuinely public good that nurtures individuality, community, and justice. I now realize that, without necessarily trying, they imparted to me and my siblings an intimate awareness of the struggles faced by teachers, students, their families, and whole communities that intersect and play out in classrooms, administrative offices, on the playground, and in the cafeteria every day.

The legacy that my parents have left behind as a result of several decades of (almost always) cheerful labor and personal sacrifice on behalf of children, teachers, and the community
recently became clearer than ever when my stepfather passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. In the weeks that followed, what appeared to be hundreds of community members gathered for two different memorial services to express how deeply his work as their principal, vice-principal, and/or classroom teacher had impacted their lives and changed them and their circumstances for the better. The passion for defending and improving public education that motivates my scholarly efforts today is fueled above all by his inspiring example, as well as that of my mother, my other (biological) father, and all the many teachers in my extended families and the many educators beyond my family that I am lucky enough to count among my friends.

In addition to such feelings of gratitude and admiration, I am compelled to acknowledge here at the outset my indebtedness (our indebtedness) to these wonderful and consistently underappreciated individuals by my commitment to intellectual honesty and humility. Philosopher of education David Bridges (2003) writes that, “the attempt to render the writer invisible in the text, the effacing of the narrative which lies behind the text and which is … inevitably entangled with it, is an artifice which is bound to fail” (p. 2). We cannot shed our subjectivity, with its distinct limitations and possibilities. In Bridges (2003) words, “What we choose to say and how we choose to say it does not after all come out of the blue. If it has any integrity it is rooted in our life histories, our values and our deepest beliefs and the social context of our writing” (ibid.).

I confess here at the outset that it is in no small part the passion for and commitment to public education enacted by the many educators in my life that inspires me to develop and promote arguments concerning the political and moral purposes of public schooling in the US that have become, at least in many elite policymaking and research circles, unfashionable today. The fact that I find these arguments to be important, compelling, even correct, does not come
“out of the blue,” but is a fact rooted in my own life history and my deepest beliefs. Insofar as these aspects of my individuality have larger intersubjective value at all, this is surely a result of the countless ways that my life is entangled with the lives of others, that they have influenced, inspired, and challenged me – in this case, to dare to hope that schools can serve the creation and maintenance of a genuinely public good, and that when we struggle to create a more just and democratic society in and through education, we never do so alone. Rather, we join a deep-rooted and living tradition that has shaped and continues to shape our world, as well as an intergenerational and global community of shared democratic aspirations and commitments, including people from all walks of life and social classes, ethnicities, religions, who have the moral courage to work for the realization of themselves and others through community built upon justice. It is to all these often unacknowledged and always underappreciated heroes of this living tradition, represented for me by my own remarkable parents, that this dissertation is dedicated, with love and admiration.

Reference
DISSESION OVERVIEW

This dissertation represents a multi-faceted interdisciplinary research agenda that I expect will guide my scholarly efforts into the future, at least in the near- to mid-term. The document itself consists of three related but stand-alone articles (chapters 2-4) that are framed by an introduction (chapter 1) and some concluding remarks. While the arguments presented in each article are intended to hold up on their own, they also develop common themes and reach conclusions that reinforce and augment one another. At times, the ideas presented in one article overlap with those in one or both of the others. While such redundancy is regrettable, I have opted to keep the articles intact in order to preserve the integrity of each article, including reference lists at the end of each chapter rather than one comprehensive list at the end of the dissertation. I request the reader’s patience at points where I will occasionally be repeating myself.

The first objective of the introductory chapter 1 is to make clear the underlying coherence of the three articles within the larger project. Given the three-article dissertation format, it is particularly important to establish at the outset the shared purpose upon which the articles’ underlying cohesion depends. Each of the three articles is motivated by an underlying commitment to the “nonnegotiable agenda” (Goodlad, 2008) of renewing and advancing democratic ideals in education policy, practice, and research. The first section of the introduction (Background) outlines in a cursory way the concerns or “felt difficulties” that motivate this agenda – in short, the manifest presence in early twenty-first century America of twin crises in democratic politics and in public schooling.

The second objective is to demonstrate and discuss both the methodological approach and theoretical framework that inform the articles more as a starting point and set of background
considerations rather than as an explicit focus of argumentation or analysis. This is pursued first of all through a literature review that situates the relevant issues in historical context. In this second section of the introduction, I draw attention to the dynamic interrelationship between the development of democratic ideals and the realities of schooling throughout U.S. history, paying particular attention to both the ways that democratic ideals and the ways debates over public education have provided the impetus to the evolution of democratic ideals. Then I conclude the section with an account of the origins and evolution of competing goals that have dissolved the historic bond between democracy and school.

In the third section of the introduction (Conceptual Framework), I draw upon formal democratic theory in light of the historical evolution recounted in the literature review. I begin with a brief narrative of the parallel history of evolution and contestation of democratic ideals in the context of academia. This then informs an articulation of the two major alternatives in contemporary democratic theory, and justification of one as superior for purposes of advancing the agenda that motivates the subsequent articles.

In the final section of the introduction (From Political Theory to Education Research) I complete the groundwork for a transition to analysis of contemporary issues in education research, policy, and practice, by identifying some of the dominant epistemological assumptions that have gained a stranglehold within these fields and restricted the expression of values and norms to those consistent with the imperatives of Smithian efficiency and neoliberal ideology. In light of the significant challenges that this ideological context presents for the democratic agenda I hope to advance through this dissertation, I conclude chapter 1 with an explicit statement of the methodological considerations that have informed my approach in the previous sections of chapter 1, and that I extend in each of the subsequent articles.
Chapter 2 (First Article: Recovering Philosophy of Education) elaborates on the discussion in the final section of chapter 1. It is addressed, however, not to a general scholarly audience but more narrowly to those who share my field of specialization, philosophy of education. The first half of this chapter (Part 1. Toward New “Interdisciplinarities”) consists of material published as an essay in *Philosophy of Education 2013* (Meens, 2013). In it, I present an account of the historical genesis of contemporary disciplinary demarcations in the Anglophone (English-speaking) academy, and of how these distinctions help account for the persistent power of the discredited epistemological view known as *positivism*, in an attenuated but still virile form, to shape educational rhetoric and inquiry. I challenge the notion that positivism’s dogged (and dogmatic) persistence shapes education research but that philosophy of education has escaped its influence. I argue that the field’s dominant disciplinary identity is itself a “positivist throwback,” and that this self-imposed obsolescence carries deleterious consequences for the field and for educational inquiry generally.

The best hope for scholars presently positioned by disciplinarity on either side of the positivist divide (empirical research/conceptual work, descriptive science/normative theory) to effectively influence education policy and practice for the better lies in a more robust integration of normative and descriptive intellectual projects within and across disciplines. Within philosophy of education and its sub-disciplines, I suggest that such an integration requires, first, greater methodological reflexivity and transparency, and second, a related recognition and deliberate embrace of practices and perspectives that are already interdisciplinary at the heart of the field.

While overcoming internal obstacles of the sort discussed in the first part of chapter 2 might be necessary for making philosophical inquiry relevant, this will not be sufficient. The
second half of chapter 2 (Part 2. Philosophy of Education Blues) begins from an acknowledgment of *external* obstacles facing philosophers of education in the form of a *relevancy dilemma* (Howe, 2014). One horn of this dilemma consists of doubling down on disciplinary specialization – i.e., voluntarily retreating into the domain prescribed (and proscribed) for philosophy by its disciplinarity to deal with issues of “ageless significance” and thereby relegating oneself to irrelevance in contemporary education policy debates. The other horn involves heeding calls of the sort I make in part 1 of the chapter to embrace interdisciplinarity and to use philosophical inquiry to speak directly to mainstream educational debates in terms of norms, values, reasonableness, etc., only to be dismissed as an “activist zealot” (Howe, 2014, p. 11). The skewering that comes with the second horn is a result of the neo-positivist ideological context discussed in the final section of chapter 1.

Given present alignments of political and economic forces, this dilemma will likely remain intractable at least in the near- to mid-term, and any number of innovations in the practice of philosophy of the sort I advocate in the first part of chapter will not alter this. There seems to be no way out. Resolving this horn of the relevancy dilemma involves changing not philosophy but the world. How to respond, then? I argue that for philosophers in the Deweyan tradition embracing the first horn of the dilemma is not an option. The question of “relevance” in philosophy of education is not, in their view, primarily a matter of professional recognition, social status, or economic remuneration. Rather, it is connected to the question of what role philosophers might play in advancing the “nonnegotiable agenda” (Goodlad, 2008) of reconstructing, revitalizing, and advancing democratic ideals in twenty-first century America, especially within the domains of education policy, practice, and scholarship.
I devote the rest of chapter 2 to reframing the second horn of the relevancy dilemma as an opportunity to deepen the democratic character of contemporary philosophy of education in the Deweyan tradition. I suggest that one way to pursue this is by incorporating into philosophical practice and products resources drawn from the deep democratic tradition (West, 2004) that has emerged from the history of oppression and related struggles for justice in U.S. history. A key element of this tradition is the democratic virtue that Cornel West (2004) terms tragicomic hope – i.e., the capacity to suffer injustice without bitterness or vengefulness, and to struggle against antidemocratic ideals without losing one’s hope for the future or joy in the present. It is no accident, on West’s (2004) account, that this virtue emerges disproportionately from the African American experience of history, finding expression in creative musical forms such as jazz and the blues and related forms of literature and oratory.

Here, I suggest that democratic theory has too often neglected the vital motivating role of passion, of affect, in democratic intellectual engagement, and that this undoubtedly contributes to the tendency of many would-be engaged democratic intellectuals to embrace cynicism and despair in the face of seemingly intractable anti-democratic forces. The virtue of tragicomic hope provides one possible antidote, and I suggest that efforts to cultivate tragicomic hope in philosophy of education can help to bolster and renew motivation and sense of mission in the face of what looks to be a slow, long slog towards better times more receptive to the contributions of democratic intellectuals.

It is also possible that linking philosophy of education to the broader American tradition of democratic struggle will open alternative avenues for philosophers to engage and support social forces more likely to bring those better days about. To the degree that some philosophers tend, perhaps by training if not by inclination, towards intellectual elitism and political quietism,
the expressions of marginalized and disempowered populations for whom “relevancy dilemmas” are part and parcel of daily struggle provides valuable perspective. This conclusion of this chapter may be summed up in an adaptation of a well-known quotation from Dewey (1917): For philosophy to “recover itself” under present conditions is a three-part process: First, “it ceases to be a method for solving the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, employed by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men [and women].” Second, the philosophers are “skewered” and dismissed as an “activist zealot[s].” Third, the philosophers realize that the horns of philosophical dilemmas typically inflict minimal damage, and discover that being marginalized for democracy puts one in some very good company.

Fortified by the stoic conclusions of chapter 2, in chapter 3 (Second Article: Reorienting Education Policy) fellow “activist zealot” Ken Howe and I enter the fray with an interdisciplinary normative analysis of recent K-12 federal education policy (accordingly, we are preparing ourselves for marginalization). We present a detailed philosophical and historical analysis of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as well as subsequent federal education policy such as the Obama administration’s Race to the Top competition. We evaluate the consequences of these policies to date of in terms of philosopher Amy Gutmann’s (1999) seminal theory of democratic education.

In our assessment federal education policy is badly off track in two respects. First, it violates basic requirements of democratic policymaking by supplanting participatory governance and subverting the legitimate role of deliberative decision-making at the local level in the name of accountability, while largely abandoning its historically vital role as a guarantor of democratic equality. Second, federal policy actively undermines the requirements of democratic education, specifically through the deleterious impact of accountability pressures and marketization
“remedies” on both the content (curriculum and pedagogy), and the context (organization and makeup of the school community) necessary for the inculcation of democratic character.

Based on this assessment we suggest several specific goals to guide future federal policy if it is to get back on the rack of fostering genuinely democratic goals. These include striking a more principled and theoretically informed balance between local, state, and federal control; bolstering the federal role in promoting equity and inclusion; curtailing and to the extent possible reversing the privatization of public resources through supplemental education services and charter schools; and finally, supporting the creation of diverse and equitable school communities required for the cultivation of democratic character through reasonable constraints on choice and testing policies. Some of the material in this second article appears in an earlier version as a National Education Policy Center (NEPC) policy brief (Howe and Meens, 2012), and an expanded and revised version is currently forthcoming in a special issue of Teachers College Record (Meens & Howe, In press).

Chapter 4 (Third Article: Deepening Democratic Education) was published in the Fall 2014 edition of the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning (Meens, 2014). It is the first in a series of articles reporting results from an ongoing qualitative study of the long-term impacts of an intensive civic engagement and service-learning program founded twenty-five years ago at the University of Colorado Boulder on participants’ democratic attitudes and behavior.

My goal in this chapter is to provide the historical and theoretical framing necessary for evaluating recent efforts aimed at renewing civic education in general, and the civic engagement and service-learning movements within higher education in particular, in terms of their consequences for democracy and social justice. I argue that a significant challenge to achieving
such outcomes is the pervasive influence of neoliberal ideology, and that theoretically-informed evaluation efforts have a key role to play in exposing and countering this influence. Hitherto, service learning and civic engagement scholars have paid little attention to the influence of neoliberal ideology on the movement. In fact, the historical analysis presented in this chapter indicates that the rise of neoliberalism in universities and in national politics helped to facilitate the contemporaneous growth, legitimation, and institutionalization of the civic engagement and service learning movement. Philosophical analysis reveals that neoliberal influence has also subtly transformed the very “terms of (civic) engagement,” such that the threat to the democratic and social justice character of civic engagement and service learning movements is an internal as well as external one.

The conceptual framework developed in the University of Colorado service learning alumni study represents an attempt to clarify the meaning of democracy and social justice goals through evaluation. This framework shaped the design of the study and data analysis, but it also evolved significantly over the course of the study through the integration of elements drawn from Deweyan democratic educational theory, Freirean critical pedagogy, and multicultural education – three major traditions that have shaped service learning and civic engagement theory and practice. While the explicit commitment to democratic equality and social justice goals across these traditions makes them in a sense redundant, at crucial moments in the course of the study it became apparent that each provides a distinctive concept or emphasis absent in the others and without which the shared ideals become unintelligible in our contemporary cultural and political situation. This synthesis exemplifies (imperfectly, of course) the type of philosophical reconstruction necessary to making civic education and its evaluation a front in the larger battle for the ongoing manifestation and evolution of democratic ideas in and through schooling.
In the conclusion (chapter 5) I reiterate what I take to be the main themes of the dissertation in the form of a few key insights that emerge from the three articles taken together. Developing these here would be premature; it’s sufficient to note these insights have to do with:

1. The nature of the present struggle over education and meanings of “reform”;
2. The concept of democracy and the forms of its renewal; and
3. The promise of 1 for 2, and of 2 for 1.

In light of these themes, I summarize the overarching program set forth in this dissertation as the analysis of (1), the articulation of (2), and realization of (3). Finally, I conclude chapter 5 and the dissertation with identification and a brief prospective discussion of two emerging issues - the anti-testing movement and the democratic education deficit among American elites - that seem to me strategic opportunities for furthering this agenda through educational philosophy and research.

References


CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

We have frequently printed the word Democracy. Yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawakened, not withstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted.

-Walt Whitman, Democratic Vistas

The serious threat to our democracy is not the existence of foreign totalitarian states. It is the existence within our own personal attitudes and within our own institutions of conditions similar to those which have given a victory to external authority, discipline, uniformity and dependence upon the Leader in foreign countries. The battlefield is accordingly here – within ourselves and our institutions [and] can be won only by extending the application of democratic methods … in the task of making our own politics, industry, education, our culture generally, a servant and an evolving manifestation of democratic ideas.

-John Dewey, Freedom and Culture

Background

On November 4, 2014, the Republican Party won majority control in the next U.S. Senate and, with it, the entire legislative branch of the federal government. In the aftermath, the Republican majority has taken relatively unprecedented actions in the both the House of
Representatives and the Senate to oppose the executive branch’s agenda on both domestic and, more controversially, foreign policy. Pundits cited the unpopularity of President Barack Obama as a major factor in the Republican “wave” that “flipped” control of the Senate. Re-elected in 2012 by the largest margin of any Democratic incumbent in 70 years, almost exactly two years later President Obama was polling at a near-record high 54 percent disapproval rating, with only 41 percent approving of his job performance – “among the lowest of any recent president during a midterm election” (Mangla, 2014).

Aggregate presidential popularity ratings mask, however, drastic variance in the polling data by race, with black Americans approving of Obama at a rate 40 to 44 percentage points higher than the national average (85 percent as opposed to 41 percent). By contrast, only 31 percent of white voters approved Obama’s performance in the last week of October 2014, compared with 65 percent of nonwhites and 82 percent of blacks (Gallup, 2014). As Meira Levinson (2012) observes, “E pluribus unum [Out of many, one] stands as America’s perennial challenge” (p. 17).

According to researchers we are presently experiencing a period of heightened ideological and political polarization relatively unprecedented in recent U.S. history (Mutz, 2006; Pew, 2014). Disagreement and even polarization do not, prima facie, represent a problem for democracy – indeed, in a pluralist society ideological contestation may be a key indicator of democratic vibrancy and civic health. But there are limits. Partisan divisions mirroring and probably exacerbating differences based on regional, racial, ethnic, social class, and gender identity threaten to “poison the well” of politics (to borrow a phrase from House Majority Leader, Rep. John Boehner [R-OH]) for many disaffected Americans.
While disgust with national leaders and the campaigns that get them (re)elected may appear to cross-cut major demographic and ideological categories, disengagement from the political process is not equally distributed, nor is it random. Levinson indicates that there exist “demographically predictable patterns in the distribution of [civic]…knowledge,” patterns that “presage a disturbing civic empowerment gap” (Levinson, 2012, p. 33). For some groups the well was poisoned, because it was poisonous, long ago.

The civic empowerment gap “bleeds over into civic and political participation” (ibid.). As in many other areas of American life, analyses of political party membership, voting rates, campaign donations, etc. reveal “vast disparities linked with class, education, and race” (Levinson, 2012, p. 34). Increased polarization and related disaffection with politics is thus likely to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities, and so should be a basic concern from the perspective of democratic equality. In light of this, the recent spate of “voter ID” laws passed in Republican-controlled state houses around the country are especially troubling, as these have a demonstrated impact reducing participation in elections by minority voters. Made possible in southern states such as Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama by the Supreme Court’s (2013) decision in Shelby County v. Holder, which invalidated a key provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, such laws appear, according to conservative U.S. circuit judge Richard Posner, “to be aimed at limiting voting by minorities, particularly blacks” (U.S. Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, 2014, p. 20; emphasis added).

Democracy in Crisis?

Troubling as such developments are, to some the 2014 midterm election results signal something much more sinister than exacerbated civic inequality, something even more fundamentally threatening to our democratic future than renewed efforts at voter suppression and
turning back the clock on civil rights. Consider the following statement given by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) in an election-night interview:

What frightens me is what Citizens United has done to the politics of this country and the ability of billionaires like the Koch brothers and others to put unprecedented sums of money into elections … I fear that we may be on the verge of becoming an oligarchic form of society where a handful of billionaires control not just the economy, but the political life of this country. And that’s just something we’re going to have wrestle with.

(Sanders, 2014; emphasis added)

Sen. Sanders refers to the Supreme Court’s (2010) decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which overturned limits on “independent expenditures” for political campaigns by corporations, and to the billionaire brothers David and Charles Koch, owners of Koch Industries. The Kochs have poured unprecedented resources into campaigns supporting conservative candidates and legislation across the country, from presidential and congressional races all the way down to, for example, school board elections in Jefferson County, Colorado (Simon, 2013). “Big money” in politics is not only a “conservative” thing, however, and Sen. Sanders could just as well have mentioned Tom Steyer, frequently referred to in media stories as a “liberal environmentalist businessman,” who donated over $5 billion to support Democrats in 2014 (Wall Street Journal). In either case, the threat of becoming an “oligarchic form of society” comes not from outside the political process but from within, and efforts to exclude perhaps matter less than the massively outsized access and influence enjoyed by a few. Whatever one’s alignment within our contemporary partisan politics, it is likely one can find both allies and opponents who are pursuing their ends in ways that threaten basic principles of democracy.
The threat to democracy of a tiny minority of wealthy citizens controlling “not only the economy, but the political life of [the] country” is (at least) as old as the republic. Alexis de Tocqueville (1835/1990) warned in the 1830s of the threat to democracy of “merchants and tradesmen”, and John Dewey spoke 100 years later, under the shadow of the Great Depression, of “the romance of business,” which elevates “the economic man” as the hero in a historical drama (Dewey, 1932; Hermann, 2011). A core contention across all of the articles in this dissertation is that if we may speak truly of a crisis of democracy today, it lies in the transformation not only of the practice of democracy, but of the very idea in terms of business.

In the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, “democracy” and closely related ideas such as “citizenship,” “the civic,” and “the state” have increasingly been recast in terms drawn from neoliberal economic theory (Clark, 2006; Giddens, 2003; Peters, 2011). The shifting meaning of the word democracy has to some extent obscured our retreat from it. Commenting on developments in the UK in the late 1990s and early 2000s – which, it should be noted, parallel developments in the US during the Clinton Administration – Catharine Needham (2003) refers to “Labour’s new marketplace democracy” in which “citizens are being treated as consumers,” such that “the government-citizen relationship is replicating patterns of choice and power found in the private economy” (p. 6).

In this reframing of political ideas in economic terms, “democracy” comes to mean “accountability,” which is “secured by competition and complaint, and power exercised through aggregate signaling.” Language of choice, competition, and “aggregate signaling” clearly evidences the move away from what Needham (2003) calls “the participatory citizen” towards “the citizen-consumer” (p. 15) as the agent of political action, and of the political sphere from a metaphor of the deliberative forum to that of the market. A basic premise of democracy,
faithfully repeated in civics classes and courtrooms, is that all citizens are equal – in the voting booth, the public forum, and in eyes of the law. But as every shopper knows (are we all citizen-shoppers as well as citizen-consumers?), not all consumers are equal in an economic marketplace. When money is regarded as political speech protected by the First Amendment and the accountability of representatives is reduced to “aggregate signaling,” “voting” with your wallet or with your feet, what meaning can the concept of democratic equality possibly have? When the logic of the forum gives way fully to that of the market, then political inequality merely mirrors inequality of income and wealth.

The “new” ideological constellation of neoliberal political economy is no longer very new. Signs of neoliberal dominance are abundant, nowhere more so than in federal- and state-level education reform efforts, as my co-author and I detail in the second article (chapter 3) of the dissertation. This is the rhetorical and ideological background against which the 2014 midterm elections and the fear to which Senator Sanders gives voice must be understood. The Senator is right to worry about the collapse of whatever boundary once existed between “our political life” and “the economy.” It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the root of this problem lies in billionaires trying to influence elections, or in the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Citizens United v. FEC* ruling. The billionaires and the Supreme Court are doing their part to apply a framework that they did not invent and that they are far from alone in promoting, a construct in which democracy comes to mean a complex patronage system of influence peddling, of political buying and selling for the maximization of one’s private interest. It is possible that the “democracy” that Senator Sanders is afraid might be lost, the one in which citizens are equals, and representatives like him are accountable for ascertaining and promoting the public good, may have abandoned us already, slipped away unnoticed – or pushed out, usurped by a different
idea, one that still goes by the same name, but plays a very different game. This is indeed, in Senator Sanders phrase, “something we’re going to have to wrestle with.”

American Democracy

In the first epigraph to this chapter, Walt Whitman – a nineteenth century poet referred to by philosopher and scholar of religion Cornel West (2004) as democracy’s “seer” – asserts that the idea signified by the syllables “de-mo-cra-cy” has yet to be realized because “its history remains unwritten...because it has yet to be enacted” (Whitman, 1871). This despite a civil war waged to “preserve the Union” that modern historians calculate involved between 650,000 and 850,000 casualties (Hacker, 2011) – more dead than in all the nation’s previous and subsequent declared wars combined. Out of these “angry tempests” came the ratification of the “Reconstruction Amendments” to the U.S. Constitution, which formally abolished the institution of slavery (except, importantly, in the case of “duly convicted” criminals) (Thirteenth Amendment), established equal protection under the law and due process (Fourteenth), and guaranteed the right to vote (Fifteenth).

It is thus in the immediate aftermath of one of the most significant legal enactments of democratic principles in U.S. history that Whitman (1871) declares democracy’s history remains “unwritten” because it has not been enacted. Democracy is, in Whitman’s vision, an aspirational ideal that, like many other ideals personal and political, cannot be fully realized. It consists not in a teleological orientation towards definite ends, but rather in a set of principles and values that orient action without delineating any predetermined endpoint. It is an ideal in the Deweyan sense of the word, akin to the individual developmental goal of “growth” that orients Dewey’s (1915) theory of education. As pragmatic framework for thought and action, a conceptual tool (or
toolbox) for responding to circumstance intelligently and ethically, of fostering what is best in
the present and for resolving or ameliorating that which is unbearable.

When we understand the aspirational and pragmatic function of democratic ideals, we
apprehend that the realization of democratic ideals is not the same thing as their enactment – nor,
as Whitman supposed, does the lack of the former necessarily signal an absence of the latter.
While democracy in its aspirational interpretation is almost surely unattainable in practice, this
should not obscure the reality that its imperfect realization has had profound and lasting
consequences on American reality. Since Whitman’s time there have been numerous upheavals
and gradual transformations that would surely have been difficult to imagine in his time, even for
one with imaginative capacities such as his – many inspired, justified, and shaped by the
democratic ideal. As political philosopher Elizabeth Anderson (2010, Ch. 5) suggests, the
meaning of this ideal has in turn been inspired, justified, and shaped by its development in
history and its ongoing validation in practices of collective inquiry and action.

These considerations support the assertion that our idea of democracy matters, in the dual
sense that it materializes, is enacted in history, and also that it has consequences that matter, such
that something significant hangs on it. In this dissertation I explore the crisis of democracy as a
fundamentally intellectual and cultural phenomenon, more basically to do with ideas and of
imagination than with the particulars of practice or implementation. As Dewey (1939) wrote in
the second epigraph, we must see that the great threat to democracy is not an external power;
rather, it exists “within our own personal attitudes and within our own institutions,” and that
“The battlefield is accordingly here” (p. 133). The internal threat to democracy has to do with
what exactly we understand (or fail to understand) democracy to be. Dewey recommends that we
intentionally develop the concept of democracy even as we seek to implement it in practice. The
battle, he writes, “can be won only by extending the application of democratic methods … in the task of making our own politics, industry, education, our culture generally, a servant and an evolving manifestation of democratic ideas” (p. 133; emphasis added).

Democracy’s School

Dewey (1939) mentions “politics, industry, education” and “our culture generally” - my present interest, however, is on just education. How has the ideological battle for democracy been fought in the context of American education? To what extent has public schooling in the U.S. served the “evolving manifestation of democratic ideas”? Several years ago senior education scholar John Goodlad (2008) characterized the challenge of renewing and deepening democracy as a “nonnegotiable agenda” (p. 9) for twenty-first century American politics and culture, and for efforts to sustain and improve our public schools. This common agenda is justified on the basis that the well-educated public is a necessary condition for democratic politics and culture. And while he reminds us that a well-educated public is not necessarily a “much-schooled public,” Goodlad (2008) also maintains that, “the only institution in the United States capable of providing this education for everyone is what was once referred to as the common school” (p. 10).

Goodlad’s (2008) view of the essential role that schooling plays in democratic life reflects a common commitment among educators and education scholars to democracy. His assessment that schools are failing in this role – or more accurately, that society is currently failing to support schools in this role – is also widely shared (Goodlad, Soder, & McDaniel, 2008; Shaker & Heilman, 2008; Howe & Meens, 2012). In part due to the broader crisis of democracy described earlier, particularly the growing influence of neoliberal free market-
ideology, support for public institutions has declined in general, not least for public schools (Collins, 2009; Lipman, 2004; Ravitch, 2013).

Goodlad (2008) also suggests that the present crisis is a deviation from historical precedent. He invokes a strong connection between democratic goals and schooling going back to the origins of the common schools in the mid-nineteenth century. Schooling has been shaped throughout its history by democratic ideals (Labaree, 1997; Spring, 2014). Or has it? Partly in response to the second article (chapter 3) of this dissertation, which puts forward arguments in line with Goodlad’s, prominent historian of schooling Larry Cuban (2015) recently posed the question, “Why raise these arguments now, given the historical absence of [democratic] principles and practices in mainstream public schools?”

If Cuban’s (2015) assertion is taken to mean that democratic principles and practices have not been realized in the mainstream public school, this is correct, but only trivially, by definition: of course in its aspirational sense democracy has not been realized in schools any more than it has been (or could be) in other aspects of American life. My sense of Cuban’s remark, however, is that his reading of history denies not only that democratic ideals have been realized but also that they have not meaningfully been enacted. This reading is, in my view, false. In the next section, I argue that not only has public schooling been profoundly shaped by democracy, it has shaped and reshaped democratic ideals in return. Indeed, this relationship has been so important that the concept of democracy today cannot be understood in its fullest sense without an understanding of its relationship to the history of education.

In what follows I draw upon relevant literature to establish the conceptual and historical background necessary for thinking about the relationship between democracy and schooling in the U.S. I begin from some general remarks on the historic tension in American life between
political ideals of democracy and faith in the economic ideals of the *free market*. This tension clarifies the distinctive content of the concept of democracy as it evolved early in U.S. history. It also lays the groundwork for discussion of competing goals for schooling that this basic tension generated. Following the account of social historian and educational scholar David Labaree (1997), I then trace the development of schooling in terms its three major historic goals of *democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility*.

**Literature Review**

For his part, when traveling throughout the U.S. in 1831-2 a young Frenchman named Alexis de Tocqueville managed to encounter democracy almost everywhere. As he later wrote in his classic two volume treatise *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville (1835/1990) was impressed above all by the power of everyday American forms of democratic life and governance, in politics and beyond. Democracy, which Tocqueville defined in terms of a commitment to “equality of [social] condition” amongst citizens, appeared so vibrant that in the opening pages of Volume One of *Democracy in America* he asks,

> Would it, then, be wise to imagine that a social movement the causes of which lie so far back can be checked by the efforts of one generation? Can it be believed that democracy which has overthrown the feudal system and vanquished kings will retreat before tradesmen and capitalists? Will it stop now that it has grown so strong and its adversaries so weak? (1835/1990, p. 6)

In this rhetorical flourish Tocqueville expresses the view, shared by many of his contemporaries, that democracy’s ascendancy as the dominant form of cultural and political life among “civilized” peoples was inexorable, all but certain. Yet he simultaneously signals a theme that recurs throughout *Democracy in America*, namely, that democracy has adversaries – not the
external enemies of “the feudal system and vanquished kings,” who have retreated, but rather the internal ones of “tradesmen and capitalists,” still on the advance.

Tocqueville thus identified in the mid-1830s what Labaree (1997) terms a “basic tension” in American life that goes back to the country’s founding: the conflict between “Jeffersonian political idealism,” centered on the value of democratic equality and rational government, and “Hamiltonian economic realism,” which places a premium on protecting economic liberty (Curti 1935/1959; Labaree, 1997). The history of public schooling has been deeply shaped by this conflict, and especially by the shifting goals for education that it has generated. Labaree (1997) identifies three major goals that have shaped public policy agendas concerning schooling throughout U.S. history. These are democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility.

These three goals are said to diverge in terms of the social perspectives and interests they represent, as well as in whether they conceive of schooling as a primarily public or private benefit. Democratic equality is the goal associated with the perspective and distinctive interests of the citizen. “From a democratic equality approach to schooling,” Labaree (1997) writes, “one argues that a democratic society cannot persist unless it prepares all of its young citizens with equal care to take on the full responsibilities of citizenship in a competent manner” (p. 42). From the citizen perspective, “we all depend on this political competence of our fellow citizens, since we put ourselves at the mercy of their collective judgment about the running of our society” (ibid.). Education is thus conceived as a public good, in that it is necessary to sustain democratic society as a whole. And since, “political equality can be undermined if social inequality grows too great,” the goal of democratic equality also implies that “schools must promote both effective citizenship and relative equality” (ibid.).
Social efficiency is, according to Labaree, the goal associated with the perspective and interests of the taxpayer and employer. This goal is based on the argument that “our economic wellbeing depends on our ability to prepare the young to carry out useful economic roles with competence” (p. 42). It is a “public” good, but in a different sense than democratic equality.\footnote{This is not recognized in Labaree’s (1997) analysis, which treats the public dimension of democratic equality and social efficiency goals as identical. As Feinberg (2012) argues, however, shared economic benefits of the sort promoted by the social efficiency goal are better understood as “neighborhood benefits” that accrue to individuals in terms of their private interests, rather than public goods that accrue to individuals in terms of their equal membership as citizens in a democratic society. The failure to recognize this distinction is reflective of the redefinition of the public good in terms of the logic of the free market.} “The idea is that we all benefit from a healthy economy and from the contribution to such an economy made by our fellow worker” (ibid.). The goal of social efficiency thus implies that schooling should be “designed to prepare workers to fill structurally necessary market roles” (ibid.). Since the good of the overall economy requires differentiation of students for different economic roles, social efficiency conflicts with the goal of democratic equality, which “implies that schooling should foster relative social equality” (ibid.).

The final historic goal for schooling is social mobility. Social mobility is the goal for schooling from the perspective of the individual educational consumer. This approach “argues that education is a commodity, the only purpose of which is to provide individual students with a competitive advantage in the struggle for desirable social positions” (Labaree, p. 42). In this perspective, the benefit provided by schooling is conceived as a private good. In the struggle for social positions, educational advantage is a zero-sum game, in which the “aim is to get more of this valuable commodity than one’s competitors” (ibid.). Thus, like social efficiency, the social mobility goal implies the stratification and unequal distribution of education through schooling.

Due to the conflicting perspectives and interests represented by these three goals, and the competing logics they imply for schooling, the basic tension between economic liberty and political equality in American ideology has played out through the periodic ascendance of one or
more goals and the corollary de-emphasis or exclusion of others within educational policy and practice (Labaree, pp. 58-59). In the next section I discuss the historical evolution, the ascendance and eventual eclipse of public schooling’s “founding” goal, democratic equality.

Democratic Equality and Common Schooling

Democratic equality is in an important sense the founding ideal of public schooling in the U.S. Labaree (1997) notes that, “For the Whig leaders who founded the common schools in the mid-nineteenth century, this political goal [democratic equality] provided the most compelling justification for schooling” (p. 43). It had been proposed by earlier advocates of public schooling such as Thomas Jefferson and Samuel Adams, and later popularized in the writings of Horace Mann. These figures shared the view that even marginally democratic forms of social and political life require education of the entire populace up to at least a minimal level (usually thought to include literacy, numeracy, and key values related to morality and citizenship). As Jefferson memorably put the basic premise, “If a nation hopes to be both ignorant and free, it wants what never was, and what will never be” (Mondale & Patton, 2001a).

This is not to say that it the only educational goal put forward in the years following the nation’s founding. The earliest appeals concerning schooling focused as much on the imperative of nation building than on explicitly democratic ideals. In the wake of the colonial American war of independence from Britain, schooling was seen by some as the key instrument of building a new national culture – in the words of Noah Webster, author of the widely used “Blueback Speller” (1783), forerunner to his American Dictionary of the English Language: “For America in her infancy to adopt the maxims of the Old World would be to stamp the wrinkles of old age on the bloom of youth. Begin with the infant in his cradle. Let the first word on his lips be Washington” (Mondale & Patton, 2001b, p. 22).
Such support for public schools as a nation-building instrument would remain influential well into the twentieth century, occasionally exerting dominance in periods when “Americanization” of waves of European and, eventually, non-European immigrants was believed to be essential for ensuring the stability of existing social arrangements and institutions. Mass schooling as an instrument of nationalism is not necessarily connected to democratic ideals. Webster’s chauvinist counterparts in other times and places have wished for other first words on the infant’s lips, “Hitler,” or “Pinochet” rather than “Washington.”

In the U.S., however, nationalist political agendas and the goal of democratic equality became closely linked. In part, this was a matter of getting and then wanting to keep a certain reputation. In a view popular with Americans and many Europeans, the distinctive “maxims of the Old World” (to recall Webster’s phrase) were those legitimating social and political inequality, and that these ideas were related to cultural decadence and decay. By the same token, the alleged role in American life played by the ideal of democratic equality came to be associated with, even to define, the “bloom of youth”: an enlivening force at the heart of a new order that, at least in the view of some had the potential to revive Western culture and remake it for the better (Tocqueville, 1835/1990).

As the international reputation of American democracy grew throughout the early- and mid-nineteenth century, so did the domestic franchise. By 1840 property qualifications for voting had been eliminated in all but three states. Despite the official disenfranchisement of African Americans in all but five states and of women everywhere, the elimination of such qualifications meant that nearly all white male adults were now eligible to vote. As a result, political parties had grown significantly more organized, centralized, and influential during this period, and partisan newspapers and grassroots organizations proliferated and flourished. Electoral
committees organized in nearly every school district and urban ward engaged in campaigns that led to unprecedented voter turnout rates of 80-90% (Huston, 2015).

The expansion of formal political participation to members of non-elite social classes proved decisive for the establishment of U.S. public school. This was not, as one might expect, simply because the new voters were supporters of the common school idea en masse. Rather, resistance to the idea shifted within the political class as elites became fearful of what the uneducated masses would do with their new political power. During this period Mann (1848/1957) wrote, echoing Jefferson, that “It may be an easy thing to make a Republic, but it is a very laborious thing to make Republicans” (p. 92). Mann continues with what his contemporaries would likely interpret as a warning about the changing character of American democracy at the time: “and woe to the republic that rests upon no better foundations than ignorance, selfishness, and passion” (p. 92; cited in Labaree, p. 44). The extension of political rights to members of lower social classes presumed to be largely ignorant, selfish, and passionate heightened anxieties regarding the feasibility of popular self-governance. Mann’s warnings (“woe to the republic”) thus gained willing elite as well as popular support for taxpayer-funded schools, and common schools became established throughout the nation for the express purpose of making “good” democratic citizens.

Thus, the dominant interpretation of the democratic equality goal at this time was manifestly what Labaree terms citizenship training (Labaree, p. 44). A serious defect in this interpretation proved, over time, to be its usefulness in reinforcing status quo “democratic” practice at a given time. Such practices have tended to represent dominant values and interests associated with privileged social groups, while discounting those of non-dominant groups as signs of defective citizenship to be stamped out and replaced. Democratic equality in this
The interpretation of democratic equality has been invoked to justify unjust and unequal treatment – for example, the aforementioned “Americanization” efforts of the early-twentieth century, which placed an unequal educational burden on immigrant and minority children, and the intentional use of schooling to destroy the cultures of colonized indigenous peoples – e.g. in the Philippines under U.S. rule and in Native American boarding schools established by the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the late-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century.

Alongside this tragic legacy, however, the citizenship training interpretation of democratic equality also contained the seeds of a counter-legacy. Had the goal of citizenship training not tapped into elite fears of the newly enfranchised citizenry, the common school idea may have remained just that, as it is unclear how or even if a system of tuition-free schools open to all on what are (at least in theory) equal terms would have taken shape. The establishment of common schools in turn introduced contradictions between the aspirational rhetoric that initially justified their creation and their actual practice. Out of this contradiction between ideal and reality two other interpretations of the democratic equality goal emerged – equal treatment and equal access – that subsequently exerted tremendous influence on the history of schooling and on the American understanding of democracy (Labaree, pp. 45-46).

The interpretation of democratic equality as equal treatment was present alongside citizenship training in the early common school movement. It was promoted through efforts to achieve universal enrollment, uniform curricula, and shared educational experience (Katz, 1987; Katzenelson & Weir, 1985). Mann (1848/1957) touted it as a remedy to the inter-class hostilities arising from extreme social inequality, of “the domination of capital and the servility of labor” (p. 86). Universal education based on equal treatment would serve, in Mann’s famous phrase, as “the balance-wheel of the social machinery” (p. 87). Mann argued that this balancing would
occur in two directions at once: Firstly, it would reduce economic and social inequality through abolition of educational stratification between and within schools, and secondly, it would create identification with the system and a shared perception of its fairness.

From early on, the equal treatment interpretation inspired criticisms of common school practice as undemocratic. The “Great School Wars” of the 1950s in New York City, for example, centered on the complaints of Catholics – mostly ethnic Italians and Irish, many of whom were recent immigrants – that the common school curriculum and pedagogy were biased towards Protestant religion while actively demonized Catholic groups and their religious beliefs and practices. Catholic parents and clergymen argued that equal treatment required that schooling should recognize and honor the differences between students and families. When their demand that a portion of the common school fund be used to support Catholic-based schools for Catholic children was denied, however, this led to the creation of the first and what remains the most important system of private schools in the U.S. (Mondale & Patton, 2001a).

This example demonstrates the way that the goal of citizenship training, based on the idea that students should learn together in order to become member of a unified democratic society, could be at odds with the goal of equal treatment under actual social conditions. The ideal of equal treatment dramatized existing inequalities in schooling and society more broadly. When attempts to transform these inequalities were not realized, this instigated an exit from the public system by members of non-dominant groups (in the example above, Catholics) who were able to leave. This effectively meant the end of the “common school” idea in the very specific sense it had for Mann and other advocates of a unitary institution where all children would come together to be formed into the American public. Public schools were now in principle one option
amongst others, and the goal of equal treatment. Importantly, it was the interpretation of
democratic equality as equal treatment which fueled, even required this fracture.

This conflict also led, however, to a transformation of the “common” content of the
public school. In the aftermath of the Great School Wars, school administrators throughout New
York City reportedly were instructed to take razor blades to textbooks in order to remove
passages deemed offensive to Catholics (Mondale & Patton, 2001a). In the years that followed,
the “recurring demand for equal treatment has removed the Protestant bible, public prayer, and
other divisive religious practices from the public schools” (Labaree, 1997, p. 45).

Thus, the equal treatment interpretation of the goal of democratic equality opened space
for debate over issues of systemic exclusion (the omitting of relevant knowledge and practices)
and systemic inclusion (the presence of derogatory or prejudicial information and attitudes) of
non-dominant students and their communities in school curricula (Johnson, 1990). Such debates
have led over time to numerous changes in schooling, sometimes superficial, sometime more
substantive, depending largely on the political power of the aggrieved groups. Equal treatment is
credited with motivating movements in the twentieth century that achieved the formal
desegregation of schools, efforts to eliminate racialized and gendered stereotypes from
textbooks, to represent the experiences of non-White students and females in the curriculum, and
to reduce discriminatory teaching practices (Labaree, 1997).

Related to the goal of equal treatment is that of equal access. In the view of some
scholars, this is the interpretation that has exerted the greatest influence on the development of
American schools (Cohen & Neufeld, 1981; Labaree). It “has come to mean that every American
should have an equal opportunity to acquire an education at any educational level” (p. 46). At a
minimum this goal entails a prohibition against the creation or maintenance of barriers to entry that would deny students access on equal terms.

The power of the equal access interpretation of democratic equality can be seen in the dramatic expansion and transformation of public schooling from its creation up through the present. The case for this claim is essentially numerical. In the common school era (mid-1800s), democratic equality as equal access motivated reformers “to provide enough schools so that every child could have a seat in an elementary classroom at public expense” (Labaree, 1997, p. 46). By the end of the nineteenth century that focus began to shift upwards towards high school access, and the effect was dramatic. As Labaree writes, “What had been a tiny sector of public education, enjoyed primarily by the elite, grew rapidly into a mass system of secondary schooling” (p. 46) and remarkably, high school enrollments doubled every decade between 1890 and 1940. This created the conditions for greater access to higher education, which saw a massive expansion of enrollments following the Second World War. By the late-twentieth century postsecondary education that was once available to an elite minority has been normalized for a majority of Americans.

While the ideal of the equal access radically transformed the scale and structure of schooling through the extent to which it has been achieved in practice, it contributed most to dramatically to the evolution of democratic ideas through its being denied. In the late-1840s, even as African Americans were officially denied a full range of civil, political, and social rights, and equal protection under the law, due process, and voting rights were not yet guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution (Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments) the newly established common school system created opportunities to challenge exclusionary practices on democratic equality terms.
Five-year-old Sarah Roberts had attempted to enroll in several of the all-white neighborhood schools that she passed each day on her way to the underfunded, all-black common school to which she was assigned by Boston’s school authorities. After being denied admission at all, and in one case physically ejected from the premises, Sarah’s father Robert initiated a lawsuit in 1849 against the city’s school authority, on the grounds that his daughter’s rights under the Massachusetts state constitution were violated by the discriminatory practice of exclusion from segregated common schools – schools that African American parents were taxed to support. The case, decided by the Massachusetts Supreme Court as Roberts v. City of Boston (1850), provides a particularly illuminating example of how the evolution of democratic ideals has been advanced through debates over public schooling. Lead counsel for the plaintiff Charles Sumner’s (1849) arguments in that and subsequent cases uncovered and articulated a deeper coherence within apparently competing interpretations of the goal of democratic equality (Anderson, 2010).

One line of argument put forward by Sumner (1849) is that racial isolation in segregated schools harmed the interests of individual black children and of African Americans as a class. This is because both equal access and equal treatment are to be understood, in his view, to be signs of equal citizenship. To be denied equal access or treatment is therefore to have one’s standing as an equal citizen explicitly denied. When the agency denying equal citizenship is the State, this is particularly injurious. This is why Sumner argues that segregation of public facilities is “an indignity to the colored race, instinct with the spirit of slavery” (1872, p. 383). As Anderson (2010) interprets Sumner’s claim, segregation thus “inflicts an expressive injury on blacks, making them an untouchable caste, which is incompatible with recognizing them as equal citizens” (p. 92).
Already, there is an important innovation in Sumner’s interpretation of democratic equality as \textit{equal treatment} as well as \textit{equal access}. Sumner asserts that the expressive injury done to blacks in denying them access to segregated schools is an injury precisely because it teaches lessons contrary to their own status as equal citizens. Equal treatment and equal access are, as signs of civic equality, integral lessons in training for citizenship; they function pedagogically, and can be educative or miseducative, depending on the quality and correctness of the lesson.

This is also why Sumner argues that both black \textit{and} white children are harmed by segregation, albeit in different ways. Obviously segregated schools fail to provide students of both racial groups with necessary opportunities to learn lessons of citizenship that come with understanding and identifying with others across social differences, and one might say that it fails these students equally. Beyond this negative failing, the exclusion of black students from the white common school also teaches its \textit{positive} lessons in inequality to white students; being “nursed in the sentiments of Caste…their characters are debased, and they become less fit for the duties of citizenship” (quoted in Anderson, 2010, p. 93).

White children in segregated schools are denied their right to training for citizenship because equal citizenship is defined by mutual recognition. In Sumner’s argument, training for equal citizenship, equal access to public institutions, and equal treatment in them, are revealed as profoundly interrelated, such that the meaning of each depends on the meaning of the others. Crucially, if any of these values are denied to a segment of the democratic community, then this means that democratic equality is thereby denied to all. In the perspective of the citizen, democratic equality is not a zero-sum game. Quite the contrary, denying democratic equality to others by the same token denies it to oneself.
In deciding *Roberts v. Boston* (1850), the court ruled against the plaintiff, rejecting Sumner’s arguments. The court asserted a different interpretation of equality – the right to school, yes, but to school understood as an *individual* good, not as the shared, the public good of the right of equal citizens to a school *in common*. In effect, the court ruled, the question of equal treatment is not connected to equal access, and neither is relevant to training for citizenship. If Sumner gave birth the first full articulation of the deeper unity of American democratic equality, the Massachusetts Supreme Court promptly took that articulation and dismembered it.

Sumner’s continual efforts to assert the internal coherence of democratic ideals in the coming decades – e.g., in his role as a U.S. senator – were unsuccessful, by and large (Anderson, pp. 94-95). After several failed attempts, his Civil Rights Bill which guaranteed blacks social rights, “by prohibiting discrimination and segregation in public accommodations” (Anderson, p. 91), was passed into law in 1875 only to be struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court, ironically on the grounds that it exceeded the authority granted Congress by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. When the Supreme Court later upheld legal segregation and famously established the “separate but equal” standard in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) it cited the Massachusetts Supreme Courts decision in *Roberts v. Boston* (1850). Segregation of human beings continued, facilitated and justified by the segregation of the elements of the ideal of democratic equality.

To sum up, in what has preceded I have developed a philosophical interpretation of the history of democratic ideals as they have evolved and shaped public schooling. The *experimental* and *evolutionary* nature of the goal of democratic equality is manifest in various ways that in each of its major interpretations it went wrong, i.e., led to unintended, unforeseen, or simply unacceptable outcomes. Interpreted as *training for citizenship*, the goal of equality in some cases justified use of the common school an instrument for the destruction of communities and their
cultures. The interpretation of *equal treatment* provided the possibility of a corrective to the latter’s assimilationist abuses, e.g. in the case of the New York school wars, in which the ideal of equal treatment provided grounds on which to challenge the status quo. A consequence of this, however, was that lack of equal treatment led to exit from the system and the creation of a separate, parallel system, rendering the common school less common and thereby undermining the goal of citizenship training.

The tension between these interpretations of the goal of democratic equality is still with us today, e.g. in the legacy of Native American survival schools (Davis, 2013) and debates over segregated charter schools as potential counter-publics (Wilson, 2012; 2014). The development of democratic ideals has been advanced most productively when tensions between alternative interpretations have been overcome not through the prioritizing of one or the other, but through the articulation of a deeper unity that reveals conceptual interdependence. The apparent contradiction between the interpretation of democratic equality as citizenship training and as equal treatment just discussed provides a valuable case in point.

By the mid-twentieth century, however, the more expansive interpretation of democratic equality linking effective citizenship, equal access, and equal treatment, helped to inspire mass action campaigns of the civil rights movement and influenced the social and policy transformation that followed. Once again, the goal of democratic equality in schooling provided the impetus (in close connection, as I discuss further below, with the goal of social motility). In its *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision the Supreme Court overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* and declared that “separate is inherently unequal.” In putting democratic equality back together again, the Court partly relied upon Sumner’s arguments on behalf of Sarah Roberts a little more than a century before.
As acceptance of this more integrated interpretation of democratic equality grew in the wider society during this period, it transformed practice within the public schools. While still markedly *compensatory* in emphasis (Howe, 1993; 1997), emphasizing providing extra support for the “underprivileged,” over the next two decades schools began to shift away from practices aimed at assimilating students to the dominant white Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture to a more pluralistic and participatory conception (Howe, 1993; 1997).

It was probably at the end of the 1970s that the integration of the ideal of democratic equality with the practice of public schooling reached its historical zenith. Public schools were educating a greater proportion of the school-aged population than at any previous time in U.S. history, including low-income, non-English speaking, and differently-abled children (Patton & Mondale, 2001a). At the same time, gaps in educational achievement between racial groups had been diminishing for at least a full decade, perhaps two. This was not because relatively advantaged students were doing worse, but because the achievement of poor and minority children was consistently improving (Glass, 2008; Kirp, 2012).

The dominance of democratic equality in school policy and practice was, however, about to be eclipsed. Presidential election of 1980 was a watershed moment that brought a long-simmering conservative backlash to national prominence and power. The political and ideological realignment that became known as the Reagan Revolution managed, in a remarkably short time period, to dissolve public confidence in what was by then a decades-old paradigm in education law and policy built upon goals of achieving equal citizenship, equal access, and equal treatment – what political scientist Patrick McGuinn (2006) has christened *the equity regime*. Dissolving the laws, policies, and programs this regime had built would take a bit longer.
In the final section of this literature review, I briefly recount the historical development of social efficiency and social mobility goals within American schooling, in order to better frame the eclipse of democratic equality in historical terms. While their history demonstrates that neither of these goals is necessarily incompatible with to the goal of democratic equality, in the latter part of the twentieth century they were both incorporated within the framework of a new accountability regime (McGuinn) informed by neoliberal ideology and based on the imperatives of Smithian efficiency. The synthesis of social efficiency and social mobility under the rubric of Smithian efficiency represents, I argue, a decisive victory of Hamiltonian economic realism over Jeffersonian political idealism and a fundamental shift in the history of both public schooling and American democracy.

The Era of Smithian Efficiency

The goal of social efficiency is the centerpiece of a landmark document in the eclipse of democratic equality in U.S. public school policy and practice, A Nation at Risk. Commissioned by the Reagan administration and released in 1983, the report declared, “Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5). The collective dimension of the alleged threat is clear: the Nation is at risk. This is explained in terms of due to the failure of schools to prepare workers effectively: “We report to the American people...the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that our threatens very future as a nation and a people” (ibid.).

The goal of achieving social efficiency goes back to the earliest proposals for a system of public education, appearing e.g. in Jefferson’s late eighteenth century proposal for “the more
general diffusion of knowledge.” In Jefferson’s view, social efficiency is necessary to successful democracy as a *compliment* to citizenship training. This is because, whereas basic education is necessary to create a literate public capable of political participation, another primary function of schooling should be to identify and separate out the most talented individual students for further education at public expense. The goal of this social stratification was not, however, to improve the economy but in order to more effectively prepare the most talented citizens for roles of political leadership (Mondale & Patton, 2001a), and should occur against the background conditions of relative social and economic equality, such that democratic elites could be held accountable by an empowered public.

The goal of differentially educating and credentialing the populace such that individuals can fill existing or anticipated niches in cultural, political, and economic systems—through access to employment, formal offices, and positions of wealth, influence, and power more generally—later came to dominate education policy across the U.S. from at least the early 1920s, when it was championed by a group of reformers that became known as the *administrative progressives*.

Although the administrative progressives’ commitment to social efficiency was in some cases explicitly anti-democratic (Mondale & Patton, 2001a; Tyack, 1974), it remained an essentially political (rather than economic) ideal having to do with the distribution of power. Theirs was a vision in which the new science of psychometrics, especially IQ testing, was believed to hold utopian potential for the rational reorganization of society. An updated version of aristocracy or “rule by the best,” with the “best” understood to be those with high IQs. While the utopian political designs that motivated their vision of social efficiency have faded, the legacies of testing and curriculum tracking bequeathed by the administrative progressives remain
profoundly up to the present. Social efficiency as just described is best understood as the political goal for schooling that corresponds to what might be described (uncharitably, but also accurately) as the perspective of the self-appointed technocratic social engineer.

The later interpretation of social efficiency as an economic goal corresponding to the “perspective of the taxpayer” (Labaree, p. 46) became possible because of the growing influence of the eighteenth century economic and social theory of Adam Smith. I take Smith’s theory and its legacy to have two key features that are relevant to understand the recent history of public schooling. The first is productivity through increasing division of labor and the second is growth through pursuit of individual self-interest. I will take each of these in turn, connecting it with its precedents in

In his book The Wealth of Nations, Smith (1776/2000) argued that the productivity of the capitalist economy depends upon an ever-increasing refinement and differentiation of the division of labor. Smith accordingly proposed a “practical” form for schooling – i.e., the provision of the minimum of instruction necessary to prepare students to enter the world of economic production (p. 838). This taking root of the idea of an economically “practical” goal for schooling had begun to exert some influence on the structure of schooling from about the 1890s in the movement that became known as vocationalism. This was the first education reform movement that sought to change the basic aims of American schooling, making education more oriented to the world of work. Vocationalists sought to move public schools away from both the classical humanist tradition, which they characterized as “education for its own sake” (Labaree, p. 47), and also from the democratic equality goal of “training students to be citizens in a democratic society, perhaps to be president” (ibid.).
The late-twentieth century era of increasingly global economic competition was unanticipated by Smith himself, who postulated that both labor and capital tend to remain within national and local contexts, as entrepreneurs will for efficiency reasons always prefer “the domestic to the foreign trade” (484-485). Smith appears to have been incorrect on this point, to put it mildly. When adjusted for the context of neoliberal globalization, Smithian efficiency spells extremely bad news for the ideal of democracy that motivated the creation of the common school. This is because the principle that economic efficiency depends upon ever-increasing specialization means that any country pursuing democratic equality goals of universal general education and the equal treatment of students will thereby become less competitive. As Phillip Kitcher (2009) argues, “The economic basis of [democratic] systems of education will be undercut: Nations will have to go Smithian to compete” (p. 312).

The alarmist rhetoric of A Nation at Risk can be interpreted as a reflection of this dilemma. The report did not, however, call explicitly for the abandonment of democratic goals in education. Such a proposal would of course have been politically anathema in the American context. As Labaree (1997) notes, “Even the authors of... A Nation at Risk...felt compelled to stress that, ‘A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to fostering a common culture’ (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 7)” (p. 44; emphasis added). In light of the substantial meanings of democratic equality that evolved throughout the history U.S. and which I discussed above, this is mere lip service.

But it is unlikely, even absent such political considerations, that the authors of the report would have proposed social planning of the sort that had influenced education so thoroughly from the 1920s up until the resurgence of democratic equality in the mid-1950s. This is because they embrace the second key element of Smithian efficiency, the principle of economic growth...
through pursuit of individual self-interest, as wholeheartedly as they do the first. Here, my analysis of Smithian efficiency departs from that offered by Kitcher (2009), who emphasizes the elements of specialization and international competition exclusively. This is a significant blind-spot, as I shall now argue, since understanding the influence of Smithian efficiency in the U.S. and its consequences hangs upon this point.

Smith argued that while it is specialization that enables increased economic production, the ultimate engine of growth is the pursuit by individuals of their own self-interest. As in the case of nations, under conditions of free competition individuals benefit from the development of competitive advantage. Hence, under such conditions the pursuit of self-interest includes the desire for specialization among workers. The neoliberal ideology that emerged after the Second World War is thoroughly Smithian in this sense, asserting the principle that individual competition leads to a more “rational” allocation of resources and so to greater overall efficiency than careful social planning of the sort advocated by the administrative progressives. This rational allocation absent a technocratic social planner is captured in Smith’s (1776/2000) famous metaphor of “the invisible hand” (pp. 484-485).

Smithian efficiency thus combines the essential elements of social efficiency with those of social mobility. Recall that Labaree (1997) characterizes this historic goal for schooling as emerging from the perspective and interests of the “consumer” of educational goods. Educational attainment, in this perspective, serves the individual’s self-interest by providing access to social positions along with the scarce material and cultural resources that these bring. Schooling is thus conceived as a private good and as positional in that it is a zero-sum game (having more requires that others have less). Educational consumers (or, more typically, their parents) support policies of stratification and differentiation. This is not because they, like the worker or taxpayer see
education as an investment in overall efficiency; rather, from the perspective of the individual consumer, stratification of opportunities “offers each child a chance to become clearly distinguished from his or her fellow students” (Labaree, p. 53).

The characterization of social mobility as an exclusively economic goal in the history of schooling is, however, overly simplistic and misleading. As with social efficiency in Jefferson’s scheme, social mobility was closely wedded to democratic equality in Horace Mann’s arguments for the common school, primarily through his emphasis on equal treatment. Not exclusively the province of the consumer, opportunities for upward mobility may be a legitimate goal from the perspective of the citizen, insofar as equal treatment serves as the sign of equal citizenship. Access to exclusive avenues for upward mobility has been a primary objective of the equal access interpretation of democratic equality, as well, and provided one of the main arguments for desegregation efforts in the 1950s up through the 1970s.

It is for these reasons that the social mobility goal has historically been allied in a “coalition” with democratic equality against social efficiency (Labaree, p. 61), especially during the common school period and a century later under the equity regime. In Labaree’s (1997) terms, “The successes scored by this coalition have been extraordinary” (ibid.), including growing enrollments at every level of education, the “largely effective” attack on de jure segregation, efforts to enhance opportunities and end exclusion of women, to provide access for the differently-abled, “explosion” in the number of educational courses, programs, and institutional choices offered to students. The most important and long lasting effect of this alliance, in Labaree’s view, is the pervasive meritocratic conception of equal opportunity, which allocates “status...because of credentials rather than on ascribed characteristics” (p. 62-63).
One interpretation of the eclipse of the equity regime in educational policy in the early-1980s is the shifting allegiance of the goal of social mobility from its coalition with democratic equality to a new partnership with social efficiency. This was made possible by the growing influence of neoliberalism from the post-WWII period until it gained political power in the Reagan Revolution (Harvey, 2005; Saltmann, 200?). It is only because *A Nation at Risk* is a thoroughly Smithian document that it can assert both that schools are not preparing workers for the appropriate niches to make the U.S. economy competitive globally (a social efficiency complaint) and that this is a result of a “rising tide of mediocrity” and “low educational standards” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5) (which invoke social mobility). In today’s neoliberal political context, Smithian efficiency has gained hegemonic (meaning: common sense) status, and has realigned not only the goals of education but the interests and social perspectives that those have represented.

I draw three conclusions from the narrative above: First, democratic equality has been a profound force in the shaping of American beliefs and practices related to public school. Second, democracy has been essentially “kicked to the curb” in educational policy due to the fusing of social efficiency and social mobility within the framework of Smithian efficiency. Above all, it is democracy that has been left behind.

I also interpret the history and concepts surveyed in this literature review as demonstrating that ideas and their expression matter a great deal. The fact that the imperatives of Smithian efficiency so thoroughly dominate contemporary schooling must serve as the starting point for any efforts to influence educational policy and practice, at least if these are to be at all realistic. It is also clear that the fullest articulations of the ideal of democratic equality achieved so far in U.S. history have unrealized implications and, due to their deep roots in American
culture and especially in education, still hold tremendous promise. What does it look like to challenge the hegemony of Smithian efficiency and to reassert democratic equality? What are the best resources available for advancing this within the context of educational policy, practice, and research? In the next two sections I offer answers to these questions that “begin at home,” within first within the domain of educational philosophy and political theory (Conceptual Framework), then in educational research more broadly (From Political Theory to Educational Research: A Note on Method).

Conceptual Framework

In this section my goal is to outline and justify the overarching conceptual framework that I deploy and develop further in each of the subsequent chapters. Engaging with formal democratic theory requires a “To discuss democracy,” Peter Dahlgren (2009) notes, “requires some conceptual ground-clearing” (p. 80). I begin by briefly recounting the history of the development and contestation of democratic ideas within the academy, a history distinct from but closely related to the story of competing educational related in the previous section. The basic concerns and the historical perspective developed in the background and literature review sections above establish the parameters for evaluation of competing theories of democracy, and the latter provide the tools necessary for explicitly formalizing the ideological competition between Deweyan democracy and Smithian efficiency.

Contemporary Democratic Theory: A Brief Pre-History

Formal democratic theory has its roots in the ancient world, specifically in Athens (Woodrow, 2005). Athenian democracy was a markedly practical experiment in self-governance. While its ideological underpinnings are somewhat discernable through extant oratory and history recorded by its coevals, the Athenian experience did not bequeath anything later thinkers would
recognize as political theory. The absence of a cogent, formal articulation of Athenian
democratic ideals is no doubt partly to blame for the overwhelming influence of Plato’s negative
assessment of democracy on thinkers in the Western intellectual from his time up until the
modern period. In the period of the European Enlightenment, religious thinkers associated with
the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation and secular philosophers alike
emphasized principles of “natural equality” and the rational authority of ordinary “citizen
wisdom” – beginning, perhaps more as a byproduct than an intentional goal, to rehabilitate a
theoretical basis for democracy.

The liberalism that emerged in the Enlightenment period thus has common roots with the
revival of democracy as an intellectually defensible proposition. While some key figures
contributed to the development of both traditions – e.g., Rousseau and J. S. Mill - the two
traditions are not identical; nor, as I discuss in greater detail below, are the two necessarily allied.
At this point the story of modern democratic theory intersects with that of the evolving
republican ideals of the American political experiment. Reflecting in Democracy in America
upon his experiences throughout the U.S., Tocqueville (1835/1990) complained of what he
perceived to be a distinctly “anti-philosophical” (read: anti-theoretical) bent to American culture.
In this one respect, at least, the “Old World” seemed to have an advantage over the new.
Tocqueville also felt that, well-schooled as he had been in Enlightenment Liberalism, European-
grown political theory provided little that was serviceable as he endeavored to interpret the
democratic phenomena he encountered in the U.S.

Tocqueville viewed this dearth of intellectual resources – from Europe, because of its
congenital aversion to and lack of experience with democracy, from the U.S., because of its
congenital aversion to and lack of experience with philosophy – as the most fundamental threat
to the survival and advancement of democracy in America. In order to reinforce democratic beliefs and values and to countervail those of encroaching free market ideology, therefore, Tocqueville (1835/1990) called for the creation of a “new science of politics for a new world” (p. 7), that would “educate democracy” by shaping the democratic citizen and society’s attitudes, actions, and beliefs, “to adapt its government to time and place, and modify it according to men and conditions” (ibid.).

How plausible is this claim that the future of democracy depends upon the development of a science – or, as I prefer, theory – of politics focused on democracy and education? The aspirational and pragmatic conception of theory that I delineated in the literature review section of this chapter lends, in my view, supports for qualified answer in the affirmative. Ideals are tools that, ideally, enable us to successfully navigate the complexities of ever-changing circumstances. “Successfully” here means that our actions are such that they preserve and promote what in our individual and collective experience we value most, and avoid or diminish what is undesirable. Without theory (whether in its academic or more “organic” flavors) we confront circumstances that require choice without the resources necessary to render the likely consequences of different courses of action intelligible in terms of competing values and interests. This is precisely situation that Tocqueville (1835/1990) believed the American populace is disposed to find itself due to its anti-theoretical tendencies. Decisions and actions taken by such a populace may be democratic and yet compromise and erode democracy slowly by degrees. Without a coherent and functional theory to inform judgment, many such decisions and actions are indistinguishable from those that sustain and promote – always partially and always imperfectly –democratic ideals in non-ideal reality of our world. While democratic theory
is certainly not sufficient for democracy, it is nevertheless necessary, especially in the long run as the consequences of decisions and actions accumulate and are compounded.

Between Tocqueville’s day and our own there has indeed developed a “new science of politics” concerned centrally with issues of democratic culture and governance. It is the basis of undergraduate- and graduate-level courses in numerous departments such as political science and philosophy, human communication and media studies, sociology, women and gender studies, and education, to name just a few. Democratic theory provides the theme of countless scholarly articles and books. It inspires conferences, working groups, and sub-committees within many professional associations. And as scholarship in democratic theory has grown so has the variety of its manifestations, its menu of available “flavors.” Indeed, in the context of today’s academic discourse the word “democracy” conveys very little without the help of a modifier: Liberal, pluralist, participatory, aggregative, or deliberative are considered a few of the more standard options; alternatively, some more idiosyncratic varieties would be strong, weak, radical, ordinary, agonistic, or experimental.

It seems Tocqueville would be pleased, if he were somehow able to see how his call has been answered. Then again, he might not. For while this “new science of politics” has in some of its forms sustained and promoted what Tocqueville valued about democracy, in others it has done as much to threaten it.

On the one hand, democratic theory has been develop along a Tocquevillean trajectory. This tradition has its fullest expression, in my judgment, in the works of philosopher John Dewey, whose most important contributions span the first half of the twentieth century. This tradition gained new prominence in the 1960s when it was reiterated and relabeled participatory democracy, a version that continues on today (della Porta, 2013). From the 1980s on, Dewey’s
conception of democracy was merged with that of German critical theorist Jurgen Habermas, for better and worse, under the title *deliberative democracy*. Given the currency of both terms, and difference in emphasis that they bring to the Deweyan tradition, I refer to this strand of theory as *participatory-deliberative democracy*.

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On the other hand, another brand of theory has emerged, odd as it may seem, along a trajectory that extends elements of the early-modern liberal tradition that were markedly unfriendly to the first “wave” of democracy’s modern resurgence (from, roughly, the last decade of the 1700s up to the mid-1920s; see Huntington, 1991). This strand of liberalism maintained certain ancient and medieval aristocratic assumptions, although it recast these in terms of the relatively new and very modern experimental sciences. True to Tocqueville’s caricature, Europe provided a more natural context for the development this strand of liberalism – e.g. in the *positivism* of the Auguste Comte, the founder of the academic discipline of sociology in early- to mid-nineteenth century France. By the 1920s, however, it had most definitely “jumped the pond,” as it was central to legitimating the technocratic elitism of the administrative progressives in the U.S.

Some of the administrative progressives, like Comte before them, were explicitly anti-democratic, a stance that does not seem to have occurred to them as being at odds with their
professed liberalism. In the mid-twentieth century and especially after the Second World War, the anti-democratic strain of liberalism seemed to abandon its struggle against democracy and become, more or less over night, one of its most ardent advocates. From the perspective of the Deweyan tradition, the price paid for the twentieth-century rapprochement between anti-democratic liberalism was the loss democracy’s soul. This is because what it achieved was not a synthesis so much as conceptual or terminological capture. The liberal democracy that gained dominance as a consequence has its emphasis distinctly on liberal rather than on democracy – the latter is the modifier, being conceptually subservient to the former. It is distinguished by its minimalism and its elitism, and it remains in some academic quarters the prevailing mode of democratic theory.

Another version of democratic theory emerged under the strong (but not exclusive) influence of Smithian economic theory, adopting most importantly its conception of human nature and the related idea that market arrangements are the most effective and efficient for organizing social activity. Aggregative democracy is distinguished by its commitment to emotivism and interpretation of politics in terms of a market metaphor. In the next section I will argue that one of the two basic alternatives in contemporary democratic theory combines the anti-democratic version of liberalism with the version based on aggregative theory. I term this brand liberal-aggregative democracy.

Liberal-Aggregative Democracy: Elitism, Efficiency, the Market

Liberal-aggregative theories share a skepticism concerning participatory governance and related institutional structures. Liberal theory is distinguished by its minimalism and its elitism. For its part, aggregative theory stands apart in its emotivism and the metaphor of politics as a market. The increasingly global influence of neoliberal ideology from approximately the mid-
twentieth century (Harvey, 2005) has contributed to the growing dominance of liberal-aggregative democracy in both education policy and research, especially since the early 1980s (Howe and Meens, 2012).

The liberalism in question was influenced most fundamentally by Adam Smith’s book *The Wealth of Nations* and was later popularized by J. S. Mill in *On Liberty*. Both of these figures represent the complex relationship in Enlightenment-era rationalist humanism between democracy and liberalism – or, more accurately, between democratic and anti-democratic liberalisms. Mill’s (1861/2002) *Considerations on Representative Government* reads much closer to Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* than to Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, such that some scholars today read Mill as a proto-Deweyan (Kitcher, 2009; Skorupski, 2006). A similar reading of Smith (1759/2011) himself is possible if one sticks to his earlier book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. It was the anti-democratic interpretation of each that won out in mid-twentieth century appropriations of their work - Mills’ utilitarian ethics, Smith’s later theory of human behavior (rational self-interest) and capitalist economic structure (division of labor and competitive advantage).

The much-lauded rise of liberal-democratic regimes around the globe during the twentieth century presumes a definition of democracy as constituted by criteria of universal suffrage and relatively frequent and relatively free and fair elections (Dahl, 1971; della Porta, 2013, pp. 13-16). Most definitions of democratic government along these lines also include some constitutional guarantees of individual liberties – perhaps most frequently the rights to property, association, and speech. According to political scientist Donatella della Porta (2013), liberal democracy is thus *minimalist*, meaning it identifies democratic governance with institutions and
formal procedures, remaining for the most part agnostic as to the quality of participation or engagement these facilitate.

David Held (1997) summarizes the classical liberal conception in a way that highlights its connection with the principles of Smithian economic theory: “democracy is a logical necessary requirement for the direction of a society … in which individuals with enlightened desires constitute a mass of consumers whose aim is to obtain the maximum of private satisfaction” (p. 140; emphasis added).

Democratic politics is defined in aggregative theory as a “competition amongst candidate-representatives for the people’s vote” (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, p. 14). Smith postulated that when individuals are allowed the unfettered pursuit of their self-interests through mechanisms of the free market, this would lead to optimal efficiency in the overall system and, as a consequence, maximize the value enjoyed by the society and each of its members.

The Smithian premise that individual desires are on average “enlightened” proved the weakest link in this formulation of liberalism. As Kitcher (2009) notes in his reading of Mill, “In societies with an extreme division of labor, as well as stratification by socioeconomic class, there’s likely to be a myopia in public decision-making: citizens cannot understand the needs and concerns of their fellows, and cannot even fathom their own interests” (p. 303). As a result, “A crucial argument for the superiority of laissez-fair capitalism loses its cogency because a fundamental premise becomes dubious: we may no longer trust that individual citizens are the best judges of the impact of proposed courses of action in their own lives” (p. 303).

The Deweyan response to this failing of individualistic liberalism, as we shall see below, is creation of a genuine public through education and deliberation. For anti-democratic liberals, the response was a more definitely elitist posture. Increasingly liberal theorists advocated the
entrusting of disproportionate policymaking power to a subclass of citizens – technical experts, professional politicians, or perhaps business professionals – *rather* than grounding policy decisions in the considered judgment of *all* those who constitute the public.

This can be seen in the work of Josef Schumpeter, a political sociologist who was perhaps the most influential liberal theorist of the 1940s and 1950s. Schumpeter suggested that citizens in modern democracies are ill-informed, apathetic, and manipulable, claims he believed were evident in the rise of the Nazi’s in post-World War I Germany (Bohman & Rehg, pp. x-xi; della Porta, 2013, p. 16). Thus, Schumpeter concluded that decision-making is best left in the hands of leadership elites, and that democracy should be reduced to *negative* control over leaders through periodic elections. Such elections allow that the majority of citizens could throw one set of elite leaders out of office – only to be replaced, of course, by a different set of members drawn from the same elite class (Schumpeter, 1942/1976, p. 251). This exercise of (nominally) democratic power through periodic voting functions as a check on abuses of power, but more importantly it serves as a mollifying concession that allows the expression of citizen preferences while restricting the space for genuine deliberation over policy to elites.

Schumpeter’s view exerted significant influence, appearing, for example, in the 1970s in the work of political scientists like Samuel Huntington (1975), who warned that, the effective operation of a democratic political system normally requires some measure of apathy and disengagement in the population. The vulnerability of the democratic government in the United States derives from the internal dynamics of democracy in a highly educated, mobilized and participatory society. (pp. 37-38)

Liberal theorists of this stripe (Crozier, Huntington, & Watakuni, 1975; Huntington, 1975), opposed calls for more widespread and accountable political participation during the 1960s (e.g.,
Hayden, 2005), arguing that an “excess of democracy” was becoming the major threat to political stability (della Porta, 2013, pp. 15-16).

Aggregative democracy, like liberal conceptions, is “vote-centric” (Chambers, 2003). The aggregative focus on voting arises for different reasons than those inspired by classical or Smithian liberalism or by Schumpeter’s “sociological realism.” Beginning from the shared minimalist premise that the meaning of equal citizenship is found in the slogan “one person, one vote”, aggregative democracy departs from both prior theories in embracing the act of voting that is an expression of preferences based on exclusively private interests. On this view, expressions of political preferences are emotive, meaning that these are highly subjective and so not amenable to requirements for rational justification (Howe, 2003, pp. 52-3).

Neoliberal ideology embraces the emotivist premise that private preferences of individuals are not subject to rational justification, yet simultaneously rejects the Schumpeterian conclusion that such preferences should be excluded from or at least mitigated through processes of governance. Instead, politics is reconceived all the way down in terms of the metaphor of a self-regulating economic market. Narrow or “unenlightened” private self-interest is re-cast as the motor that drives the overall workings of political machinery leading to greater overall efficiency and (ultimately) improved outcomes for all. Under neoliberalism’s growing influence, liberal democracy has embraced the aggregative recasting of citizens as authoritative in their role as consumers of political outcomes produced by elites, and politics is conceived as one mode amongst others of interest-based exchange (della Porta, 2013, pp. 29-32). In the combined emphasis on the pursuit of personal advantage and overall efficiency, liberal/elitist and aggregative/emotivist conceptions were brought together, like the formerly competing goals of
social mobility and social efficiency in the context of schooling, were harmonized in the logic of Smithian efficiency.

Basing policy on the aggregate private preferences of citizens fits well with the liberal notion that the political process is supposed to be neutral towards the diverse values held by citizens. Importantly, such emotivism eschews public deliberation over the values that undergird citizen preferences altogether. In the absence of such deliberation, the politics of manipulation and competitive individualism are, at a minimum, accepted as unfortunate necessities, and are at most, elevated to the level of positive democratic ideals. For when, as Howe (2003) writes, “democracy is characterized as a scramble on the part of various interests to get their way, employing whatever methods and strategies prove effective” (p. 131), self-interested positioning for private advantage is ironically trumpeted as a basic democratic value, and as fostering a “pluralism of values” (Shadish et. al, 1995, p. 456).

Participatory-Deliberative Democracy: In Search of the Public

Dewey’s work represents perhaps the first comprehensive account of the participatory-deliberative model represents the major alternative to the liberal-aggregative theory today. In Dewey’s picture of democratic politics, citizens come together in public forums under conditions of equality to participate in deliberation to discern inclusive solutions to public problems (1927/1954). Dewey’s democratic faith was in the common person’s capacity to contribute to processes that shape human institutions and community life (1929). Dewey’s confidence in “citizen wisdom” and “reasoning without knowledge”—embraces the premise that, under conditions of uncertainty, the reasoned judgments of ordinary people are the legitimate source of political decision-making. It has deep roots in the Western political and philosophical tradition,
appearing in “first democracy” of the ancient Athens (Woodruff, 2005) and reemerging in force during the early-modern period (McCormick, 2011).

Dewey, more than any other intellectual in the U.S., developed a new iteration of democratic ideals keyed to the context of a modern, pluralistic, industrial society. While he firmly maintained the ancient commitment to citizen wisdom, Dewey also lauded the application of scientific modes of inquiry, of intellectual expertise, to problems of social and political life, and he saw social meliorist potential in technological and social scientific developments of his day—if put to truly democratic use (1927/1954; 1916/1966, pp. 329-330). On this point, he was critical of the practice of science in his own day: “At present,” he wrote, “the application of physical science is…made in the interests of its consequences for a possessing and acquisitive class” (1927/1954, p. 174). Such science serves predetermined aims chosen by elites who seek to manage and sometimes manipulate the masses. The application of science in which it is converted to “knowledge in its honorable and emphatic sense,” by contrast, would be “absorbed and distributed” (p. 174), and the methods of scientific inquiry, as well as their results, must be widespread and take the problems experienced by ordinary people as their starting point. Indeed, the methods of inquiry and communication—and also, importantly, of education—become mechanisms enabling ordinary people to participate meaningfully in deliberating together to make determinations concerning their common life. In Dewey’s vision, scientific and technical expertise thus becomes “the instrumentality of that common understanding and thorough communication which is the precondition of the existence of a genuine and effective public” (p. 174). Deliberation thus refers firstly to the process of inquiry that constitutes a public conscious of itself as such, and secondly legitimates the decisions made by that public or its representatives on the basis of participatory discursive spaces and mechanisms.
Deliberative democracy, according to James Bohman and William Rehg (1997), “refers to the idea that legitimate lawmaking issues from the public deliberation of citizens” (p. ix). While deliberative democracy is clearly participatory in its emphasis, modern participatory democracy has been regarded by many theorists as distinct from and even competing with the deliberative tradition. In the U.S., participatory democracy has its more immediate historical and ideological roots in the social movements of the 1960s, gaining traction especially (although not exclusively) among the relatively privileged but disaffected young people “housed” in the nation’s universities. Famously, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) argued in The Port Huron Statement of 1962 that civic apathy and private materialism, especially amongst the young, was a result of alienation from political, cultural, and economic decision-making.

According to the primary author of the document, Tom Hayden, who was at the time SDS President:

The Port Huron Statement espouses ‘participatory democracy,’ a concept inherited from John Dewey through a University of Michigan Professor of mine, Arnold Kaufman. This notion gives coherence to the experience of the new movements that are excluded from ‘representative’ democracy.” (Hayden, 2008, pp. 35-36)

As a reaction against the allegedly “representative” democracy, the participatory theory espoused by SDS and subsequent organizations and movements emphasize political engagement through non-traditional modes of civil disobedience and direct action.

The distinction between the participatory and deliberative traditions is thus, in the view of some, between a deliberative focus on “word” and a participatory emphasis on “deed” (Hildreth, 2012). It should be noted that this criticism typically focuses on the influence of Habermas’ work theorizing “communicative reason,” rather than Dewey’s contributions. Critics of the
deliberative resurgence of the 1980s and 1990s in academic democratic theory such as Chantal Mouffe (1996; 2000) argue that a focus on “rational” discourse ignores the reality of politics as struggle over competing visions of, not only the good life, but of “good” politics. Amongst activists and practitioners, some participatory democrats are critical of deliberative components of, for example, the Occupy Wall Street movement (Gitlin, 2012; see della Porta, 2013, pp. 79-83, for additional examples). On the one hand, deliberative procedures are perceived as inefficient and unwieldy, to the extent that these are at odds with the practical imperatives that attend aspirations to real political influence. On the other hand, emphasis on “rational” discursive engagement restricts political participation to those who speak according to dominant norms of “civility,” making deliberative norms a potentially pernicious means of exclusion and disempowerment—as Anderson (2010) notes, this was precisely how such norms functioned in the U.S. South prior to and during the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

Mouffe and most other critics who point to such pitfalls of deliberative ideals do not, however, forgo the notion that substantive democratic ideals should constrain political struggle; indeed, on her view, the difference between democratic and undemocratic politics still depends on a notion of the public. Anti-democratic struggle is “antagonistic”, meaning that participants in the struggle seek total victory over opponents, denying them recognition of their legitimate interests and rights. Democratic struggle, by contrast, is “agonistic”, meaning it is a struggle between competing conceptions of what is good for the whole, struggle against others is understood as struggle on their behalf. The important distinction here is between struggle that pictures competitors as enemies to be vanquished and as (perhaps misguided or mistaken) fellow citizens to be respected even if their views cannot be reconciled.
Along with its emphasis on political action, participatory democracy is concerned with structural inequalities, and seeks to fundamentally transform these through democratization of social institutions generally. The participatory citizen is an active (even activist) citizen that shapes public life and policy through direct engagement. Deliberative democracy, by contrast, is characterized by a focus on discursive reasoning about common problems that aims at generating outcomes acceptable to all. With its focus on legitimating political decisions and rational consensus, deliberative democracy to some extent must take status quo background conditions for granted. The deliberative citizen offers reasons and gives due consideration to the reasons provided by others, all of which are subject to mutually acceptable standards of rationality.

As Hildreth (2012) suggests, participatory and deliberative practices, often treated in the academic literature as competing and contradictory ideals of “genuine” democracy, may be “distributed and sequenced” within a larger normative framework. Hildreth and other contemporary followers of Dewey such as Elizabeth Anderson (2010) suggests that these distinct but complementary democratic “moments” fit within a larger ongoing iterative process of cooperative inquiry and action. Different standards for democratic action can be invoked to assess the requirements of different moments, and the exclusion of either type of practice will be detrimental to democratic outcomes. This integrated view has implications for theories of democratic education, since different democratic “characters” may be essential for the success of distinct democratic practices and institutional contexts.

Contrary to the sparring amongst theorists of the sort mentioned above, some hold that deliberative and participatory democracy can be reconciled with relative ease at the level of theory (della Porta, 2013; Hildreth, 2012), pointing to their common roots, especially within the U.S., in Dewey’s thought (Hayden, 2008). Both share a common premise that the construction of
political identities and preferences are endogenous rather than exogenous to the political process itself (della Porta, p. 10)—i.e., the formation of identities and preferences is part of the task of democratic engagement rather than the independent variable determining it.

Deliberative and participatory theory also assert that the primary challenge of democratic politics and governance is not, as liberal theories assume, mitigation of the threat of “rule by the mob”, the specter of “too much participation” by citizens (Huntington, 1975). Rather, the primary challenge is to enable such participation through institutional mechanisms and social practices that keep elites meaningfully accountable to those they allegedly represent. Thus, the central problematic of democratic governance is taken to be elite accountability to the public rather than elite management of the public (McCormick, 2011). This is not to say that categories of “elites” and “the public” are taken to be static or structurally necessary—instead, politics is construed as the necessary process of formation of the public (Dewey, 1927/1954). The public good is better conceived as a creation rather than a discovery, an attainment rather than a realization; to the extent it can be found and seized upon, it is itself a consequence of democratic engagement.

Herein lies what is perhaps the crucial distinction between participatory-deliberative and liberal-aggregative theory: the latter diverges from the ancient and early modern conceptions of democracy in its conception of the public. Liberal-aggregative democracy frequently refers to and even valorizes “democratic” methods of preference aggregation as serving “the public interest” or “the public good” (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). The aggregation of individual preferences does not amount to a common good acceptable to all (Feinberg, 2012). This is because any aggregation of preference is a different process than deliberation about the values that undergird and justify these preferences. It is in such deliberation that a shared preference
becomes public. Yet in aggregative theories, the possibility of such an outcome is explicitly precluded by foundational assumptions drawn from so-called “rational-choice” theories of human behavior (Bohman & Rehg, pp. vii-viii). Originating in the field of economics and influential across the social sciences (see Becker, 1976), rational-choice theories more or less follow from “the first principle…that every agent is actuated only by self-interest” (Edgeworth, 1881, p. 16). When it comes to questions of “shared interests” (Feinberg, 2012), rational-choice assumptions imply that, at most, individuals are able to recognize that the satisfaction of the private interests of others may entail private benefits for themselves. Such benefits are sometimes referred to as “neighborhood benefits” (Friedman, 1955) due to the fact that one benefits from another’s activity indirectly, merely by being in the “neighborhood.” While such phenomena do entail mutual benefit, they do not amount to a public interest—i.e., an interest that my neighbor and I hold in common because of our involvement as equal citizens in a common political project (see Feinberg, 2012, pp. 10-13 for examples).

Participatory-deliberative thus takes reasoning about and realizing shared values and norms as the primary task of politics, a central outcome of which is what we might term “public-creation.” As such, participatory-deliberative theory remains closely tied to the historic rationale of democratic equality for US public schooling, discussed at length in the literature review section above. It was Dewey, however, who most fully theorized democracy as a practical application of critical intelligence through collective inquiry, thus uniting a democratic theory of education with an educational theory of democracy. Through his work as an academic philosopher and a public intellectual Dewey gained many adherents to this pragmatist democratic faith (Westbrook, 1991; West, 1989). His influence was particularly strong in the field of educational theory, and although it is certainly true that he “lost” and the administrative
progressives “won” (Kohn, 1999), Dewey did within his lifetime have substantial and lasting impact on education policy and practice (Fallace, 2011).

The “conceptual ground-clearing” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 80) in this section provides a clear basis for the claim that deliberative-participatory theory is the best framework available for resisting Smithian efficiency the promoting democratic equality through normative inquiry in general. In the next section, I turn to the question of what this means for the domain of education research and scholarship. This requires outlining forms that the dominance of Smithian efficiency has taken in education scholarship, and to suggest the outlines of a Deweyan democratic alternative. After outlining the epistemological and rhetorical challenges posed by the dominance of positivism in education research and policy - namely, a general form of what Howe (2013) refers to as a relevancy dilemma. I conclude this penultimate section with a cursory sketch of an alternative approach to education scholarship, one that informs the analysis in this introduction and in the articles that will follow: an explicitly Deweyan-pragmatic approach experiencing a resurgence in political philosophy and philosophy of education under the label of non-ideal theory.

From Political Theory to Education Research: A Note on Method

There is a great deal at stake for democracy in the evaluation and transformation of contemporary federal education policy. As the politics of school reform have become tethered to the accountability regime at federal, state, and local levels, education research is frequently expected to inform, guide, and legitimate or condemn major policy initiatives (McGuinn, 2006; Shaker & Heilman, 2008). Such expectation in turn serves as the impetus for criticism of education research and educational researchers by at least three distinct sectors or constituencies: First, policy and opinion makers complain of contradictory and inconclusive findings (Kaestle,
1993; Cooper, 1996), as well as perceived ideological biases from all sides (Henig, 2008; 2009). Second, a public alienated by seemingly scholastic debates over methodological minutiae perceives the research community as out-of-touch elites driven by competitive egotism (Cooper, 1996; Henig, 2008). Third, internal critiques from researchers themselves complain that the field fails on various grounds to approximate practices of more respected empirical sciences – for example, in a well-publicized\(^2\) article in American Educational Research Association (AERA) flagship journal, *Educational Researcher*, researchers again assert the persistence of a decades-old “credibility problem”, citing as a proximate cause the dearth of articles devoted to the replication of previous studies’ findings in major journals (Makel & Plucker, 2014).

Such external and internal criticisms have not gone unheeded by education researchers who, over roughly the last decade-and-a-half, have responded by narrowing their focus and restricting their range of methods. In terms of focus, research is increasingly oriented to determining “what works in education” – shorthand for “what works to increase standardized test scores,” across the board and especially for traditionally low-scoring student populations (in order to close “the achievement gap”). In terms of methods: at the behest of policymakers, researchers have attempted – in terms borrowed from the 2001 NCLB legislation – to codify and legitimate what counts as “high quality education research.” Not that the Bush Administration and bipartisan supporters of NCLB gave the research community an opportunity to weigh in on the subject. Instead, the policy adopted the language of the National Reading Panel (NRP) report *Teaching Children to Read* (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 1999a). Convened under the auspices of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the NRP was made up of a majority (12 of 14 members) with no significant experience either studying or implementing

literacy instruction and perhaps unsurprisingly, given their NIH credentials, the panel “summarily adopted a medical research model” (Shaker & Heilman, 2008, p. 84; Garan 2002).

In a widely distributed Summary, the NRP report was declared “an evidence-based assessment of scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction” (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 1999b, p. i). The findings of the report, its methods and its motivation, became a subject of intense debate among education scholars (Camilli, Vargas, & Yureko, 2003). However, it was the Summary that, despite misrepresentation of key findings in the little seen report of 600 pages, exerted influence on educational policy and practice. In fact, the Summary was drafted, “not by the panel, but by Widmeyer Communications, a public relations firm that serves McGraw-Hill … among other corporate clients” (Shaker & Heilman, 2008, pp. 84-85). The rhetoric of “scientifically based research” emerged as a political tool useful, in Shaker and Heilman’s (2008) words, for “overriding practices of local autonomy” (p. 85) and ensuring profits for influential corporate interests (Metcalf, 2002, p. 21).

Researchers responded to NCLB with a series of attempts to codify their own methods and standards of quality through a spate of publications—most notably, the National Research Council’s Scientific Research in Education (2002), and AERA’s (2006; 2009) separate standards for empirically- and humanities-based social science research that followed. The NRC and AERA’s documents take NCLB’s language, adopted from the NRP’s report, as establishing the basic framework in which research is to be defined. Despite lip-service acknowledgment of diversity of approaches (AERA, 2006), these documents assume a model of scientific research that may be characterized, epistemologically and politically, as a “positivist throwback” (Howe, 2009).
The New Scientific Orthodoxy

The recent resurgence of a tacit-positivism in education research is what Howe (2009) terms “the new scientific orthodoxy.” Positivism assumes a set of dichotomies or in a more acerbic characterization, “dogmas” (Quine’s, 1970; Howe, 2009). One is the dogma that there is a hard distinction between conceptual and empirical claims, rooted in the analytic-synthetic distinction. This distinction divides all statements into two classes: analytic statements are those that have their truth value determined by formal logic or in virtue of definitions or meanings; synthetic statements are those whose truth value can be verified through empirical investigation. This distinction informs a second positivist dogma, the fact-value dichotomy, is a corollary of reductionism and the analytic-synthetic distinction. It holds that because value claims are neither synthetic nor analytic, they are devoid of cognitive content: facts and values “occupy distinct epistemic domains” (p. 430) such that value claims are emotive – again, subjective and not amenable to demands for rational justification. As discussed previously concerning the political domain, the influence of emotivism in social scientific work appears in the widely accepted norm of value-neutrality (Scriven, 1983) as defining good scientific (as opposed to unscientific or poor scientific) work (Shadish et al., 1995). More recently a third dogma, first identified by C. P. Snow (1959), has emerged as particularly influential in education science: the empirical science-humanities dichotomy, which holds that the subject matter and methods of these two traditions of inquiry are fundamentally different (Howe, 2009, p. 432).

Expressed tacitly in the National Research Council’s (2002) report, Scientific Research in Education (SRE), the new scientific orthodoxy explicitly relegates values “beyond the purview of science, to be hammered out in political forums and mused about by humanities-oriented researchers using their special non(un?)scientific methods” (Howe, 2009, p. 433). SRE assumes
that the goal of science is to establish causal relations, understood in terms of the kinds of regularities that characterize the natural sciences. The new scientific orthodoxy thus marginalizes the notions of human motivation, intentionality, and agential causation. For this reason, it also valorizes quantitative research and relegates qualitative research to a secondary, supportive role (p. 434) which is (de)valued accordingly (Bridges, Smeyers, & Smith, 2009; Shaker & Heilman, 2008). Such a judgment carries real material consequences in light of current funding priorities of government and research institutions—education scholarship in the humanities and philosophy is, within such a frame, consigned to perpetual marginalization.

Research in philosophy and the humanities often deals explicitly with values and ideals. Within education research, this involves focus on the question of what educational efforts are ultimately for – which values ought to guide and constrain practices and policies, and what ends public schooling ought to achieve. Unsurprisingly, then, given the strategy of legitimation education research has pursued of late, critical examination of questions of value and proper ends has been largely lost in the mix. In this regard, education policy research now tracks education policy debates more generally. As was already discussed at length, Labaree (1997) argues that the history of public schooling in the US has been dominated by competing and contradictory values and goals and that this is the ultimate source of many dysfunctional policies and practices in our schools. Until we come to terms with issues of educational values and goals, on this view, research and reforms concerned with “what works” may “progress” – but in the same sense that a nautical voyage might if a ship’s crew considers navigational charts, the compass, and the Global Positioning System all beyond the legitimate purview of sailors.

How might education researchers laboring under “the received view” respond to Labaree’s claim that, “the central problems with American education are not pedagogical or
organizational or social or cultural in nature but are fundamentally political” (Labaree, 1997, p. 40)? One option is to grant the claim, but then counter that disagreement over goals belongs to the domain of political deliberation rather than that of technical implementation or control. There is an intellectual division of labor: in our role as citizens, we may have a proper interest in the debate over the legitimate goals of schooling; as researchers, however, our role is that of technical experts—our charge is not to determine goals, but to assess how well the goals the public or its representatives have chosen are achieved.

This reply misrepresents how policy research actually proceeds. Not only have philosophers, in the view of many, undermined the tenability of the fact-value dichotomy in the abstract (Quine, 1970; Howe 2009), sociologists of science and other scholars have also thoroughly documented the contingent, value-laden nature of the scientific inquiry in actual practice (Merton, 1973; Latour, 1979) – a (value-laden) fact that is even more apparent in the social and policy sciences (Smith, 2003). Contrary to the positivist, technocratic view widely embraced by policymakers and research professionals in the mid-twentieth century (Fay, 1975; Howe, 1985), and which is resurgent today (Howe, 2009), normative issues are at the foundation of all research in education, whether or not it is granted the honorific label “scientific” by the prevailing orthodoxy.

Ignoring or denying this can be dangerous. As philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend (1999) remarks provocatively,

Love of Truth [in the positivist sense] is one of the strongest motives for replacing what really happens by a streamlined account or, to express it in a less polite manner: Love of Truth is one of the strongest motives for deceiving oneself and others. (p. 158)
Indeed, “the self-perception on the part of educational researchers of value-freedom (of value-neutrality in the strong sense)...is dangerous because it introduces (not eliminates) the potential for bias” (p. 133). In the context of contested and contradictory ideals, “value-free” (Scriven, 1983) inquiry amounts to intervention on behalf of a particular political agenda masquerading as “science.” The problem here is not the presence of values and normative commitments, political or otherwise, which are inevitable; rather, the danger is that the delusion (or pretense) of value-freedom shields these values from public scrutiny and demands for justification.

Howe (2003) summarizes the pitfalls of the illusion (or delusion) of value-neutrality in educational research: “Educational research can never be value-free. To the extent it approaches value freedom in its self-perception, it is to that extent dangerous. To the extent it approaches value-freedom in fact, it is to that extent useless” (p. 133). The new scientific orthodoxy thus places education scholars in something of a straightjacket: In order to conform to the new scientific orthodoxy in education research, scholars can embrace the technically sophisticated but philosophically superficial and ethically problematic role assigned them by the received view of education research and policy. In this case, they will likely face charges from policymakers and the public that their work is overly scholastic, unable to provide decisive answers to significant educational questions, or masks special interests.

At the same time, they risk contributing to biased agendas masked beneath a guise of value-neutrality. This danger can be seen, e.g., in the case of the NRP Report and Summary discussed above. In the Department of Education’s “draft guidance” for NCLB’s implementation, the popular program Reading Recovery was excluded from Title I eligibility, the main avenue of federal funding for underserved students, despite a large evidence-base supporting the program’s effectiveness. This was due to the fact that the NRP declined to
consider Reading Recovery and similar programs that regard reading as a “complex, strategic process” (Shaker & Heilman, 2008, p. 86), focusing instead on isolated skills and the techniques that taught these (e.g., phonics or letter-sound instruction). The latter approaches have long been identified with conservative education reform agendas, and were by the late-1990s being promoted by a variety of for-profit curriculum publishing corporations (Metcalf, 2002). Reading Recovery, by contrast, “is a non-profit organization whose materials are produced by numerous houses. There is no corporate advocate, political fundraiser, or Washington lobbyist seeking profits for Reading Recovery. Of course, all this should be irrelevant to the advancement and application of science. But it is not” (Shaker & Heliman, 2008, p. 86).

Goals obfuscated in such determinations of which interventions have been proven through “scientifically based research” may be rooted in the (often implicit) ideological commitments of researchers themselves. Alternatively, they may be motivated by material imperatives of grant-seeking and personal career advancement, independent of the beliefs of the researchers actively promoting them. Regardless of their source, however, delusions (or illusions) of value-neutrality represent an important threat to both validity and usefulness of education policy research—if by “usefulness” we mean something more than serviceable for achieving veiled partisan educational agendas and private interests. Education policy research and scholarship more generally remains part of the problem, albeit tacitly, to the extent that it fails to foreground educational values and ends increasingly legislated under the guise of “scientifically based research” (Howe, 2003; Shaker & Heilman, 2008).

Non-ideal Theory

In a Deweyan-pragmatic view of the role of education research, researchers are charged with helping to develop a public through the framing of collaborative inquiry in socially
significant terms. Some of the most promising efforts to develop such an approach go under the heading of *non-ideal theory*. Non-ideal theory is distinguished from ideal theory by its explicit attention to historical and empirical realities in the framing of problems to be addressed in theoretical work (Levinson, 2012). In this sense, it is *grounded* theory, rooted in what Dewey termed the “felt difficulties” experienced by individuals (Dewey, 1910) and communities (Dewey, 1927/1954). Apart from taking empirical realities and problems experienced by situated people as its starting point, non-ideal theory is also distinguished by the way that it constructs and makes use of normative ideals: “In non-ideal theory,” Anderson (2010) writes, “ideals embody imagined solutions to identified problems in a society” (pp. 24-5). Valued ends and “felt difficulties” are recognized as essential resources for framing scientific (understood in the broader Deweyian sense of systematically applied critical intelligence) problems and candidate solutions. Such theory regards its normative and idealized constructs as *hypotheses* to be tested in experience, through implementation in actual practice. Such theories are valid to the extent that, when implemented, they “solve the problems for which they were devised, settle people’s reasonable complaints, and offer a way of life people find superior to what they had before” (Anderson, 2010, p. 25).

Non-ideal theory integrates empirical and normative claims within its method, recognizing their interdependence without falling into the naturalistic fallacy of conflating “what is” with “what ought to be.” While descriptions of what happens to have been and happens to be the case constitute the starting point for non-ideal theory, it need not accept these uncritically so as to be lacking in ambition or aspiration. Dewey (1920/1948) writes that in such an approach, …the world or any part of it as it presents itself at a given time is accepted or acquiesced in only as material for change. It is accepted precisely as the carpenter, say, accepts the
things as he finds them…They are what they can do and what can be done with them,—

things that can be found by deliberate trying. (pp. 101-102)

Dewey’s metaphor effectively captures the approach of nonideal inquiry: the way the world is presently, understood in terms of categories inherited from a traditional that has shaped and been shaped by prior material and cultural conditions, is regarded as the raw material upon which inquiry can work. The tasks undertaken in inquiry, the problems posed, emerge from the felt difficulties in this situation. The material out of which new solutions are formed is the same.

Deliberative democracy defines democratic activity in terms of a process of collective inquiry aimed at ameliorating pressing public problems (Anderson, 2010, Ch. 5) and is, therefore, conceived as a public, inclusive, sometimes formalized and at other times “organic” form of non-ideal theorizing. Democracy so conceived is a comprehensive or “programmatic” (Unger, 1999, pp. 48-52) response - as Kitcher (2009) terms Dewey’s version, an “ambitious package” (p. 308) – for solving a wide range of problems.

Developing such a program in educational policy, practice, and scholarship is part and parcel, a nonnegotiable part, of the “nonnegotiable agenda” (Goodlad, 2008) discussed at the outset of this first chapter. It this agenda that I take up in chapters 3 and 4, through direct engagement with issues in educational policy and practice. Before jumping into the fray, however, I take the opportunity to engage in a bit of self-fortification: in chapter 2 (First Article: Recovering Philosophy of Education), I extend the discussion in this final section of chapter 1 into considerations relevant to practice in my own field of specialization, philosophy of education. I explore some of the distinctive challenges, both internal and external to the discipline, that prevent philosophers of education from more effectively advancing Deweyan democratic aims in our work. Recognizing that the challenges are substantial, I consider both
how we can make our work more relevant, and how we can use even our marginalization as an opportunity to deepen democratic commitments.

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http://www.democracynow.org/2014/11/5/sen_bernie_sanders_the_united_states

*Sarah C. Roberts v. The City of Boston, 59 Mass. (5 Cush.) (1850).*


Part 1. Towards “New Interdisciplinarities”

It is wisdom to know others; it is enlightenment to know one’s self.

- Lao-Tzu, Tao Te Ching

Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men [and women].


Implementing a Deweyan democratic program in educational scholarship requires building establishing new relationships across disciplinary boundaries and specializations. Healthy partnerships require that the parties to them have knowledge not only of the others involved but also, in each case, of herself or himself. Multi- and Interdisciplinary engagements are most basically about creating unions between diverse communities of inquiry, each with its own distinctive epistemic orientations and methods, as well as professional self-understanding and social location. A requisite component of productive interdisciplinary partnering is a process of coming to an adequately reflective and honest self-understanding. I say “requisite” and not “prerequisite” because knowing one’s self is, pace Descartes, never accomplished by an individual in isolation. Rather, it seems to be through interaction with culture and tradition, and most fundamentally through interpersonal engagements that open the self to the other’s
assessment that human beings come to a more honest and reflective sense of personal identity (Taylor, 1992). Thus, the issue of engagement with issues that necessitate interdisciplinary engagement provides a staging point for reflection upon our own disciplinarity.

This requisite self-awareness is something that I do not believe has often been achieved within the discipline of philosophy, or within the subfield of philosophy of education. Philosophers often pride themselves on their philosophical courage, their willingness (even eagerness) to wade into the messiness of ambiguities and difficult questions, without consideration to the personal or social stakes. Yet they also display uncharacteristic temerity when facing the prospect of clear and critical inquiry into just what it is that philosophers do. So long as and to the extent that this situation persists, aspirations to productive and influential interdisciplinary engagement will remain an idle fantasy of a would-be romancer who fails to undertake the serious effort of self-scrutiny required to become one worthy of the partnership of others.

Efforts to attain a higher level of self-awareness as a discipline must be both critical and constructive, entailing dimensions of metaphilosophy — that is, inquiry into the nature and proper aims of “philosophy” as such — as well as methodology — that is, reflection upon choices concerning methods of inquiry deployed to attain our aims with an eye toward their warrant or justification. Such self-scrutiny strikes some as unbecoming of a self-confident and mature discipline, even as suggesting insecurity and self-absorption. And indeed, some discussion of methodology in philosophy is clearly motivated by professional insecurities (Ruitenberg, 2009, p. 319). But the self-interrogation that such insecurities instigate need not devolve into the “naval gazing” so endemic in “pop-psych” bestsellers, books whose readers become, in the process of “self-help,” less confident and secure (Greenberg, 1994).
of wisdom gleaned from the self-help literature may, however, serve us well: the first step to recovery is recognizing that you have a problem. To understand our own “problems,” we must see how our professional insecurities and the challenges of interdisciplinarity are interconnected, and that both are rooted in our disciplinary history.

Important work in metaphilosophy and philosophical methodology has been undertaken in many of philosophy’s sub-disciplines and specializations. These attempts to contribute to our contemporary understanding of philosophy tend to be, by their very nature, interdisciplinary — historical analysis, empirical findings, experimental results, and political deliberation are all brought within rather than excluded from the extension of the term philosophy. In the first half of this chapter (part 1), I make an argument for parallel efforts in philosophy of education. I begin with an account of the origins of modern academic philosophy’s disciplinarity in methodological terms, revealing the interdisciplinarity that was lost in a process of academic balkanization. This historical perspective helps to illuminate both our contemporary impoverishment as well as distinctive resources we retain. Then, I briefly highlight what I take to be some of the most promising developments in philosophical methodology across the discipline’s subfields from which we can productively borrow as philosophy of education seeks greater self-knowledge and so, in theory, greater ability to bring our distinctive intellectual resources effectively to bear within broader educational inquiry and debates.

In the second half of this chapter (part 2) I turn from what might be thought of as internal challenges that militate against a Deweyan “recovery” of philosophy of education to external ones. I suggest that when confronting professional and political realities, philosophers of education seeking to contribute to current debates over education policy and practice have good reason to get the blues – in the sense of melancholy, sadness. The forms this despair takes at
present can be articulated in terms of the two horns of what I call, following Ken Howe (2014), a relevance dilemma. I do not offer any recommendations for overcoming or resolving this dilemma, as I do not believe that there is any realistic way to do this. Present circumstances are not amendable to such overcoming, and this dilemma is, for the foreseeable future, intractable.

How to respond, then? I propose that philosophers who hope to respond productively to this dilemma can learn from and draw upon the broader democratic intellectual and cultural tradition that Deweyan democrats hope to advance. In particular, democratically-committed philosophers of education can learn what it means to cultivate the virtue of tragicomic hope that Cornel West (2004) argues is exemplified in the work of blues-influenced artists and intellectuals. Understanding this often overlooked aspect of the “Deep Democratic Tradition” in America provides much needed soul-nourishment for those of us committed to advancing democracy and social justice through philosophical work. If we are to sustain this commitment we must learn ways to transform our blues, and the blues of our profession, into the blues — that is, into creative and courageous expressions of love in the face of despair. Under present conditions, reconstructing democratic values within philosophy of education requires not only methodological clarity and metaphilosophical courage, but a deepened awareness of the sources of moral (one might say spiritual) motivation from which philosophical interventions grow and by which they might be sustained.

How Philosophy was Disciplined

Philosophy, as both an academic discipline and a social practice, is substantially a historical artifact: its unity (such as it is) derives from, to borrow Ortega y Gassett’s (1975) phrase, “no nature; what [it] has is — history” (p. 152). In the same vein, when A. J. Ayer was reportedly asked, “What is philosophy?” he waved his hand in the direction of his impressively
stocked bookshelves and said, “It’s all that” (related in Oancea & Bridges, 2011, p. 52). A historical account of philosophy in its specificity as a literature and tradition of thought and discourse (“all that”) reveals clearly that it has always cut across our current disciplinary boundaries — adequate appreciation of the philosophical tradition requires regarding it as more than philosophy, in the contemporary, more restricted sense of the word.

Kwame Anthony Appiah (2008) argues that the “official history” of the scientific revolution has grown up after the fact to explain contemporary disciplinary demarcations. This means, according to Appiah, that a “Great Partition” between empirical and conceptual “work” — and, by extension, the domains of facts and values and related descriptive and normative claims — has been read into history to justify divisions in the contemporary academic scene. This historical perspective helps us to understand the situation in which philosophers of education find themselves today. Philosophy of education refers to both a distinct subfield within the field of education studies (or research) as well as a specialization within the academic discipline of philosophy. While its subject matter is shared across disciplines in education (psychologists and sociologists are as likely as philosophers to take up issues of the identity in education, the nature of consciousness and learning, and so on), philosophers of education draw their methods primarily from the practices of academic philosophy.

While philosophical inquiry into educational issues has a long lineage and can be traced back to the Greeks, especially (as with so many of the questions we consider “philosophical”) to Plato and Aristotle, academic philosophy did not appear in something close to its modern form — a discipline with its own distinctive subject matter, methods, and style — until the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.

A product of a series of European cultural and institutional revolutions (the Renaissance,
the Reformation, and the Enlightenment), philosophy was heavily influenced by the emergence of the natural sciences. In fact, what today is known as the scientific revolution began as the work of “Natural Philosophers,” taking on a recognizably modern form in experiments conducted by Sir Francis Bacon and others, notably members of the Royal Society of London.

As the experimental methods of the natural sciences grew in prestige, the distinction between empirical and conceptual dimensions of inquiry became more sharply drawn. David Hume famously distinguished between “relations of ideas” and “matters of fact” (1975a, pp. 26-27), and extended this into moral matters by drawing a distinction between “is” and “ought” claims, arguing that the latter cannot be deduced from the former (1975b, pp. 455-470). In the early twentieth century, the fissure that Hume had opened was systematized in the logical positivism developed by a group of European intellectuals known as the Vienna Circle. The logical positivists asserted an influential form of verificationism that had tremendous influence on methodology in the rapidly developing social sciences.

*Logical positivism* translated Hume’s distinction between matters of fact and relations of ideas into a theory of cognitive significance: analytic statements are those shown to be true in virtue of formal logic, or meanings and definitions; synthetic claims are shown to be true in virtue of empirical verification. Thus, the logical positivists held that the analytic-synthetic distinction is dichotomous as well as exhaustive of all (cognitively) meaningful statements. In its extreme formulation, this view judges all non-empirical claims — including all metaphysical claims and value judgments — to be strictly meaningless (Ayer, 1936). Emotivism is an extension of the positivist position, and holds that claims as to the rightness or wrongness of a given act are mere expressions of personal preference or feeling, and so not subject to rational debate (Howe, 2003, pp. 53-54).
Arguably, Hume and his intellectual progeny laid the groundwork for nineteenth- and twentieth-century schism between the two scholarly cultures later described by C. P. Snow (1959). This divide, which Howe (2009) terms “the Empirical-Science/Humanities Dichotomy,” contrasts empirical research (the province of the natural and social sciences) with “conceptual work” and inquiry into values (deemed the domain of the humanities). As these two types of inquiry were increasingly divorced, the divvying up the Western intellectual estate was markedly unequal. Philosophy was left, in the view of many, stranded on the side of the divide with the wrong subject matter and an ineffectual methodology.

What is worse, as the cultural imperialism of the natural sciences gained momentum these continued (and continue) to overtake subject matter that philosophers previously deemed their turf. For their part, academic philosophers have made the best of a bad situation. At its most disciplined, philosophy now falls into a narrow range of formal logic, speculation in metaphysics and epistemology driven by tautologous analytical clarifications, and intuition-pumping “trolleyology” in ethics (Appiah, 2008). Empirical findings are often deemed irrelevant distractions, and it is common enough that a philosopher confronted with some (apparently relevant) aspect of how the world actually happens to be, will deflect the critique with: “Well, that’s an empirical question.”

The irony of this state of affairs is striking, in light of the fact that prior to its modern disciplining, philosophy’s integration of the empirical and conceptual and of the factual and normative was thoroughgoing. These were fundamentally linked, for example, in the works of the founding figure of modern philosophy, René Descartes, as famous for contributions to experimental method, geometry, and mathematical physics as for his epistemology-oriented Meditations. We should also recall more often that, despite the historical role he plays in the
development of positivism, Hume (1975b) chose for his *Treatise of Human Nature* the subtitle: *Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. We are guilty of anachronism when we carve up Descartes’s or Hume’s work into separate “scientific” and “philosophical” parts.

*Getting Over “the Great Partition”*

Positivism’s influence in philosophy peaked in the mid-twentieth century, when it was decisively discredited in W.V.O. Quine’s (1951) classic essay, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism.” Quine’s critique occurred, however, within already established *professional* boundaries that are themselves an expression of the Great Partition. To some extent it is true that the continued influence of positivism outside of philosophy has to do with a lack of critical reflexivity. As political scientist Steve Elkin writes, “Our disciplines absorbed positivism in the 1950s when it was at its peak of influence, and then stopped thinking about the foundations” (cited in Boyte, 2000, p. 50). Institutional considerations also help to explain positivism’s continued influence despite its widely heralded decline. Training within academic disciplines tends to reinforce already established boundaries, and so also to initiate new scholars into an implicit positivist ideology — as Harry Boyte (2000) puts it, “Faculty members undergo an insidious socialization, especially in graduate school” (p. 46-51). Thus, while the image of the knower informed by positivist epistemology “may be discredited in theory,” Boyte writes, “it would be a mistake to minimize the challenges of overcoming it in practice” (p. 49).

In terms of Appiah’s (2008) metaphor, the legacy of the logical positivists cordoned philosophy off from contingency by surrounding it with a moat (the analytic/synthetic distinction); Quine drained that moat of water. Discipline-dictated patterns of professional activity persist out of inertia, even as the ditch grows ever drier. Old dogmas “die hard” (Howe,
periodically, they may even rise from the grave. With positivism’s recent resurgence in educational research under the guise of what Howe (2009) terms “the new scientific orthodoxy” (pp. 430-432), philosophers of education find themselves embattled on all sides by epistemological zombies, positivism’s living-dead. To the extent they conspire in the segregation of empirical from conceptual work and retrench themselves within the ghetto of analyticity that positivism designated, they too become such zombies.

One form that this retrenchment takes is the widespread resistance amongst philosophers of education to discussing the practice of philosophy in terms of methods and methodology. Consider that, in Paul Standish’s (2009) preface to a special edition of The Journal of Philosophy of Education dedicated to the question: “What do Philosophers of Education do? (And how do they do it?),” this outstanding philosopher of education acknowledges the growing marginalization of the field and nevertheless remarks that, “Philosophers are rightly wary to be too quick to explicate their methods” (Standish, 2009, pp. i-ii).

In Standish’s view, raising the issue of methodology at all occurs as an unfortunate concession to an inhospitable intellectual climate. It is as if such discussions require that we put on the ill-fitting and unbecoming coat of “methodology,” clothes cut to fit our younger and more popular friends in the natural and social sciences. Richard Smith (2009) expresses this view when he writes that, “In doing philosophy we need to be aware of the awkwardness of thinking in terms of having a method, still more any kind of ‘methodology’” (p. 437). Smith goes further, suggesting that to focus on methodological concerns at all risks reducing philosophy to mere method. In such cases, the word “method” is taken in terms of pejorative connotations of “methodical” and “mechanical.” This perspective has been influential across the humanities — as when the cultural historian Jacques Barzun (2000) emphasizes the “organic unity” of thought
and the “capacity for insight” – and rejects what he considers a “Cartesian emphasis” on method in education and academic life (pp. 200-201).

“Methodology” perhaps carries for some a dogmatic sense, similar to that of “ideology” – a resonance that Richard Rorty (2000) takes a step further when he warns of “methodolatry” (p. 316). Such views seem based, at least in part, upon a common confusion between the meanings of the words “methodology” and “methods.” Philosopher of science Sandra Harding (1987) draws attention to the importance of distinguishing between methods, methodology, and epistemology (pp. 2-3). In Harding’s definition, methods are any techniques used for gathering and organizing evidence. Since what counts as evidence varies from discipline to discipline, so do the methods for collecting it. Methodologies are theories concerning how research should proceed and how evidence should be gathered. Methodology is normative and theoretical, keyed to the context of inquiry and its goals, with special attention to the justification of the methods employed. Situated as it is as a kind of bridge between the concrete realm of methods and the more abstract domain of epistemology, which concerns how knowledge claims are justified and on what grounds authority is accorded to a knower, methodological inquiry deals with questions associated with both.

Carefully distinguishing between methodology and particular methods dispels many of the concerns expressed by philosophers of education about the risk of deeper and more frequent methodological reflection. Claudia Ruitenberg (2009) recognizes this distinction when she points out that resistance to narrow characterizations of philosophy in terms of a mechanical or overly formal method or methods is itself an argument at the level of methodology (p. 338). This is true, for example, of Smith’s (2009) view that philosophy is less of a science and more of an art – of close reading and listening in preparation for flashes of insight or inspiration – that defies
construal in terms of method (p. 437). There’s something to be said in support of such a view. On the one hand, as Thomas Kuhn (1962) puts it, there is a sense in which it is when method breaks down and methodologies conflict that philosophy begins. Philosophy is in such cases something like a meta-method that only comes into play when paradigms breakdown and we are faced with the problem of theory selection.

This view is problematic, or at least partial, in that it ignores the “normality” (in Kuhn’s sense) of much of what passes as philosophical work. Consider the following short list: The Socratic elenchus; critique. dialectic; phenomenological description; hermeneutics; archeology/genealogy; structural analysis; ideology critique; conceptual analysis; linguistic analysis; deconstruction. concept creation; appeal to intuitions; constructing imaginative examples and counterexamples; reflective equilibrium; the adversarial method; conversation; narrative. It seems odd to insist that philosophy is anti-methodical, given the variety of methods philosophers have developed and employed!

In any tradition of inquiry, the question of the relationship between the process of inquiry and the validity of results and conclusions is central. Even in relatively well-established methodological terrain of the natural sciences, leading thinkers have complained that the stylized form of research reporting common to academic writing often presents a “totally misleading narrative” (Bridges, 2003, p. 181). There is often a significant gap between the complexities of scientific practice, which is “seldom pristine, impersonal and fully logical” (ibid.), 36 and the presentation of both method and results that seem to be so. For our part, David Bridges (2003) writes that, “Philosophers are on the whole protected from this accusation by their practice of saying nothing by way of preface to their writing about the method which they have employed in its derivation and construction” (pp. 181-182).
The modern demand for transparency of methods is rooted in the Enlightenment commitment to publicity – meaning, in Simone Chambers’ (2000) words, “not only bringing something to the public’s attention but also requiring or asking the public to scrutinize critically the object in question” (p. 193). Arising as it did from a medieval context in which knowledge claims rested upon the authority of a religious priesthood, emphasis on the disclosure of methods is thus part and parcel of the modern democratization of knowledge production and epistemic authority. The positivist division of our academic culture has pictured the role of the expert as fundamentally removed from the public, since technical forms of knowledge are not subject to assessment by the non-expert or layperson (Fay, 1975; Boyte, 2000) – and increasingly, products of inquiry in one discipline are also unintelligible to experts in another.

Within the essentially hybrid context of education studies, the expectation that researchers specify their methods and (within reasonable bounds) disclose the (contingent and particular) process of inquiry is laudable and, to the extent possible it ought to be embraced. Additionally, concerns for publicity and accessibility of the democratic community of inquirers also set reasonable limits on the requirement for transparency of method. As José Ortega y Gassett (1967) writes,

I think that the philosopher must, for his own purposes, carry methodological strictness to an extreme when he is investigating and pursuing his truths, but when he is ready to enunciate them and give them out, he ought to avoid the cynical skill with which some scientists, like a Hercules at the fair, amuse themselves by displaying to the public the biceps of their technique. (Pp. 19-20)

We must resist “methodolatry,” with its modern scholasticism and professional elitism, for precisely the same reasons we must take the difficult task of gaining clarity about our methods
Recognizing What We Can Offer

Philosophers of education hold a dual intellectual, social, and cultural citizenship (Furlong & Long, 2011). I have argued that in order to be citizens in an interdisciplinary world, we must embrace the empirical, contingent nature of our discipline, its methods and its themes. We should reject the false choice between, in Nicholas Burbules’ (2002) phrase, “relevance and critique.” As Dewey eloquently and concisely recommends in the second epigraph, the pragmatist tradition points the way toward a “recovery” of philosophy in which it becomes grounded in contemporary social problems and the concerns of public life. Within philosophy of education, the pragmatist school is strong and Dewey’s writings are widely cited. A pragmatist philosophical methodology thus represents a resource endogenous to our field (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Garrison & Neiman, 2003).

We can also draw upon developments in other philosophical subfields that are perhaps less well known to philosophers of education. In epistemology, Karl Popper, Quine, and Donald Campbell initiated efforts to naturalize theories concerning what it means to know (Quine, 1969; Campbell, 1974). Feminists and some critical theorists have argued that taking seriously the epistemic and ethical implications of our social situatedness means that processes of inquiry must be democratized as well as naturalized (Jaggar, 2008, pp. 414-417; Freire, 1976; Giroux, 1988). In ethics, recent attention to the interaction of moral psychology and social context has led to exciting developments in “experimental philosophy” (Appiah, 2008). In political philosophy key aspects of John Rawls’ (1971) method of “ideal theory” are being eclipsed by a Dewey-inspired non-ideal approach that takes historical context seriously and orients philosophical inquiry towards amelioration of pressing public problems. All of these promising
developments seek to integrate a methodological focus in philosophical work.

Successful philosophical interventions in the broader field of educational inquiry also require clarity concerning what we have to offer our various partners in inquiry. I submit that the most distinctive and necessary contribution we philosophers make is our unabashed commitment to the carefully reasoned discussion of questions of value. Unlike many education policymakers, researchers, and publics, most philosophers still suppose that meaningful deliberation about normative issues is possible. This philosopher’s faith as well as our many methods developed for dealing with normative questions are desperately needed in the current educational scene. In the second part of this chapter, I turn to the question of challenges external to philosophy of education that must be reckoned with in order to bring these resources to bear within the broader field of educational inquiry.

Part 2. Philosophy of Education Blues

I believe in political solutions to political problems. But man's primary problems aren't political; they're philosophical. Until humans can solve their philosophical problems, they're condemned to solve their political problems over and over and over again. It's a cruel, repetitious bore.

- Tom Robbins, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*

My notion of love…is very closely related to blues.

- Toni Morrison
Even philosophers of education get the blues – or, to hear some tell it, *especially* philosophers of education get the blues. The *blues* refers first of all, according to Webster-Merriam’s (2015) online dictionary, to “a feeling of sadness or depression; low spirits; melancholy.” The blues in this sense is an affect or mood, one that signals personal encounter with the tragic elements of life: limitation and contingency; circumstances that hem one in, or in which one’s world falls apart; frustration, anxiety, or trauma. Misfortune and failure are central to the blues. Upon reflection, however, there is more to the blues than mere bad luck or human vulnerability. As Victor Frankl (2006) demonstrates powerfully, the bare facts of sickness, old age, and death are not in themselves tragic - which is to say: they do not in and of themselves give rise to the blues. “The key,” Cornel West (1989) writes, “is not simply the circumstances under which one lives, but how one interprets those circumstances” (p. 120).

This last point provides a bridge between our first definition of the blues and a second: “a style of music that was created by African-Americans in the southern U.S. and that often expresses feelings of sadness; a song often of lamentation…jazz or popular music using harmonic and phrase structures of the blues” (Webster-Merriam, 2015). The blues in this sense represents a creative, often artistic *response* to suffering, of oppression and marginalization, experiences that constitute much of the experience of black Americans throughout U.S. history (Harding, 1980, esp. pp. 318-332). West invites his readers to join a number of intellectuals and artists who understand blues music as a paradigmatic instance of a wide-ranging cultural form that, through interpretive engagement, has the power to transform experience in the face of traumatic suffering and apparent helplessness. It provides, perhaps more than any other cultural expression available, a model for a response to overwhelming tyranny and abuse of power that avoids both Pollyannaish illusions and Ecclesiastical despair. “That is the essence of the blues”
according to West (2004): “to stare painful truths in the face and persevere without cynicism or pessimism” (p. 21)

The “Relevancy Dilemma”

Along with many other educational scholars in similar circumstances, the contemporary philosopher of education’s reasons for lamentation include, but are not limited to, a daunting set of occupational challenges. Over the past decade-and-a-half or so, changes to teacher licensure requirements have eliminated the need for stand-alone courses in philosophy of education or social foundations in many schools of education and teacher training programs (Hayden, 2012). As compared with those working in other areas of education research and scholarship, philosophers of education today face a relative dearth of external funding opportunities (Oancea & Bridges, 2011). With fewer courses to teach and without external grants to secure, a shrinking number of faculty jobs are available, which “raises questions about whether … philosophy of education will remain an attractive career choice for new researchers” (p. 60). These challenges reflect larger dynamics facing the humanities and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the social sciences.

Concern among philosophers of education about the marginalization of their discipline surely arises, to some extent, from professional and personal self-interest, narrowly construed. For those who believe good philosophical work is desperately needed to deepen current debates over education policy and practice, however, such marginalizing forces are disturbing for broader, more public reasons. Many of us hope that our efforts might influence educational and policy outcomes for the better. In a chapter on “Philosophical Inquiry” in the American Education Research Association’s (AERA) Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research, Nicholas Burbules and Bryan Warnick (2006) define philosophy as a branch of
knowledge dealing with “commitments of value and belief that provide answers to the ‘why’
questions underlying any complex area of human practice” (p. 489).

After acknowledging widespread impatience with “critical reflection on educational
aims,” Burbules and Warnick (2006) defend the importance of philosophy:

[I]n our view, the people on the front lines of education need more than anything a sense
of value and purpose for what they are doing…The crisis confronting education today is
not a lack of ‘how to’ directives, but a lack of meaning and satisfaction attracting new
teachers into the profession and keeping them for reasons beyond a paycheck. Philosophy
has something to say about this.” (Pp. 489)

Certainly, questions of value and meaning are fundamental to educational policy and
practice, and on virtually all conceptions, philosophy concerns itself centrally with such
questions. Burbules and Warnick miss the mark, however, when they claim that present
discourse concerning education is “valueless,” as if teachers and policymakers do their work
lacking any more meaningful aims than their paychecks. On the contrary, values of social
efficiency and social mobility, historically important in schooling but only recently united within
the neoliberal logic of Smithian efficiency (Kitcher, 2009), have edged out other humanistic and
democratic values in education (Labaree, 1999).

Surfacing such values and rationally deliberating about them – rather than reasoning from
them and in terms of them – is a key task in much contemporary work in philosophy of
education. As Tom Robbins puts it concisely (albeit a bit simplistically) in this paper’s third
epigraph: unless we get properly philosophical, in the sense of openly debating normative issues
and assumptions, political problems in education are likely to be “solved” over and over again,
without any progress necessarily being made toward worthy educational aims. Philosophers of
education appear to have just the right skills and knowledge to deliver us from this “cruel, repetitious bore.” This hope of bringing skills and knowledge productively to bear, of helping to foreground basic issues of educational values and aims, becomes increasingly difficult to maintain in the face of powerful institutional signals that such work is widely considered dispensable, even irrelevant – when, as G. J. Whitehurst (2003) puts it, “The people on the front lines of education do not want research minutia, or post-modern musings, or philosophy, or theory, or advocacy, or opinions from educators” (p. 12).

Some, including Burbules and Warnick, entertain the notion that the problem here lies with the philosopher’s “audience” rather than with the philosopher, that these “people on the front lines” simply do not know what is good for them. Others suggest that the main problem facing philosophy of education lies not in its relationship to the broader field of education studies but in its relationship to philosophy. A practical effort to address this concern can be found in the *Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, in which editor Harvey Siegel’s (2009) adopts increased participation from “general philosophers” – meaning, presumably, scholars rostered in departments of philosophy rather than schools of education or elsewhere – as one of the volume’s key aims.

If successful, such a strategy would surely benefit philosophy of education in many respects. Even then, however, it is extremely unlikely that it would improve philosophy’s standing in the eyes of the broader community of education researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. This is due, at least in large part, to the fact that today’s most important educational debates are dominated by a crude positivist outlook that defines ‘relevance’ in terms of technical knowledge – ‘what works’ – to achieve goals associated with growing the national economy and facilitating individual economic mobility. And although “general philosophy” may enjoy greater
legitimacy due to a more established and autonomous institutional base, it is marginalized as non- or unscientific alongside other humanities disciplines by “the new scientific orthodoxy” (Howe, 2009) that increasingly dominates education research, policy, and practice. This option thus constitutes, according to Howe (2014), the first horn of our contemporary relevancy dilemma: philosophers of education may seek to better approximate “general philosophy,” “to then be excluded as irrelevant” by the broader education community (p. 10).

This broader context seems lost on those who embrace this option. Stefaan Cuypers (2009), for example, advocates “the analytic paradigm” as the proper (normative) core of philosophical inquiry in education, as well as its best hope for contributing (admittedly in a modest way) to education. The analytic conception, according to Cuypers, is defined as the “disinterested study of some complex field for its own sake…namely, the conceptual analysis of concrete problems emerging from the world of education” (p. 61). Cuypers (2009) asserts that it was the embrace of the analytic paradigm that “did much to establish the philosophy of education not only as a respectable branch of philosophy but also a foundational component of educational theory” (p. 59) – enabling it to transcend and break free form “the ‘old ‘mushy’ educational studies” (ibid.). Even if this historical claim were correct (and Cuypers provides no compelling evidence or argumentation), educational policymakers, practitioners and researchers are hardly clamoring for “good work in conceptual analysis.” This is to be expected, given the dominance of Smithian efficiency and its associated forms of technocratic rationality already mentioned.

In Howe’s view, which I take to be representative of a growing chorus of voices that includes Phillip Kitcher (2009), John White (2013), and many others, falling on the first horn of the relevancy dilemma is a mistake not simply because “turning inward” and approximating
general philosophy is unlikely to make philosophy of education more influential in the wider world of education. The more basic problem with this approach is that it aspires to a closer association with practices that do not represent “philosophy as it ought to be” (Howe, 2014, p. 78). Like many “pragmatists and near pragmatists” in philosophy of education and in philosophy more generally, Howe adopts the position that the practice of philosophy may most defensibly be characterized in terms of the Deweyan conception. Dewey conceived of philosophy as a social practice that arises from a specific socio-historical and that, at its best, is oriented to ameliorating pressing social problems through the application of critical intelligence. Philosophy as such is necessarily engaged with politics and public life, as well as research in other disciplines in the natural and social sciences, and the humanities. Recognition of the profoundly contingent, historical nature of the exercise of critical intelligence, and the role that substantive values play in all forms of inquiry, implies that we ought to embrace, in Randall Curren’s (2009) phrase, “the empirical, the normative, and the contextual (especially the socio-cultural) within the analytic method” (pp. 489).

Deweyan pragmatism articulates basic connections between philosophical methodology, epistemology, and the larger context of an evolving democratic cultural project (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Contrary to the claim, made by Cuypers (2009) that “the philosophy of education tends, on this conception, to reduce to ideology and even dogmatism,” even “overturning the theoretical,” (p. 61, emphasis in the original). Deweyan pragmatism resists reification of conceptual distinctions and dogma through an insistence that the projects of philosophy and democracy are related, interpenetrating, and continuous with one another. In this perspective, to the extent that philosophy of education has embraced, historically, an “outward looking” orientation of engagement with the worlds of education policy, practice, and research,
productive engagement with “general philosophy” might more justifiably seek to educate than to emulate.

Cuypers’ critical characterization of philosophy of education in a Deweyan-pragmatic frame as a “radically practical” – read: ideological/dogmatic and activist – conception is important, as it is emblematic of assumptions that, although intellectually discredited, exert powerful influence on and in education. The “new scientific orthodoxy” is indeed dominant in education policy and research, driven by resurgent (but often implicit) positivist epistemology that separates facts from values and conceptual from empirical claims. Similar to the way that “colorblind” racist discourse identifies those who pose critical questions concerning racial inequality as the source of racism (reasoning that if everyone would just stop talking about race, then there would be no racism), those who seek to expose and critique dominant values driving research and policy are cast as inappropriately introducing values into education. Whereas philosophers of education who embrace a narrower, more specialized conception of philosophy are dismissed as irrelevant, those who “concern themselves with critically engaging the contemporary world of education policy and practice, well informed of its features and the vocabularies used to characterize it” (2014, p. 11) fall on the second horn of the relevancy dilemma, being “excluded as activist ‘zealots’” (2014, p. 11).

At their core, Dewey’s democratic and educational visions express an optimistic belief in the power of critical intelligence to help ameliorate pressing social problems, primarily through dialogue and deliberation. The dominance of Smithian efficiency in contemporary education policy, paired with the rise of the new scientific orthodoxy in education research based on intellectually discredited by still virile positivist dogmas, relegates critical intelligence to the sidelines in all but its most crudely instrumental forms. Normative claims and value
commitments essential to genuine critical inquiry are excluded as *biases*. Those who seek to expose, let alone contest, the aims presumed in prevailing neoliberal policy regimes are branded “unscientific” advocates of partisan ideological agendas. White speculates that, if unchecked, these dynamics may very well “spell the end for hopes pinned on a Deweyan education” (White, 2014, p. 299) and Howe (2014) concludes that, “However discomfiting it is to philosophers of education these days to be so stymied … it may well be an inevitable fact of their vocation” (p. 11). So it seems that even—and especially—Deweyan-pragmatist philosophers of education have reason to get the blues.

*Tapping America’s “Deep Democratic Tradition”*

How should philosophers of education – as well as critically oriented education scholars in other disciplines that are more or less in the same boat - respond to our own distinctive relevancy dilemma? How might we go about making the most of our situation? In responding to these questions I am not so much interested in strategic or tactical considerations, vital as these are. Instead, I offer an exploratory presentation of one viable source of motivation and meaning that might sustain our commitment to democratic struggle in the face of what are, at least in the short term, insurmountable obstacles. The question is: When optimism is no longer warranted, is there still a basis for hope?

Here, mining the implications of the Deweyan conception of philosophy of education as part of a broader effort to develop democratic culture opens up a number of sources for insight, inspiration, and self-criticism. Philosophy of education has long been associated with the broader democratic political and cultural tradition, especially in the U.S., due in no small part to Dewey’s ongoing influence. One hundred years after its publication, Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* continues to be the single most cited text in educational studies. Dewey emphasized that
democracy should be understood as more than a set of political institutions or decision-making procedures; indeed, such institutions and procedures depend upon the cultivation of culture of democratic individuality and community. This puts him at odds with the formal minimalism of definitions that have become standard in political science and some corners of political philosophy, in which “democracy” is identified with a particular set of formal institutions and decision-making procedures, including “frequent, free and fair elections” and constitutionally guaranteed rights for individual citizens. Such minimalism marks liberal-aggregative democracy, and has proven quite compatible with the neoliberal transformation of formerly public sectors on the model of the market (della Porta, 2013, pp. 12-35) - in short, with the imperatives of Smithian efficiency that threaten Deweyan democracy and education.

West (2004) embraces Dewey’s view of democracy as a more general concept, fundamentally dependent upon culture, and suggests that committed democrats struggling against neoliberalism (with its “free market fundamentalism”) must draw upon democratic traditions “deeper” than liberalism. He identifies three of these: Socratic questioning, prophetic witness, and tragicomic hope. All three are valuable for understanding the task of a Deweyan-pragmatic philosophy of education in our present context. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of the Greek commitment to courageous Socratic questioning, which instigates and advances dialogue and deliberation in the service of transcending merely personal opinion and prejudice. As the identification of this tradition with Socrates already makes plain, this is very close to the heart of most philosopher’s self-understanding. The Hebrew prophetic tradition has also exerted powerful influence on Western culture, primarily through the vehicle of the major Judeo-Christian religious traditions. Prophetic witness speaks forcefully to issues of social justice and holds powerful elites to account. The notion that democratic inquiry must attend to the needs
of the most vulnerable and empower the marginalized is rooted in this tradition, and many philosophers of education understand their vocation to include prophetic witness through, within, or alongside their commitment to Socratic questioning.

The third source of “deep democratic energies” is probably less familiar. Tragicomic hope, in West’s (2004) characterization, “is a profound attitude toward life reflected in the work of artistic geniuses as diverse as Lucian in the Roman Empire, Cervantes in the Spanish empire, and Chekov in the Russian empire” (p. 19). In each case, artists and intellectuals draw upon the tragicomic in order to “expresses righteous indignation with a smile and deep inner pain without bitterness or revenge.” In the US, tragicomic hope “has been most powerfully expressed in the black invention of the blues in the face of white supremacist powers” (ibid.). The blues emerges out of a three centuries-long experience of enslavement and marginalization, and explicitly engages this history of profound suffering and apparent powerlessness. Making this connection to the blues in no way limits tragicomic hope in America as an exclusively black phenomena – it is not a racially or ethnically-specific way of being. West (2004) writes that, “This powerful blues sensibility” is “a black interpretation of tragicomic hope open to people of all colors … One finds it in the works of Mark Twain, Tennessee Williams, Eudora Welty and Thomas Pynchon as well as Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Robert Johnson, and Leroy Carr” (pp. 19-20).

West’s lyrical characterizations of tragicomic hope are peppered with the names of literary and musical artists, as well as occasional activists, organizers, and ordinary citizens. This is partly because the blues represents not only a musical style, but also, and more fundamentally, “a hard-fought way of living.” As with dispositional or affective learning in general, methods of conceptual analysis and formal argumentation likely to be of little use in conveying or cultivating a blues sensibility. West therefore provides a kind of reader’s guide to democratic intellectuals
who *embody* tragicomic hope in their work, and attempts to convey the power of the blues sensibility in their words. For example, he writes that,

The high point of the black response to American terrorism … is found in the compassionate and courageous voice of Emmett Till’s mother, who stepped up to the lectern at Pilgrim Baptist Church in Chicago in 1955 at the funeral of her fourteen-year-old son, after his murder by American terrorists, and said: “I don’t have a moment to hate. I’ll pursue justice for the rest of my life.” And this is precisely what Mamie Till Mobley did until her death in 2003. (Pp. 20-21, emphasis added)

The blues is not simply about the pursuit of justice; the prophetic tradition does that powerfully, but often in a mode of self-righteous anger and condemnation. What distinguishes the blues sensibility is that prophetic witness and courageous truth-telling are grounded in a refusal of bitterness, resentment, and hate - grounded, as the literary blues-master Toni Morrison puts her view of the matter in the second epigraph at the opening of this paper, in *love*. The tragicomic attitude overcomes the association of love and naïveté and truth-telling with anger. As West (2004) interprets the actions and words of Mamie Till Mobley,

Her commitment to justice had nothing whatever to do with naiveté. When Mississippi officials tried to keep any images of Emmett’s brutalized body out of the press – his head had swollen to five times its normal size – Mamie Till Mobley held an open-casket service for all the world to see. *That is the essence of the blues: to stare painful truths in the face and persevere without cynicism or pessimism.* (p. 21, emphasis added)

The American democratic project is in crisis (and perhaps always has been). Naming this crisis, diagnosing its causes, requires courage. Democratic intellectuals desperate need the “spiritual” resources that West and the artists and activists he lionizes provide through their
creative work and the example of their lives. Such resources provide a deep *motivational* basis for continued insistence on Socratic questioning and prophetic witness. Democratic theory has been accused of neglecting the important role that passion plays as a motivating force in democratic commitment (Hall, 2005). As Dahlgren (2009) writes, “motivation without affect would be hard to comprehend” (p. 84). Cultivating the democratic virtue of tragicomic hope, in our selves, in our scholarly production, and in our disciplinary institutions and culture, represents the best chance that we will be able to transform our blues-inducing circumstances into soulful, creative, and ultimately and the possibility, in the long-term, of effective philosophical action.

*Embracing Tragicomic Hope*

What are the prospects for connecting work in the philosophy of education with a soul-nourishing dose of tragicomic hope? Some may balk at West’s rhetoric concerning the role of the blues in our “Deep Democratic Tradition” as “mushy” or imprecise, unworthy of consideration by serious philosophers. In order to appreciate the possibilities of the tragicomic, we need to bracket this reaction – if not in our style of writing and discussion, in our own personal lives, in the non-academic practices that provide the often hidden ground for our professional work. My suggestion is that we can, as human beings if not as philosophers, become better theorists of democracy by becoming better appreciators and admirers of the blues tradition and irrepressible spirit to which it gives voice, and so reckoning with and potentially renewing our own deeper sources of motivation.

Here, however, lies another danger. West (2004) writes, “There are a number of white lovers of the blues who have a tragicomic sensibility, but for too many in white America the blues remains an exotic source of amusement, a kind of primitivist occasion for entertainment only” (p. 20). This exploitative relationship to the blues is perhaps especially tempting to those
comfortably positioned in the contemporary neoliberal global order. Appreciation and cultivation of tragicomic hope may be more difficult for those who enjoy relatively greater social, political, and economic power. Ironically such privileged individuals may also more readily experience despair in the face of persistent injustice, inequality, and violence. Such despair can itself be understood as a luxury, a mode of comportment more available to those whose privileged position insulates them from the direct consequences of injustice.

I do not wish to minimize the angst that accompanies experiences of helplessness for even the most privileged in the face of injustice. We should, however, exercise a self-critical attitude and recognize the fact that self-interested contentment with the status quo often lurks beneath the surface of despair. Given the relatively privileged social and economic position that many of us in philosophy of education occupy, we must acknowledge that the temptation to despair is with us as a feature of our positionality. What can we do in a positive sense? We can undertake the hard work incumbent upon all committed democratic citizens: we must courageously confront our own past, our complicity, and our temptation to despair. We have first got to get the blues if we are going to get the blues. When we do, we may find our love – of education, of our vocation – renewed. And we may find that it is also transformed, more resilient, more mature; in which case, although the relevancy dilemma remains, so do we.

References


CHAPTER 3. SECOND ARTICLE: REORIENTING EDUCATION POLICY

Introduction

Jeffrey Henig (2007) observes that in the arena of education policy at the present time, the notion that “localism is obsolete” is taken for granted by Democrats and Republicans alike. This stance developed over a 50-year period that saw notable expansions of the federal role through the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA), the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and its 1994 reauthorization. ESEA was initially driven by equity concerns but subsequently evolved to emphasize accountability. This crystallized in the passage of No Child Left Behind, the most recent reauthorization of ESEA, which represents the single largest expansion of the federal government’s role in education in U.S. history. As political scientist Patrick McGuinn (2006) notes, “Though the funding and day-to-day administrative control of U.S. public schools remain decentralized the politics of education has been nationalized to a degree unprecedented in the country’s history, and the federal government’s influence over education has never been greater” (p. 1). Local control has been further diminished by the increased role of the states in interpreting and implementing NCLB, Race to the Top, and, now, Common Core Standards. Though the role of states has been steadily increasing for other reasons, most notably as a result of funding equalization litigation, federal accountability policy is now a major cause of the states’ increased reach.

What does the diminution of local control of public education driven by changed views of the proper role and the acceptable reach of the federal government mean for our democracy? In this article, we distinguish between two dimensions of democracy that are at issue: democratic policymaking and democratic education. We argue that the effects of NCLB have been to
frustrate our democracy—along both of these dimensions. We then offer several principled guidelines for fostering more democratically defensible policymaking processes and results. We frame our analysis in terms of the normative theory of democracy, now ascendant, that has roots in the works of John Dewey and currently goes by the name deliberative democracy.¹

**Deliberative Democracy**

*Deliberative democracy* “refers to the idea that legitimate lawmaking issues from the public deliberation of citizens” (Bohman & Rehg, 1997, p. ix). An early comprehensive account of the deliberative model that remains in our view the strongest can be found in the works of philosopher John Dewey. In Dewey’s picture of democratic politics, citizens come together in public forums under conditions of equality to participate in deliberation to discern inclusive solutions to public problems (1927/1954). Dewey had confidence in citizen wisdom, or the common person’s capacity to contribute to processes that shape human institutions and community life (1929; 1938).

This belief has deep roots in the Western political and philosophical tradition, dating back at least to the “first democracy” of ancient Athens (Woodruff, 2005). Democratic theorists have developed strong epistemic and ethical arguments for citizen wisdom as the proper basis for legitimate and effective policymaking. Critics of democracy across the centuries, from Plato to Guicciardini to Walter Lippmann, rely upon the staple image of the people as a rabble, an irrational and unruly mob. The problem facing the constitutional republic, on this view, is the elite management of the masses through political and legal mechanisms. Such critics advocate entrusting disproportionate policymaking power to a subclass of citizens—technical experts, professional politicians, or perhaps business professionals—rather than grounding policy decisions in the considered judgment of all those who constitute the public. Deliberative theorists
do recognize that the effective exercise of citizen wisdom depends on appropriate social
conditions and institutional forms, and so recognize that participation can easily go wrong, and
that it often does. They also acknowledge, however, that a more basic problem democratic
constitutions must address is the tendency of economic and political elites to usurp and
manipulate political processes to achieve their own ends, excluding common citizens from

Creating the conditions for the effective exercise of citizen wisdom and guarding against
the tyranny of elites are, in the view of deliberative theorists, complementary and mutually
supportive democratic goals. Perhaps more than any other intellectual in the United States,
Dewey fleshed out these ancient ideals within the context of a modern, pluralistic, industrial
society. While he firmly maintained the ancient commitment to the collective wisdom of the
citizenry as the basis for legitimate policy, Dewey also lauded the application of scientific modes
of inquiry and intellectual expertise to problems of social and political life, and he saw social
meliorist potential in technological and social scientific developments of his day—if put to truly
democratic use (1927/1954; 1916/1966, pp. 329–330). On this point, he was critical of the
practice of science in his own day: “At present,” he wrote, “the application of physical science is
. . . made in the interests of its consequences for a possessing and acquisitive class” (1927/1954,
p. 174). Such science serves predetermined aims chosen by elites who seek to manage and
sometimes manipulate the masses. The application of science in which it is converted to
“knowledge in its honorable and emphatic sense,” by contrast, would be “absorbed and
distributed” (p. 174), and the methods of scientific inquiry, as well as their results, must be
widespread and take the problems experienced by ordinary people as their starting point. Indeed,
the methods of inquiry and communication—and also, importantly, of education—become
mechanisms enabling ordinary people to participate meaningfully in deliberation to make
determinations concerning their common life. In Dewey’s vision, scientific and technical
expertise thus becomes “the instrumentality of that common understanding and thorough
communication which is the precondition of the existence of a genuine and effective public” (p. 174).

Through his work as an academic philosopher and a public intellectual Dewey gained
many adherents to his faith in deliberative democratic ideals (West, 1989; Westbrook, 1991). His
influence was particularly strong in the field of educational theory and had substantial impact on
education policy and practice (Fallace, 2011). Yet Dewey’s conception of the democratic aims of
education never fully prevailed, as evidenced in the writings of a collection of education theorists
now known as the administrative progressives. The administrative progressives were technocrats
who saw in the scientific method potential for social engineering and control by an (ideally)
enlightened elite class of specialists and technicians (Tyack, 1974). The administrative
progressives were not advocates of a participatory form of democracy; for them, democracy of
the sort that Dewey advocated put too much faith in the people, who needed to be managed
rather than involved in social planning. By mid-century, the space Dewey and his allies had
carved out for the deliberative theory in American intellectual and political life diminished.
Instead, elements of the administrative progressives managerial approach increasingly fused with
an expansive confidence in the mechanisms of unfettered markets to achieve social efficiency
and maximize desirable economic and political outcomes.

*Emotive Democracy: Private Interest, Efficiency, and the Market*
The persistent centrality of the term *democracy* in American cultural and political life often obscures the fact that it is a term whose meaning is deeply contested. Deliberative theories of the sort described above may be contrasted with aggregative or “vote-centric” theories (Chambers, 2003). Aggregative theories focus on different methods whereby citizen preferences are expressed, registered, and then used to inform or to dictate policy. By focusing on voting as the primary or even essential mode of democratic participation, aggregative theories allow but severely limit the role of citizens in government. To the extent that aggregative theories defer to citizen preferences expressed through voting, they embrace a form of majoritarianism that defines democracy in terms of a market metaphor. Citizens are pictured as consumers of political outcomes produced by elites and politics as a mode of private interest-based exchange. Democratic politics are defined as the competition amongst candidate-representatives for the people’s vote (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, p. 14). The competition between citizens to elect their preferred representatives (typically, if not exclusively, drawn from the members of a distinct social class of political and economic elites) is in turn a struggle between individuals and factions to advance their own private interests, rather than a collective pursuit of the public good (Bohman & Rehg, 1997, p. xi).

Aggregative theorists sometimes refer to their preferred methods of aggregation as serving “the public interest” or “the public good” (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, pp. 14-16). The aggregation of individual preferences, however, does not amount to a common good acceptable to all (Feinberg, 2012). This is because any aggregation of preference is a different process than deliberation about the values that undergird and justify these preferences. It is in such deliberation that a shared preference becomes public. Yet in aggregative theories, the possibility of such an outcome is explicitly precluded by foundational assumptions drawn from so-called
rational-choice theories of human behavior (Bohman & Rehg, 1997, pp. vii–viii). Originating in the field of economics and influential in across the social sciences (see Becker, 1976), rational-choice theories more or less follow from “the first principle . . . that every agent is actuated only by self-interest” (Edgeworth, 1881, p. 16). When it comes to questions of “shared interests” (Feinberg, 2012), rational-choice assumptions imply that, at most, individuals are able to recognize that the satisfaction of the private interests of others may entail private benefits for themselves. Such effects are sometimes referred to as “neighborhood benefits” (Friedman, 1955) due to the fact that one benefits from another’s activity indirectly, merely by being “in the neighborhood.” While such phenomena do entail mutual benefit, they do not amount to a public interest—i.e., an interest that my neighbor and I hold in common in virtue of our involvement as citizens in a common political project (see Feinberg, 2012, pp. 10–13, for examples).

Aggregative theories conceive the preferences expressed through processes such as voting to be private not only in that they express the private interest but also in the sense that they are emotive, meaning that these do not require justifications that other citizens would find acceptable (Howe, 2003, pp. 52–53). The elitist view that discounts the value of citizen wisdom and the picture of politics based on a free market metaphor are both forms of emotive democracy.2 This is because they locate the formation of citizen preferences and interests outside the domain of democratic politics. Thus, as Howe (2003) writes, “democracy is characterized as a scramble on the part of various interests to get their way, employing whatever methods and strategies prove effective” (p. 131) that may go under the banner of fostering a “pluralism of values” (Shadish et al., 1995, p. 456). Because the political process is supposed to be neutral towards the diverse values held by citizens, emotive theories eschew public deliberation over the values that undergird citizen preferences altogether. In the absence of such deliberation, the
politics of manipulation and competitive individualism are, at best, accepted as unfortunate necessities, and at worst, elevated to the level of democratic ideals.

*Deliberative Resurgence*

After decades of aggregative theory hegemony in political science and philosophy, the 1980s and 1990s saw a resurgence of deliberative theory (Deweyan and otherwise), to the extent that it has been characterized as “pervasive” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 80). Contemporary deliberative theories explicitly reject both anti-democratic, technocratic elitism and aggregative theories of democracy. Against technocratic elitism, deliberative democrats assert the primacy of citizen wisdom, and argue for *meaningful* inclusion and nonrepression. Against aggregative democracy’s guiding metaphor of the market, they (re)substitute that of the public forum (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Against aggregative theory’s emotivism, deliberative theorists re-assert that the formation of citizen preferences and the discussion and judgment on questions of value are part and parcel of the political process, rather than outside it (Bohman, 1998). In what follows, we hope to demonstrate that deliberative theory holds unique promise for wedding practices of education and public policymaking, and for assessing the significance of both to the future of American democracy.

In her seminal book *Democratic Education,* Amy Gutmann (1999) begins from the premise that in the contemporary United States, educational theory must be embedded in a deliberative (or *participatory*) political if it is to be meaningfully construed as democratic. The core requirement of deliberative democracy, as Gutmann puts it, is that citizens should not be relegated to the role of passive bystanders in “social reproduction” but should be capable of actively engaging in the kind of “*conscious* social reproduction” associated with democratic deliberation. The theoretical justification for public education is thus to prepare future citizens
for this participatory role. The actual practice of democratic education may include forms of public deliberation, in which students actively participate in forms of conscious social reproduction within the classroom or the school. Even when it does not, however, as in instances in which direct instruction in specific skills or knowledge requires a less participatory pedagogical mode, it is nonetheless the enabling of such participation in the wider society that is the normative *sine qua non* of democratic educational practice.

Gutmann adds to the foundational ideal of participatory democratic citizenship the premise that democratic participation may only be legitimately constrained in its own name. That is, any constraints placed on democratic deliberation must be justified on the grounds that they are needed to protect democracy’s continued existence and development. With this basic normative framework as her point of departure, Gutmann then formulates three specific principles that provide the necessary background conditions for the practice of deliberative democratic politics.

The first of Gutmann’s principles is *nonrepression*, which stipulates that citizens may not be excluded from deliberation on matters of public concern. The principle of nonrepression “prevents the state and any group within it from using education to restrict rational deliberation of competing conceptions of the good life and the good society” (p. 44). Certain forms of religious or political education, are, on Gutmann’s view, properly restricted or even prohibited for the sake of democracy. Some groups actively seek to insulate themselves and especially their children from the give and take of rational deliberation over plural conceptions of the good life. She offers, for example, the Old Order Amish as one group whose “ways of life” are at odds with the achievement of the democratic threshold. “Rational deliberation makes [such] ways of life difficult to pursue *insofar as dedication to such lives depends upon resistance to rational*
deliberation” (pp. 44–45; emphasis added). In Gutmann’s framework, education that reduces the opportunities and, ultimately, the abilities of the young to rationally deliberate with fellow citizens amounts to repression. At this point it must be made clear that this is not because rational deliberation is associated with a form of life that stands apart as particularly valuable in some metaphysical or moral sense. Rather, it is because participation in rational deliberation is a pragmatic condition of possibility for sustaining and promoting democracy. Gutmann puts the point concisely: “Rational deliberation remains the form of freedom most suitable to a democratic society in which adults must be free to deliberate and disagree but constrained to secure the intellectual grounds for deliberation and disagreement among children” (p. 45).

Importantly, nonrepression is not only relevant to cases of provincial, group-specific practices of communities like the Old Order Amish example offered by Gutmann. The unequal provision of educational resources and forms of instruction that favor some students at the expense of others likewise violate the principle of nonrepression. The principle of nonrepression is expansive, in that it ensures not just freedom from interference, but also the positive support of the freedom to engage in deliberations associated with conscious social reproduction. Differences among citizens mean that what counts as repression will vary across contexts, depending upon the needs of specific groups or segments of the population.

Gutmann’s second principle of nondiscrimination follows from and complements the principle of nonrepression, stipulating that citizens may not be excluded from deliberation on the basis of group differences. Nondiscrimination prohibits the “selective repression” associated with “excluding entire groups of children from schooling or by denying them an education conducive to deliberation among competing conceptions of the good life and the good society” (p. 45). Discrimination is a more general and typically less overt, “passive” form of repression. It
is the form that has been most prominent in schools with respect to girls and children of color.
The passive form is distinct from overt discrimination. It is often subtle, the result of attitudes and beliefs that remain hidden within institutional contexts (Anderson, 2010). Such discrimination based on the subtle effects of racism, sexism, nationalism, homophobia, etc., leads to the exclusion of “educable children” from “an education adequate to participating in the political processes that structure choice among good lives” (Gutmann, 1999, p. 45), and so amounts to a form of group-specific repression.

Third and finally, the principle of the democratic threshold stipulates that all citizens must be enabled, through education and perhaps other means, to attain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective participatory citizenship. The democratic threshold is an educational equality standard: it is “democratic” because it is defined in terms of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions people need to participate effectively in a deliberative context created and protected by nonrepression and nondiscrimination; it is a “threshold” because it is a standard of equality below which no child should fall but that, once reached, does not require further equalization efforts.

For example, the current adult citizenry is not permitted to deny future generations an education that would instill in them the capacities associated with the democratic threshold, even if it did so within the bounds of the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination as applied to their own participation. Suppose that members of a school board, legislature, or voting public (e.g., through referendum) might choose to promote or prohibit the teaching of “creation science” or, conversely, of evolution. What is at stake here, as concerns the democratic threshold, is not strictly whether all citizens were allowed at the table, so to speak—the adult citizenry could be in substantial agreement regarding one policy or the other. The issue, rather, is
what consequences such policies will likely be for ability of future citizens to engage in such deliberations themselves.

The democratic threshold has implications for both the content and context of schooling in a democracy, although these implications will vary greatly depending upon factors such as the present state of information and communication technology, prevailing economic arrangements, and so on. The types of knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for participation in conscious social reproduction is ever changing, and are themselves a vital topic for public deliberation. Thus, the requirements of the democratic threshold highlight the tight link between public policymaking and democratic education: Determination of what, under present conditions, effective democratic participation requires (technical skills related to employment options, critical thinking skills, empathic imagination, a sense of civic responsibility, etc.) is perhaps the most critical political issue facing the existing public, precisely because this bears directly upon the democratic possibilities of future publics to come.

The Value (and Limits) of Local Control

Local control refers generally to the power of human communities—groupings of individuals bound together by factors such as a shared history, geography, or culture, or by common resources, interests, or problems—to collectively determine the policies that govern their lives. In the realm of schooling, local control typically refers to control by elected school boards and their constituents, at the district or municipal level. Since they have to do with the exercise of power, the meanings of the local and of community are deeply political and, like that of democracy, contested. At a theoretical level, democracy by its nature seems to presume the value of local control. Democracy trusts in the people to rule themselves, based on their collective judgment, freed from externally imposed dictates. Since at least the time of the
Ancient Greeks, democratic practice has relied upon notions of “the Public” or “the People” as more than mere abstractions or theoretical inventions; the democratic community has been conceived primarily as an actual collective bound together by concrete, personal relations and interactions. Since deliberative engagement requires at least some form of proximity and relationship of identification, local control and robustly democratic procedures have been closely associated. Gutmann’s view is no exception on this point. Indeed, like all deliberative democratic theorists, she attributes greater value to local control than do aggregative views that place little emphasis on dialogical political participation (Chambers, 2003).

Nevertheless, while there is a presumption in favor of local control it must sometimes be overridden in democracy’s own name. This is a premise of constitutional democracies like our own and it is the justification for the kinds of principled constraints with which Gutmann limits democratic discretion. Use of local control to justify and perpetuate racial segregation, for instance, violates the principles of nondiscrimination and the democratic threshold, as well as the Fourteenth Amendment, and thus cannot be defended on democratic grounds. The same reasoning can be extended to the spectrum of educational law and policy that followed in the wake of the Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision regarding income, disability, gender, and language. It follows that the diminution of local control in education policymaking in the wake of NCLB is not undemocratic per se—whether it is depends on its rationale and results vis-à-vis the normative requirements of democratic education. In what follows, we highlight the rationale and results of NCLB relevant to American democracy in general and democratic education in particular by examining the law and its effects in historical context.

**NCLB and Democratic Policymaking**

*Localism as Obsolete*
In order to understand how federal education policy has come to be, in important respects, anti-democratic, it is important to understand the history and nature of the accountability regime (McGuinn, 2006) embodied in NCLB. With states acting to implement NCLB, schools and relatively localized school systems have become the loci of accountability for educational performance. This focus on accountability has occurred to the near exclusion of attention to social, cultural, and economic conditions influencing students’ academic performance. While local school systems are held accountable for student performance, however, performance itself is measured almost exclusively in terms of scores on standards-based tests that are both mandated and developed from afar (Baker, Hannaway, & Shepard, 2009). This development is probably no accident; for, as we discuss in greater detail below, the accountability regime has arisen in part as a result of the belief amongst technocratic, antidemocratic reformers that local control of schools is in principle a problem to be overcome.

Throughout the nineteenth century, local community control was not so much an organizational preference or political stand as it was a material necessity and unquestioned matter of fact. Alexis de Tocqueville (1835/1990) remarked in Democracy in America that one of the most frequent topics of local discussion and deliberation that he observed throughout his travels involved education (pp. 404–405; 314–318). Decisions concerning schooling were distinctive, in Tocqueville’s view, in that they brought together the community as a community for the purposes of deliberation over what was understood to be both a public and a private good—the education of all the community’s children. Thus, Tocqueville (1835/1990) suggested that local town or school board meetings concerning education were (along with jury service) “democracy’s schoolhouse,” where the adult citizenry learned and indeed, created the meaning of democratic citizenship (pp. 280–287; 317–318).
Vital as local control of schools seems to have been for the democratic development of American culture and politics, critics of schooling never had to look far to find much that was lacking, from pedagogical and organizational perspectives. Historian of education David Tyack (1974) writes that, in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, “Teachers knew to whom they were accountable: the school trustees who hired them, the parents and other taxpayers, the children whose respect—and perhaps affection—they needed to win” (p. 18). Such high levels of citizen participation contributed to the diversity of schooling in America, as local idiosyncrasies and perceived needs dictated choices about curriculum and staffing. Tyack states that, “The ‘curriculum’ of the rural school was often whatever textbooks lay at hand,” and so “schooling” could mean fairly different things in different places (1974, p. 19). In the late nineteenth century, for a variety of reasons—accommodating the large influx of immigrants foremost among them—this diversity came to be seen as a problem to be solved, and a number of reformers who became known as the “administrative progressives” worked to standardize, professionalize, and centralize schooling in the United States, to transform it into what Tyack (1974) later christened “the one best system.”

While they met with a good deal of resistance from teachers, administrators, and communities at the local level, the decades-long efforts of reformers did change the face of public education in the United States to a remarkable extent. Then, as now, many viewed standardization as a necessary means to achieve the equalization of opportunity. The idea that creating equality of educational opportunity (or, at a minimum, creating the perception of such equality) is essential to the functioning of democracy was popularized by Horace Mann and other proponents of common schools. But the leading reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the mold of Ellwood Cubberley, Lewis Terman, and Edward Thorndike,
were not committed to furthering educational equality as the foundation for democracy. Rather, they were technocrats who sought to apply science to public education, the goal of which they considered to be the preparation of students to fit into their predetermined social and vocational niches. As Cubberley, inaugural dean of the Stanford School of Education, remarked,

We should give up the exceedingly democratic idea that all are equal and that our society is devoid of classes. The employee tends to remain an employee; the wage earner tends to remain a wage earner . . . One bright child may easily be worth more to the National Life than thousands of those of low mentality. (Mondale & Patton, 2001)

The goals of social efficiency and of more “rational” social policy, here pictured as at odds with democratic values, were to be achieved through an increasing centralization of decision-making power of technocratic elites. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the role of centralized authority had changed. It was now equity-minded reformers who adopted it as a tool of education reform, shifting the focus from curriculum and the adequacy of management in schools to the elimination of unequal access and resources in order to foster the conditions of a more democratic society. The Supreme Court’s 1954 Brown decision was the watershed, inaugurating what McGuinn (2006) refers to as the equity regime. The new focus was particularly embodied in 1965’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), most recently reauthorized as NCLB.

Alongside the increased intervention of the federal government in education in the decades following the Brown decision, new advocacy for local community control emerged from two very different types of constituencies. Conservatives (including traditionalists, religious conservatives, and Right Libertarians) invoked local community control as they resisted racial desegregation in public schools, initially in the South and later in the North as well. School
choice emerged at this time as a policy instrument that legitimated continuing segregation in the name of *prima facie* democratic principles of freedom of association and local community control. Thus, education scholar Diane Ravitch (2010) writes that, “During the 1950s and 1960s, the term ‘school choice’ was stigmatized as a dodge invented to permit white students to escape to all-white public schools or to [private] all-white segregation academies” (p. 114). For equity-minded reformers, school choice became associated with local obstructionism and racism.

Another source of support for local community control, by contrast, was explicitly equity-minded and at odds with the conservatives. This emerged in many predominantly Black and Latino/a communities, throughout California, the Southwest, and especially in the urban centers of the North. The civil rights movement had mobilized minority groups to resist inequity and injustice in American institutions. From the mid-1960s, the growing militancy of ethnic solidarity movements—captured for many in phrases such as “Black Power,” “Red Power,” and “Chicano Power”—advocated communal autonomy and self-sufficiency as paths to empowerment and equity for the historically marginalized and disadvantaged. Control of education and schooling were seen as key fronts in a struggle for both civil and human rights. The Black Panther Party (BPP), for example, established breakfast programs and developed new Afro-centric curricula. In the early 1970s, American Indian Movement (AIM) organizers and various Native American communities established “survival schools” (borrowing this terminology from the BPP) on and off reservations that sought to address longstanding iniquities in education, child welfare, and juvenile justice (Davis, 2013). Such community-based solidarity efforts in some cases reshaped official education policy, especially related to school governance. In cities like New York and Chicago, grassroots movements advocating local community control led to increased decentralization of school governance that, at least in some cases, supported
increased public participation in determining and implementing education policy (Ravitch, 1974).

As the above discussion makes clear, local control has been mobilized by different actors and groups in order to further disparate, sometimes contradictory political aims. In the early 1980s, however, as the decades-long battles over desegregation and school choice continued, and as various minority constituencies experimented with developing local community control as an equity-oriented reform in its own right (Lipman, 2004), a decisive new trend emerged in national politics that would prove extremely important in undercutting local control across the board. Namely, the equity regime that had dominated federal policy, justifying instruments such as desegregation busing and affirmative action, began to be eclipsed. In May 1983 the U.S. Department of Education released *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report, which was followed by several more with similar messages, portrayed public education in the United States as contributing to “a rising tide of mediocrity” that threatened the country’s economic competitiveness. The report held that while education had long been considered primarily an issue to be addressed at the state and local levels, the crisis in education now made it an issue of national significance (McGuinn, 2006, p. 43). If this crisis was not addressed, the report warned, the U.S. role as a global economic and political superpower was in jeopardy.

During the Reagan years and beyond, rhetoric concerning the perceived crisis of achievement came to dominate discussions of education policy. By the mid-1990s a much-increased emphasis on holding local districts accountable to state and federal authorities provided the context in which Democrats and Republicans alike discussed education policy issues. This culminated in NCLB, which completed the shift from the equity regime to a new
accountability regime. Equity was not eliminated as a concern in education policy—for example, attention would continue to be focused on the “achievement gap.” But the goal of educational equity was diminished in overall importance and subsumed under the principle of raising the performance of all students, rather than focusing special attention on those most marginalized and in need (McGuinn, 2006).

As indicated before, much more emphasis was placed on the accountability of local schools for educational performance, independent of the social, cultural, and economic conditions in which they operate. The role of the federal government in education became one of ensuring that schools were held accountable for teaching all students basic skills, especially those thought to enable them to participate productively in the workforce and keep the U.S. economy competitive in the global marketplace. Simultaneously, a growing faith in unfettered private markets as the solution to inefficiency and poor performance—the “free market fundamentalism” (West, 2004) central to emerging neoliberal ideology—positioned formal democratic accountability (now synonymous with “bureaucratic control”) as a primary obstacle to be overcome through reform, and gave new life to school choice and privatization initiatives. Thus, in the advent of the accountability regime we detect echoes of administrative progressivism, minus that earlier movement’s overt racism, in combination with an aggregative conception of democratic politics and schooling as the pursuit of private interests, best achieved through private markets.

*Conservative Accommodations of the Federal Role in Education*

Although NCLB has come to be viewed by many as a victory for a number of longstanding conservative agendas, the fact remains that the rise of the accountability regime occurred in the face of conservatives’ historical resistance to encroachments by the federal
government on local control of education. This resistance took two general forms, which in turn produced two ways of accommodating a federal role.

The first form was advanced by conservative critics of federal welfare programs in the 1980s, who held the view that social problems arose not from a history of unequal economic and social opportunity structures, as equity-minded reformers claimed (Wilson, 1987), but from flaws in the character or culture of the communities and individuals that make up the American “underclass.” Influential voices claimed that, ironically, such flaws were exacerbated by the very social programs designed to benefit those in need (Murray, 1984). Applied to education, this perspective depicts the failure of schools to improve student achievement as a failure of effort or will on the part of individual students and, especially, their families and communities. Schools, in this view, cannot help children overcome the “culture of poverty” (Harrington, 1962; Moynihan, 1969; Murray, 1984) within a system led by bureaucratic school administrators with a vested interest in preserving the status quo and characterized by a corps of teachers shielded by union-protected privileges (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Accordingly, such critics believe that federal intervention in education can only do good if it addresses the cultural/moral problems that are responsible for poor school performance. They assert that what is needed is the enforcement of standards and sanctions to force students and education professionals (teachers and administrators) alike to do what they ought to do, and to hold them responsible for failure.

As Oakes, Rogers, and Lipton (2006) explain, “No Child Left Behind seeks to increase adult expectations, motivation, and effort—it assumes that inequality is the result of a lack of commitment by the people who live or work in low-income communities of color” (p. 160). This presumption that the cause of disparate achievement lies in deficiencies of individual and community motivation and commitment directly informs the policy interventions preferred in the
accountability regime. Thus, “the key policy lever to promote educational equity is not better resources more fairly distributed, but rather behavioral prompts in the form of public exposure followed by incentives or (more likely) punishments” (Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006), mechanisms which we discuss in greater detail in the next section.

The second form of conservative resistance to and eventual accommodation of federal intervention, neoliberalism, is of more recent vintage, dating from the 1990s. The influential thesis advanced by Chubb and Moe (1990) on school choice in their book *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools* is quite hostile to government intervention, including standards-based testing and accountability. Despite Chubb and Moe’s use of the concept of “scholarships” to characterize their plan, it is a voucher plan, and such plans have so far not been a serious policy option. Charter schools have become far and away the most prominent form of school choice in the U.S., with significant support from the federal government, including substantial financial allocations (Kober & Usher, 2012, pp. 12–14).

Though opposed to governmental intervention, Chubb and Moe (1990) are not advocates of local control, at least not *democratic* local control. Indeed, they are openly dismissive of it. Instead of democratic local control, they wish to see educational policy guided by market mechanisms, minimally overseen by government. Chubb and Moe’s fundamental principle is not give-and-take deliberation, but consumers voting with their feet. Insofar as charter schools deploy the same basic market rationale (Howe, 2008), they too are dismissive of local democratic control (if only implicitly). Though Chubb and Moe do not endorse government-sanctioned standards and testing, other supporters of market mechanisms in education assert that the information derived from testing is very useful to parents in the process of choosing schools.
Despite seemingly contradictory elements, the two different conservative accommodations of the growing federal intervention in education policy eventually became cornerstones of the new accountability regime, embraced by both major parties. It should be clear this mix of ideas that undergird the accountability regime shares a great deal with the assumptions of aggregative theories of democracy: questions of value and of the defensibility of citizen preferences are relegated outside the domain of political deliberation, and the political sphere, like the economic, is increasingly pictured in terms of the free market.

In the next section, we consider how the implementation of the accountability regime in the form of NCLB violates the requirements of deliberative theory by marginalizing members of the political community most affected by decisions under the banner of accountability. We also argue that the greater power and voice that these same citizens are said by proponents to gain under NCLB do not amount to the kind of power and voice required by a deliberative theory of democratic policymaking and education.

*Testing and Choice Under NCLB*

The NCLB accountability regime incorporates two preeminent policy instruments: *standards-based testing* and *public school choice*. Diane Ravitch (2010), an early and influential supporter of testing and choice policies, eventually came to see NCLB as “a measurement strategy that has no underlying educational vision at all” (p. 16). While Ravitch’s claim here is overstated, it does help to dramatize the extent to which measurement is the driving mechanism in NCLB. Testing is mandated for all schools in districts receiving Title I funds and functions as the basis for sanctions and rewards. For each year that a school or district fails to “make” the mandated improvement on testing measures (Annual Yearly Progress or AYP), NCLB specifies
increasingly drastic sanctions. Supplemental Education Services, parental school choice, firing of teachers and administrators, and eventually school “reconstitutions” and even closures.

Testing measures have become almost uniformly unpopular with teachers, students, and parents. A 2008 poll by *Education Next* found that 69% of those polled wanted the testing provisions of NCLB substantially altered, and teachers were far more likely to disapprove of NCLB than the general public (Howell, West, & Peterson, 2008). The most recent attempt to establish a national set of education standards, the Common Core State Standards endorsed by the National Governor’s Association in 2009, has led to a backlash unlike that seen in the implementation of NCLB, galvanizing community-level resistance to testing and, to an extent, to standardization itself. Organized movements have captured headlines by encouraging parents to have their children “opt-out” of state standardized tests (Chen, 2014). Commitment to the Common Core has become a key election issue cutting across the two major parties, but posing a political dilemma for Republican governors in particular (Barrow, 2014). Advocacy groups associated with the Tea Party movement exploit the Common Core standards as an opportunity to focus their more general attack on federal government interventions, and “establishment” Republicans who staunchly continue to support the accountability regime at both the federal and state levels. Association with Common Core has been used to explain losses of Republican incumbents in recent primary elections in Indiana—this despite substantial financial backing of the incumbents from the Common Core-promoting U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and endorsements from the state’s Republican Governor Mike Pence (Malkin, 2014).

While it may seem obvious to many activists and observers that NCLB’s provisions (or the Common Core Standards) violate the democratic principle of nonrepression, within the framework of deliberative theory this conclusion cannot follow from the mere fact of their
unpopularity. Backlash against the implementation of Common Core, occurring as it is in the context of a growing xenophobic and racist grassroots conservative movements, seems reminiscent of conservative resistance to desegregation and other civil rights legislation. Court ordered desegregation was explicitly justified in terms of promoting principles of nonrepression, nondiscrimination, and the democratic threshold; local resistance in this case was more a threat to democracy at the local level than its enactment. As we will demonstrate in the next section, the demonstrable impact of NCLB on the content and context of schooling suggest that federal initiatives, in this case, violate the principle of the democratic threshold for all students, even as they disproportionately impact students and communities that are historically disadvantaged.

That being said, there is evidence that NCLB’s design and implementation has violated the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination. Recall that nonrepression requires that those who are affected by a particular issue of public concern may not be prevented from participating meaningfully in deliberations that generate policy and guide its implementation and evaluation—barriers to participation may not be constructed. The principle also entails a more positive requirement that participation be fostered—this means that appropriate supports must be provided in some cases to make the opportunity to participate more than the mere absence of formal barriers (Howe, 1997). This requirement has important practical as well as moral limits, and the larger the scale of the democratic processes in question, the more challenging it becomes to meet this requirement. Indeed, this is one reason that local control has historically been so vital in determining education policy. High stakes testing is mandated for all locales under NCLB, with the content of tests is determined at the state level (Common Core attempts to substantially nationalize one overarching set of standards). As a matter of both design and
implementation, the local deliberation that makes the meaningful and positive participation of those affected possible has been absent from the process.

The observations above could be repeated concerning a number of national policies. Improving the conditions for meaningful participation in deliberation within this system is itself a major front in democratic institutional reform. The principle of nondiscrimination prohibits “selective repression” on the basis of group differences (Gutmann, 1999, p. 45). NCLB does, to some extent, take decision-making concerning curriculum standards and school policies out of the hands of every local community. That is, after all, built into standardization by its very nature. However, not all communities and school districts have been affected in the same ways or to the same extent. From relatively early on in its implementation, researchers have found that urban districts were identified disproportionately as “in need of improvement” (Center on Education Policy, 2006). As a result, although only 27% of schools receiving federal funds through Title I were located in urban districts, urban schools constituted about 90% of those facing NCLB sanctions. One reason cited by researchers for this disproportionate focus on urban schools was the higher percentage of students of nondominant groups associated with their “race/ethnicity, income, language background, or disability status.” In her focused study of four schools in the Chicago area, Pauline Lipman (2004) observes that, “patterns of racial subjugation are clear” when one considers “the demographics of schools on probation” (p. 177).

The discrepancy Lipman documents can also be observed through inter-state comparisons. Nichols, Glass, and Berliner (2006) conducted an analysis of accountability in 25 large U.S. states. They found a statistically significant correlation between increased accountability demands and the growth of minority populations in individual states during the period of 1980 to 2000. The authors postulate that accountability systems are adopted in
response to growing ethnic minority populations. States with growing minority populations adopt more intense and punitive accountability systems, and the schools and districts in those states where such students are concentrated are more likely to have experienced NCLB sanctions than are districts made up of students belonging to the majority population. Glass (2008) puts the point bluntly: “There appears to be a link between accountability and ethnicity. Where highly punitive education accountability systems are installed, there one finds the politically weak and vulnerable members of society” (p. 225).

It is not surprising that students in traditionally underserved districts and schools perform more poorly on standardized tests than their more advantaged majority-group peers. The relatively heavy burden of punitive interventions borne by disadvantaged students was predictable and has had consequences for them that are educationally far reaching. A consortium of six policy agencies found that increased accountability has contributed to an increase in dropouts, suspensions and expulsions nationwide, which feeds the phenomenon known as the “School-to-Prison-Pipeline” (Advancement Project, 2011; LaFree & Arum, 2006). Test-based accountability creates a perverse incentive for schools to allow or even encourage low-performing students to leave. Combined with “zero tolerance” school discipline policies, “effects have been particularly severe for students of color and students with disabilities” (Advancement Project, 2011).

Lipman (2004) draws a clear link between NCLB’s rationale and its selective and disproportionate effects. In pointed language, she characterizes the accountability regime as a “highly racialized discourse of deficits” (p. 178). Its top-down imposition of standards and sanctions “is a form of colonial education governed by powerful (primarily white) outsiders. It signals that communities affected have neither the knowledge nor the right to debate and act
together with educators to improve their child’s education” (p. 178). Thus, Lipman finds that one of the most significant results of NCLB is that “Schools in low-income neighborhoods of color are the least in charge of their own destiny” (p. 177). This is the case because NCLB sanctions predictably target and then undermine the democratic participation of already disadvantaged communities. This targeted repression is further dramatized in the many prominent examples of school reconstitution have met with local opposition and, in some cases, community organizing and active resistance (Buffenbarger, 2012; Lipman, 2004, p. 58; Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006; Priority Schools Campaign, 2011). Such efforts have been, by and large, stymied.

This flies in the face of NCLB supporters’ claim that the law serves to empower parents and communities, through sanctions thought to foster alternatives and choice. Among these sanctions is the requirement of schools to provide Supplemental Educational Services (SES), which is a precursor to the requirement to provide a choice of alternative schools. In particular, after two consecutive years of failure to make Adequate Yearly Progress, schools must use a portion of their Title I funds to allow students’ parents to purchase tutoring or other supplemental services from private providers (e.g., Sylvan Learning Center, Education Online, etc.). If a school fails to improve for a third consecutive year, the school must offer a choice of alternative schools. Paul Manna (2007) explains the logic undergirding choice and SES provisions in NCLB:

In theory, NCLB school choice and supplemental education services can empower parents and students, providing students who are attending struggling schools with opportunities to improve their academic fortunes. Simultaneously, both mechanisms offer a form of “exit,” through which parents’ choices can put pressure on struggling schools to
change. Thus, these two remedies can serve not only the individual students who use them, but also those who remain in schools that respond to parents’ signals. (p. 21)

As discussed above, school choice and the introduction of private educational entrepreneurship are viewed by many as a way to improve schools by making them subject to market competition, and this view has increasingly won adherents amongst both Democrats and Republicans (Henig, 2007).

While NCLB’s combination of public school choice and SES does allow for a form of accountability from below and thus a form of local control, it is not a particularly democratic form of control. School choice has the potential to foster democracy by helping to ensure that disempowered communities have a real voice in policy deliberations concerning their schools, and no doubt some choice schools foster democracy in this way. However, school choice most often does nothing to foster democracy and sometimes frustrates it. First, it does not advance democracy in those cases in which the opportunity for parents to “exit” cannot be exercised because no better schools are available (Hess & Finn, 2007). Second, school choice frustrates democracy when it fails to ensure that groups that have historically been subjected to discrimination are protected from it and permits the potential of school choice to foster democracy to be “hijacked” (Witte, 2000)\(^7\) by parents with power who seek to further advantage their children (Chute, 2012; Glass, 2008, pp. 148–202). This further empowerment of the already advantaged at the expense of those worse off does not amount to an increase in democratic power and voice, understood in terms of the ability and means to participate on equal terms with fellow citizens in the activity of conscious social reproduction.

The accumulated evidence on school choice, with charter schools being the most heavily represented, indicates that school choice does little if anything to boost achievement overall and
may actually increase the achievement gap. It also exacerbates the segregation of African American and Latino/a children, as well as children with disabilities (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011; Lee & Lubienski, 2011; Miron, Urschel, Mathis, & Tornquist, 2010), a result that we consider in greater detail in the discussion of democratic education below.

While decision-making power concerning policy is taken out of the hands of local communities and schools, NCLB helps to increase the power of other actors and organizations. If, in the years following the implementation of school choice and SES, schools fail to attain preset levels of mean test scores, NCLB mandates that they take “corrective action”: firing staff and administrators, adopting a new curriculum, even reconstituting schools as state or district charters, or placing them under private management. As the severity of sanctions escalates, decision-making power is taken out of the hands of the communities most affected and is increasingly concentrated in the hands of business interests (SES providers and Education Management Organizations [EMOs]) and wealthy philanthropic organizations (the Gates Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, and the Broad Foundation, to name three of the most important players), despite their mixed track record of improving achievement (Miron, Urschel, Yat Aguilar, & Dailey, 2012; Ravitch, 2010; 2013).

Public school choice and SES sanctions thus provide a door through which private business interests and philanthropists enter public education reform. As in parallel transformations in other sectors, this “disaster capitalism” (Klein, 2007) uses the declaration of schools as “failing” and of the public education system as “broken” as the pretext for deregulated privatization (Saltman, 2007). As a consequence, NCLB has fostered the “deregulation and commodification of public schooling” and has served to “undermine democratic governance over this crucial public sphere” (Saltman, 2007, p. 10). As the dust settled and assessment measures...
and research studies revealed little or no advantage in terms of student achievement as a result of changes such as the proliferation of charter schools and other school choice policies, these reforms had become widespread and entrenched (for the case of charters, see Henig, 2008).

NCLB violates the principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination because those citizens who have a profound stake in policy decisions are marginalized from processes of policy design, implementation, and evaluation, and because the communities most subject to NCLB sanctions are disproportionately low-income communities of color. By taking decision-making power away from members of the local community and, in many cases, vesting power instead in private corporations and philanthropic foundations, NCLB thereby diminishes the opportunities available to members of certain communities to participate in decision-making about education policy making. It does this in ways consistently associated with groups that are disadvantages in terms of income and race. In sum, NCLB exemplifies an undemocratic type of policymaking, and its impact vis a vis ongoing policymaking processes is demonstrably negative.

In the next section, we examine NCLB qua accountability regime in terms of its implications for democratic education. We focus in particular upon the requirements of the third principle of a democratic theory of education, the democratic threshold.

**NCLB and Democratic Education**

It has been a commonplace since the ancient Greeks that citizens are not born, but must be made. And while not everything that counts as citizenship education occurs in schools, surely schools have, or should have, a significant role to play. What sort of schooling, then, is required to develop democratic character?

The answer is provided in part by a determination of necessary curricular content. John Dewey (1938), the foremost champion of democratic education, observed, “(T)he field of
experience is very wide and it varies in its contents from place to place and from time to time. A single course of study for all progressive schools is out of the question” (p. 78). Dewey’s observation is quite germane to our increased contemporary recognition of the multicultural, multiracial nature of our society. And it is a central in work such as the *Save Our Schools* initiative, which argues against the kind of standardization promoted by NCLB and explicitly calls for more local control of curriculum decisions:

Today’s curriculum, which is the result of the unintended consequences of NCLB, has diverted America’s schools from their mission of providing children with a good and meaningful education. In a country as diverse as our fifty states are it stands to reason that local communities can best decide the curriculum that their own students need. (Save Our Schools, 2012)

The claim that “local communities can best decide” is consonant with the argument above that decision-making concerning education policy is itself a vital site of democratic participation, and that the failure to include relevant stake-holders amounts to a violation of the complimentary principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination. Yet as we have signaled throughout, within a robust deliberative democratic theory such a valorization of local control also presupposes important limiting constraints. Some standardization is appropriate, if grounded in the necessary conditions that make democratic life possible in the first place.

Curriculum expresses basic value commitments of the society as it reproduces itself, and so might be viewed in a sense as a litmus test for the public and elite’s commitment to democratic ideals. Researchers continue to document the myriad ways in which curriculum serves as a key cite of struggle over our cultural politics, and critical scholars point to sometimes subtle but nevertheless powerful ways that groups are systematically advantaged or
disadvantaged. The content of curriculum, official as well as the “hidden,” is therefore a proper and, indeed, pressing topic for democratic deliberation within the domain of education policymaking. To be sure, literacy and numeracy are crucially important, as are many other parts of the standard official curriculum, including science and math beyond numeracy. But these aspects of the curriculum are not sufficient. The *sine qua non* of democratic character is skill in defining and jointly deliberating about the public’s common problems. Unlike an aristocracy governed by a properly educated ruling elite, such as that described in Plato’s *Republic*, democracy requires that all citizens be educated to participate in what Benjamin Barber (1994) describes as an “aristocracy of everyone” (in this vein see also Feinberg, 2012; Woodruff, 2005). Although NCLB does not explicitly rule out attention to the development of skill in democratic deliberation, it hardly encourages it.

Recall that the democratic threshold sets an educational equality standard that is defined in terms of “democratic character”: the skills, knowledge, and dispositions required for effective political participation (Gutmann, 1999). This requirement that students master the elements of democratic character, at least up to the democratic threshold, sets limits on what education policies may be adopted. The significance of NCLB for democratic education depends ultimately upon whether it increases or decreases the likelihood of all children in attaining the democratic threshold. This depends upon the policy’s impact on two distinct dimensions of schooling: first, the content of curriculum and second, the context in which instruction occurs. Both of these dimensions, we argue below, are essential to consider if we hope to understand the true impact of NCLB vis a vis democratic education.

It is difficult to find evidence that speaks directly to the question of the NCLB’s effects on democratic education, but there are a number of findings and arguments that are germane.
Some of these effects may be, depending on one’s perspective, quite positive: a recent study found that NCLB led to an increase, on average, in per pupil spending of $600, as did teacher compensation and the share of teachers with advanced degrees (Dee, Jacob, & Schwartz, 2013). More significant for the question of democratic education, however, the study confirmed that NCLB spurred a reallocation of time from science and social studies instruction to the tested subject of reading. NCLB testing requirements exert pressure on educators to focus instruction on content that appears on the tests and on test-taking skills, excluding much of the content essential to democratic character. And indeed, the effects of curriculum standards and standardized testing mandated by NCLB have damaged the equal opportunity of students to learn (Tienken & Zhao, 2013).

There is also substantial evidence supporting the conclusion that school choice has increased segregation among schools (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011; Lee & Lubienski, 2011; Miron, Urschel, Mathis, & Tornquist, 2010) and this reduces opportunities for students to develop democratic character because of the deleterious effects on the context of education (Auge & Simpson, 2012). Segregation is both a cause and an effect of discrimination (Anderson, 2010; Satz, 2007), and it significantly compromises the ability of public schools to instill democratic character as called for by the democratic threshold.

The Content of Education

Since NCLB took effect in 2002, a majority of districts have significantly increased the time spent on math and English instruction in both elementary and middle schools, at the expense of other subjects and activities (FairTest, 2012). In middle schools, the Center for Education Policy found an average increase in time spent on math and English of 42%. This increased focus on “the basics” means that other subjects have had to give. At the elementary
level, 44% of districts reduced time in one or more subjects or activities including, most significantly for our purposes, social studies.

Under NCLB, “The goal of testing [is] higher scores, without regard to whether students [acquire] any knowledge of history, science, literature, geography, the arts, or other subjects that [are] not important for accountability purposes” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 20). A meta-analysis of studies on the impact of high-stakes testing on curriculum not only found narrowing of the curriculum to the tested subjects but also a shift in pedagogical approach, “compelling teachers to use more lecture-based, teacher-centered pedagogies” (Au, 2007, p. 264). This contributes to the fragmentation of students’ knowledge by reducing content to bits of information learned for the sake of doing well on tests. In this environment, teachers also respond to high-stakes testing by avoiding more controversial subjects and issues that are the stuff of democratic deliberation amongst equal citizens (Journell, 2010). Regarding history, in particular, Ravitch remarks that a critical education in history is required to foster the skills of deliberation needed for political participation. Similarly, Richard Neumann (2008) counsels that, “Effective citizenship requires critical habits of mind and the ability and inclination to deliberate and debate conscientiously on matters of social importance” (p. 332).

Such habits and inclinations ought to be part-and-parcel of civics education, which is usually situated today within the broader field of social studies (Hanson & Howe, 2011). The narrowing effects of NCLB on social studies have been marked. Currently, only nine states require a civics test for graduation, and since 2001 the number of states in which social studies subjects are regularly assessed has declined from 39 to 21 (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2012). The content of civics and social studies assessments has also shifted during this period from a mix of essay and short answer responses and multiple-
choice questions to an almost exclusive use of the latter. While certainly important in their own right, disputes over the appropriate content of social studies—for example whether it ought to involve a traditional discipline-focused approach or a more problem-centered, activist progressive approach—need not be resolved in order for us to see that NCLB diminishes the place of civics education in any curriculum.

Predictably, this impact on curriculum and pedagogy has been greatest on districts and schools identified as requiring improvement under NCLB (Center on Education Policy, 2005; McMurrer, 2007). Thus, such policies likely exacerbate what Meira Levinson (2012) has referred to as “the civic empowerment gap” between wealthier, white, middle class students and their minority, lower-income peers. On the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Assessment, for instance, White students who were poor scored as well as Black and Hispanic students who were not poor. This gap is apparent as early as fourth grade and persistent through high school, and is reflected in knowledge about and attitudes towards civic participation on a variety of measures from voting behavior to civic trust to volunteerism. These disparities between groups continue into adulthood, and indicate an alarming inequality in the distribution of preparation for participatory citizenship. Attention to the civic engagement gap is thus warranted, while we are also rightly concerned by low absolute levels of participation across all categories (Levinson, 2012, p. 37).

Finally, even as young people across demographic categories are increasingly courted by the two major political parties and seen as a decisive factor in many electoral outcomes, the civic knowledge that these young citizens possess is alarmingly narrow and fraught with falsehoods and misunderstandings. A poll conducted in the summer of 2012, during the lead up to a national election (a time when, it should be noted, many people are significantly more attentive to politics
than at other times) found that “68% of young people were either unable [or unwilling] to answer or incorrect about whether their state required a photo ID to vote,” and that “80% of the young voters were either unable to answer or incorrect about their state’s early registration rules” (CIRCLE, 2012, p. 1).

Lack of awareness of current events and issues such as voter ID laws and procedures such as voter registration have obvious practical implications for effective participation in even the most basic democratic procedures. More fundamental issues having to do with the recent history of democratic life in America may be even more significance. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) published a recent study of the state of civil rights education in the United States (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2011). Only two percent of 2010 high school seniors had the most general and rudimentary knowledge of the Brown decision: that it had to do with segregation in the schools. This is “no surprise,” according to the study, for, “across the country, state educational standards virtually ignore our civil rights history” (p. 6). The findings indicated that most states do not view the civil rights movement as an essential subject for all American citizens to be conversant with; rather, it is viewed as a topic primarily of interest to African American students.

Without knowledge of recent struggle for justice and the conditions necessary for real democratic participation, it is unlikely that students will have the resources to understand and assess the historic significance of, for example, the Supreme Court’s decision in June of 2013 declaring Section 4 (“the heart”) of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional (Shelby County vs. Holder, 570 US; see Liptak, 2013). This is, of course, an example of judicial review, and so is relatively aloof from participatory politics. The political ramifications of this decision and the responses of, say, the Obama administration or the Congress, will likely have great significance
for the conditions under which democratic politics will occur in the future. Democratic education should prepare students to at least understand and take informed positions on such critical issues. The SPLC findings, however, in combination with evidence of less and much narrower testing of social studies subjects including civics, provide a dramatic indicator of a profound lack of understanding of and commitment to democratic citizenship education in U.S. education policy today.

*The Context of Education*

In a complex and diverse society such as ours, deliberation necessarily involves negotiating disagreement while tolerating difference (Gutmann, 1999). In contemporary pluralistic democracies, goals of inculcating critical thinking skills in individual students intersect with those of fostering possibilities for public deliberation. Dewey (1938) proposed a vision of education in which students were encouraged and enabled to reflect on and revise their own beliefs and values, and he argued that this process was aided by a diverse context of learning:

> The intermingling in the school of youth of different races, different religions, and unlike customs creates for all a new and broader environment. Common subject matter accustoms all to a unity of outlook upon a broader horizon than is visible to the members of any group while it is isolated. (p. 21)

Indeed, truly democratic deliberation requires that all recognize the legitimate claims of fellow-citizens across cultural, social, political, and other differences (see Howe, 1997)—in what Robert Kunzman (2011) calls “civic multilingualism.”

Instruction in practices of “taking multiple perspectives” and “codeswitching” certainly supports such civic multilingualism (Levinson, 2012, pp. 87–92; see also Collins, 2009).
However, the dispositions and attitudes necessary for entering into deliberation and for keeping it productive are considerably more difficult to directly teach than are customary academic knowledge and skills (Davis, 2003, p. 32; The Institute of Education Sciences, 2010). Much depends on how the context is set up so as to introduce, hone, and reinforce constructive interaction, including, and especially, dialogue across differences. When it comes to ways in which individuals are disposed towards those different from themselves, nothing is so formative as personal contact with others, at least if it occurs under certain conditions (Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Kenworthy, Turner, & Hewstone, 2005). Gordon Allport (1954) famously hypothesized that when intergroup interaction occurs under conditions of institutional support, role equality, and frequent cooperative contact with acquaintance potential, such contact reduces the prevalence of prejudice, stigmatization, discrimination, and anxiety in intergroup relations. Recent meta-analysis has shown strong support for this contact hypothesis, as applied to numerous categories of difference (Anderson, 2010, p. 125; Pettigrew, Thomas, & Tropp, 2006).

Many efforts at desegregation in the post-Brown era did not meet all of Allport’s (1954) criteria—role equality was not always available to Black students enrolling in previously all-white schools (Cohen & Lotan, 1995)—and within-school tracking often reduced opportunities for cooperative contact with acquaintance potential (Eyler, Cook, & Ward, 1983). Even so, adult graduates report that they valued the experience of attending integrated high schools and that it prepared them for coping with life in a diverse society (Anderson, 2010; Holme, Wells, & Revilla, 2005). The outcomes of previous efforts at racial integration suggest that integration helps to sustain a democratic society, since citizens with experience working in diverse settings are “more responsive to the rights, needs, and concerns of diverse citizens rather than catering to the interests or perspectives of one or a very few sections of society” (Anderson, 2010, p. 128).
The likelihood that citizens of all backgrounds will come to possess genuine democratic character traits is increased within a diverse context of learning. Thus, segregated learning environments and the policies that support these amount to “a loss suffered by the American public at large because they limit the ability of citizens from all origins [to] exchange ideas and cooperate on terms of equality—which is the indispensable social condition of democracy itself” (Anderson, 2002, 1270–1271).

In keeping with Anderson’s (2010) argument that racial integration is an imperative of justice and democratic politics, recent analysis shows that racial integration of schooling was in fact the most effective reform effort for closing the achievement gap (Schofield, 2005; Whortman & Bryant, 1985). Black students made gains as a result of desegregation efforts, while white students’ test scores held steady. As David L. Kirp summarizes these findings, “Between 1970 and 1990, the black-white gap in educational attainment shrank—not because white youngsters did worse but because black youngsters did better” (Kirp, 2012). Rucker C. Johnson (2011) has demonstrated that these gains also persisted into the next generation: The children of students who attended integrated schools in the 1960s and 1970s do better academically than do the children of their counterparts who remained in segregated schools.

In the years since NCLB was enacted, schools in the United States have become increasingly stratified by race, socioeconomic status (SES), ability status, and even by religious and political affiliation (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011; Lee & Lubienski, 2011; Miron, Urschel, Mathis, & Tornquist, 2010). Gary Orfield (2009) observed in 2009 that, “Fifty-five years after the Brown decision, blacks and Latinos in American schools are more segregated than they have been in more than four decades.” In a report released in September 2012, Orfield and his associates have documented that segregation has since grown worse (Orfield, Kucsera,
Siegel-Hawley, 2012). While increasing school segregation began before NCLB, it is clear that the law has failed to address, much less reverse, this trend. On the contrary, NCLB’s encouragement of unconstrained choice policies have contributed to increased stratification between as well as within schools (Glass, 2008).

Warnings about the deleterious effects of stratification have often been dismissed on the grounds that these are an inevitable product of the democratic principle of freedom of association (Merry, 2012; see Scott, 2005). Certainly, freedom of association is an important democratic principle, and there is no reason to believe that some forms of school choice can’t complement the creation and maintenance of diverse contexts for learning. As Linn and Welner (2007) point out, “The key for realizing the potential of these policies to achieve racial diversity to any significant degree is the inclusion of enrollment constraints, such as race-conscious policies, as part of the school choice policy.”

Desegregation of schools on its own does not ensure greater academic achievement, nor is it sufficient for the inculcation of democratic character.\textsuperscript{11} It is, however, an aid to the former and a necessary condition for the latter. Dewey’s (1938) insight that the public purposes of schooling and the ideal of critically reflective individuals converge is perhaps more salient today than ever before (see Robertson, 1992). Without exposure to others unlike themselves, and practice in reflecting on their own beliefs and values in light of those held by fellow citizens, it is unlikely that children will develop the dispositions that enable productive dialogue and deliberation across such differences as adults. Thus, serious attention to the role of the context of learning in inculcating democratic character in order to enable students to reach the democratic threshold suggests that choice policies that increase stratification by socially significant categories of difference can, and indeed ought to, be constrained in democracy’s own name.
Ironically, in this perspective it appears that those who are usually considered to enjoy the most adequate education today in elite private and semiprivate schools may suffer a profound deficit in terms of education for citizenship. This is because they often receive instruction in segregated (predominantly White upper and upper-middle class) contexts unlikely to inculcate dispositions of critical reflexivity and competence for effectively engaging across difference that form part of the core of the democratic threshold. As Senator Charles Sumner argued on the behalf of plaintiff in the case of *Roberts v. City of Boston*, in which the Massachusetts Supreme Court judged the constitutionality of segregated schools, White children in such schools are implicitly and even at times explicitly “nursed in the sentiments of Caste, their characters are debased, and they become less fit for the duties of citizenship” (cited in Anderson, 2010, p. 174). Such students are denied the opportunity to develop affinities on equal terms with other young citizens, and to develop the sense of common purpose that is the basis of public interests and values (pp. 175–176).

An “elite” education provided in a segregated environment is likely to develop politically powerful but “democratically incompetent” leaders who lack the “knowledge of how to effectively communicate and cooperate on terms of equality across group lines, in a relaxed and comfortable way” (Anderson, 2010, p. 278). Democratic education thus has significant implications for how we assess the adequacy of the education that relatively privileged students receive. Educational researchers have largely neglected issues related to the education of “elites” (see Howard & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010), and one important consequence of a democratic theory of education is that it draws attention to this as an issue which warrants further examination.

Recall that the third principle of democratic education, the democratic threshold, is an
educational equality standard. It stipulates that all children must be educated such that they can participate meaningfully in the conscious reproduction of democratic society—that is, of a society of free and equal citizens. NCLB clearly undermines the ability of public schools to educate students up to the threshold, and it does this partly by imposing choice policies that have increased stratification and segregation in and between schools. The requirement that all students be educated up to the democratic threshold makes an integrated and diverse context of learning an imperative, and shifts attention from only those schools deemed a failure under NCLB to the failure of public education from “top” to “bottom” to attend to its democratic purposes.

Conclusion: Policy Transition or Reorientation?

Reassessing Accountability: NCLB’s Failure to Make AYP

In this paper, we have focused narrowly on NCLB as the paradigm example of the accountability regime. However, NCLB is now in a period of significant transition, due in no small part to the failure of the states to achieve requisite benchmarks by the stipulated deadline of 2014. Skeptics of the accountability regime have argued that the failure of NCLB to achieve its goals was, from the outset, predictable (Minthrop & Sunderman, 2009). As time has passed the number of Title I schools failing to achieve the requisite improvement has rapidly grown, policymakers and government officials had to publicly acknowledge that NCLB will not succeed in achieving its stated aims. In February 2012 the Obama administration granted Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Tennessee waivers exempting them from some of the provisions of NCLB (Elliott, 2013). At the time of our writing, a total of 43 states and the District of Columbia had all received waivers from the key AYP provisions of NCLB (New America Foundation, 2014).
To what extent might such waivers be interpreted as recognition of the failure not only of NCLB but also of the accountability regime it exemplifies? Secretary of Education Arne Duncan explained the move to grant waivers using the language of increased local and state participation in reform: “Rather than dictating educational decisions from Washington, we want state and local educators to decide how to best meet the individual needs of students” (Muskal, 2012). Yet while states that receive these waivers are exempted from the requirements to calculate AYP and implement sanctions according to the NCLB timetable, the commitment to the accountability regime remains firmly in place. In practice, the conditions attached to the waivers harden the basic tenets of the accountability regime and ensure that states will not discard testing and choice remedies, and many states have recently tied teacher accountability to student test performance. For example, Colorado, praised by Duncan (Associated Press, 2012) and historically at the forefront of implementing the accountability regime, stipulated in its waiver application that SES and school choice will be implemented simultaneously, after a school is designated for “turnaround” or “priority improvement” by the state accountability system in any given year (Colorado Department of Education, n.d.). The accountability regime has been reinforced—indeed, expanded—through the Race to the Top competition, a $5 billion provision of the 2009 economic stimulus bill which sought to induce states to expand testing and choice measures through financial incentives. Race to the Top awards points to states for expanding their charter sector or including student test scores as a substantial portion of teacher evaluation (Riddle, 2012; Rothstein, 2011).

Despite Obama and Duncan’s rhetorical support for greater local control of schools, the reform instruments that their policies are based on are clearly antithetical to it. They do not grow out of and do not foster democratic deliberation at the local level. While the broader
accountability regime is still dominant, prospects for deeper change may emerge alongside the growing recognition that current arrangements cannot be sustained. In order to chart a better course that is more likely to strengthen democracy, however, policymakers and the public must learn the critical lessons of NCLB’s dramatic remaking of U.S. public schooling.

The contribution of deliberative democratic theory to this discussion is that it allows us a principled way to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate constraints on federal activism in the service of reform. A widespread anti-testing movement has gained new prominence with the backlash against implementation of the Common Core standards, which represents a rare convergence normally opposed political forces. Criticisms of the Common Core range from the conservative billionaire Koch brothers and Tea Party groups to far left elements of the Occupy Wall Street movement (Williams, 2014). When conservatives use the rhetoric of local community control in such contexts, what they in fact advocate is a market-driven, individualistic form of school choice that lacks grounding in any truly robust or defensible theory of democratic politics (Burke, 2011). Therefore, while conservatives sometimes oppose the accountability regime and NCLB on the grounds that these involve federal overreach, they do not acknowledge the ways that school choice can also undermine local community control and democratic education. Thus they offer little that is helpful in constructively addressing the central issue that policymakers must address: Local community control of schools matters a great deal for public education and democracy, and yet NCLB-style sanctions are not designed to mobilize the marginalized to become more engaged in school reform efforts, nor are they likely to have such an effect.

In recent years, scholars and researchers have joined activists in calling for greater attention to the role of schools in cultivating engaged citizenship and in highlighting the need for
a revitalization of local participation in reform (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2012; Lipman, 2004; Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006). The evidence surveyed in this paper suggests that contemporary reforms run afoul of democratic principles in several critical ways. Democratic reform should involve local stakeholders, especially marginalized members of society (Fine, 1993; Priority Schools Campaign, 2011), because inclusion is a democratic value that not only increases the likelihood that policies will be just, but also that the implementation of reforms will succeed (Ravitch, 2010, pp. 57–58). Such inclusion helps create the conditions in which all students can attain the democratic threshold. In the final section, we offer several guidelines for policymaking aimed at making these goals a reality.

Requirements for moving forward

If the future reauthorization of ESEA is to safeguard and strengthen democracy, it should focus on education for democracy as a fundamental aim of public education. Federal legislation should recognize the primacy of local participation and community control while reasserting the legitimate and, at times (see Howe, 2010),\textsuperscript{15} historic role of the federal government in promoting principles of nonrepression, nondiscrimination, and the democratic threshold in public education. The following requirements are intended to provide constraints and guidance for policymakers, scholars and researchers, activists and ordinary citizens who are committed to aligning education reform with democratic principles.

First, the prevailing punitive approach must be replaced by a more participatory model for engaging local communities in reform efforts. Rather than threatening to withhold funding from struggling schools, additional support and incentives might be provided for staff, parents, and other community members to get involved in deliberating about educational problems and their solutions. This would require identifying or creating venues where voices of all these
community members can be heard and, crucially, have actual influence on policy outcomes. Furthermore, considerations such as childcare, the timing of meetings, etc., must be taken into account to make participation possible for low-income parents, and release time or additional compensation could be used to encourage meaningful participation for teachers, administrators, and other staff. Such participation will increase the likelihood that policies will be just and democratic, as well as more likely to succeed due to greater constituent buy-in. Finding the right balance of responsibility and power, accountability and influence for enabling meaningful participation from all relevant citizens will take creativity and experimentation.

Second, states and locales ought to adopt curriculum standards that include a substantive focus on (as opposed to mere lip service to) the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective participation in a democratic society. Determining the proper content of such standards calls for extensive public deliberation, within a deliberative context structured by principles of nonrepression and nondiscrimination. Our view is that, granting a wide range of legitimate variation in how locales determine the content that the democratic threshold requires, moving in this direction will necessarily involve de-emphasizing high-stakes testing of “the basics” as the exclusive focus of accountability measures. This is because the combination of high stakes testing and standards focused on “the basics” inevitably restricts the instructional and curricular space required for cultivating the complex knowledge, skills, and (perhaps above all) dispositions widely regarded as essential to the democratic threshold.

This does not mean, however, that accountability and standards for instruction adequate to effective citizenship is impossible or undesirable. Public education’s central purpose of creating competent citizens should be pursued through the regular and meaningful assessment of social studies subjects across grades, at least in middle and high school, and, possibly, as a
requirement for graduation. And while the content of such standards may vary widely based upon locale, knowledge relevant to the basic tenets of democratic politics (such as, e.g., nonrepression and nondiscrimination) should be included. The history of the civil rights movement, for instance, as well as that of other struggles of marginalized groups for greater democratic inclusion is relevant to understanding what these principles mean in the contemporary U.S. context.

Third, bolstering democratic education requires working to curtail the privatization of public resources through Supplemental Education Services (SES) and school choice. The ongoing possibility of genuinely democratic policymaking demands that we keep the individuals and organizations receiving public funds accountable to the public through democratic procedures. Nonrepression and nondiscrimination set the parameters for the inclusivity and accountability required for an organization or agency to participate legitimately in public education for democratic purposes, and the adequacy of educational provision must be judged, in part, in terms of what local communities judge the democratic threshold to require. Some organizations currently involved in reform efforts surely meet these criteria, and others may be created for the purpose, in which case the receipt of public funds is warranted. Such determinations are best made and reviewed at the local level, within the constraints of appropriate state and federal oversight; while appropriate structures for deliberative participation and democratic accountability are underdeveloped, elected school boards are likely the entities best positioned at present to exercise proper discretion in allocating education school funding and overseeing educational practice—as always, the crucial caveat: within firm national guidelines based on democratic education’s three limiting principles.
Our fourth and fifth requirements arise from the argument that provision of an adequately democratic education requires attention to the context as well as the content of schooling. While we have not devoted much attention in this paper to the radically unequal funding of schools across the United States that of course predates NCLB, we would be remiss if we did not indicate its importance as a guiding constraint for future policy. Reliance on local property tax in school funding formulae produces gross and well-documented inequalities of educational opportunity; hence, specific proposals for creating greater material equity across should receive greater attention and support. From the perspective of democratic education, equalization of funding is justified in terms of developing an adequate context for instruction of all students up to the democratic threshold. The absence of appropriate instructional materials and physical spaces, and the inability of relatively poor districts to attract and retain highly qualified and well-compensated educational professionals undermine such contexts. As a result, the current approach to school finance in almost all states amounts to a form of repression (through a failure to enable) and of discrimination.

Finally, the normative ideal of democratic citizenship that remains the bedrock of our system of compulsory and free public schooling requires that we seek new ways to promote integrated schools in order to ensure access to equal educational opportunities and the diverse context of learning that all students need for the inculcation of democratic character and skills. Theoretical and empirical evidence drawn from our national experience suggests that key elements of democratic character are unlikely to be achieved in any other way. Progress in this direction may seem a distant possibility, but realistically could be made, for instance, by including enrollment constraints based on socially significant categories such as race as part of school choice policy. As one of the few venues in the contemporary United States serving truly
public purposes and accessible to a vast majority of the population, increased integration in school settings is a necessary step along the path toward greater social justice (Anderson, 2010).

Reform efforts within our four guidelines would reorient education policy toward recovering the democratic purposes of public education worthy of the name. It would equip future generations of Americans with the understanding and will required to take up the unfinished task of democracy, which in a rapidly changing world remains one of our proudest inheritances and worthiest aspirations.

Notes
1. Deliberative democracy is particularly useful for our purpose here because it is an instance of nonideal political theory, the primary aim of which is to wed political theorizing to public policymaking. Nonideal theory is distinguished from ideal theory by its explicit attention to historical and empirical realities in the framing of problems to be addressed in theoretical work (Levinson, 2012). In this sense, it is grounded theory, rooted in what Dewey termed the “felt difficulties” experienced by individuals (Dewey, 1910) and communities (Dewey, 1927/1954). Apart from taking empirical realities and problems experienced by situated people as its starting point, nonideal theory is also distinguished by the way that it constructs and makes use of normative ideals. “In non-ideal theory,” political philosopher Elizabeth Anderson (2010) writes, “ideals embody imagined solutions to identified problems in a society” (pp. 24–25). Such theory regards its normative and idealized constructs as hypotheses to be tested in experience, through implementation in actual practice. Such theories are valid to the extent that, when implemented, they “solve the problems for which they were devised, settle people’s reasonable complaints, and offer a way of life people find superior to what they had before” (p. 25).
As a form of nonideal theorizing, deliberative democracy defines democratic activity in terms of a process of collective inquiry aimed at ameliorating pressing public problems (Anderson, 2010, ch. 5). Democracy thus conceived is a comprehensive or “programmatic” (Unger, 1999, pp. 48–52) response, an overarching strategic approach to solving a wide range of practical problems, some of which will be suggested in the following section.

2. “Emotive democracy” is a term inspired by MacIntyre, 1981.

3. Gutmann is a self-described follower of Dewey, who held that democratic arrangements are justified on the grounds that they provide the best kind of life for humans. Other views, J. S. Mill’s, for example, hold that democracy is grounded in a more overarching utilitarian moral theory.

4. Although we frame our analysis in terms of Gutmann’s “democratic threshold,” this concept could be brought more fully into line with the goals routinely adopted for public education, including inculcation of the skills, knowledge and dispositions required for gainful employment. Nothing in Gutmann’s view would exclude this. Indeed, material well-being is a legitimate educational goal for Gutmann if for no other reason than that it is a prerequisite for effective political participation.

5. For an in-depth discussion of adequacy as opposed to equity standards, see Howe, 2013.

6. One apparent exception that may have national implications is the recently implemented statewide program in Indiana. The bill was passed by a party-line vote in an extremely contentious political climate. In 2013, the law was upheld by the Indiana Supreme Court (see Moxley, 2013).

7. “Hijacking” is the charge Polly Williams made against Gov. Tommy Thompson and others who proposed expanding the Milwaukee voucher program from low-income to all children in the Milwaukee system.
8. Increased stratification is only one of the consequences of accountability sanctions that have transformed the context of learning in U.S. public schools. Others include the growing prevalence of top-down management approaches, and many instances of cheating and outright fraud (see Auge & Simpson, 2012).

9. The decision was made by a 5-to-4 vote, in which “The court divided along ideological lines, and the two sides drew sharply different lessons from the history of the civil rights movement and the nation’s progress in rooting out racial discrimination in voting” (Liptak, 2013). Informed citizens ought to be able to assess for themselves the merits of the arguments from the two sides, which in this case clearly involves a good grasp of the history whose interpretation is at stake.

10. Thus, Gutmann offers as a primary democratic virtue tolerance.

11. The claim that the Black–White achievement gap is primarily a result of failing schools is false; therefore it is implausible that any reform focused solely on what happens in schools can overcome the gap. Indeed, school factors matter a great deal, and public schools are already doing much to offset inequalities in the larger society. If we hope to close racial achievement gaps, however, Rothstein (2004) argues that we must expand our focus to include the time and activities engaged in outside of school time and engage in broader efforts to address prevailing social and economic inequalities.

12. This is the basis of one argument for the importance of affirmative action in college admissions, especially in elite institutions. See Anderson, 2010, ch. 7.

13. As early as 2005, researchers projected that by 2013, nearly all public schools in the Great Lakes region would be declared “failing” under NCLB. See Wiley, Mathis, & Garcia, 2005; see also Saltman, 2007, p. 7.
14. See, for example, the Education Opportunity Network’s (2013) “Education Declaration to Rebuild America,” which condemns “top-down education mandates” centered on high stakes testing, and affirms meaningful and engaging education as a public good and something that must be available to all. In just one day, the declaration garnered over 10,000 signatures (Bryant, 2013). See also the Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (FairTest, 2004), which has been signed by over 156 national civil rights, civic, labor, disability advocacy, and religious groups.

15. While the Brown decision is the best-known example of the federal government fulfilling this role, President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty programs were also a conspicuous example of an explicit commitment to aims of nondiscrimination and nonrepression (see Howe, 2010).

16. In ancient Athens, the “First Democracy” of the European tradition (Woodruff, 2005), participation in the deliberative forum was eventually compensated with the equivalent of a half-days wages (pp. 5556). This reform made the participation of working class citizens in democratic governance a reality. We would be wise to pay much more attention to the material constraints that limit citizen participation in deliberative governance today.

17. For a collection of essays dealing with the practical implications in both legal and policy terms of racial integration as a legitimate educational goal, see Frankenberg and Debray (2011).

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This paper is part of a study on the long-term effects of participation in a comprehensive service-learning program on alumni knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective democratic citizenship. In this article, the larger research project is introduced and its central questions are put into historical context. I contend that critical consideration of the changing context of higher education in recent decades – especially the advent of neoliberalism and a transformation in the meaning of the terms civic and citizenship – indicates the need for a more robust normative conceptual framework if democratic and justice goals of service-learning are to be incorporated meaningfully into evaluation work. Based on these historical/ideological challenges, I identify some core theoretical problems that must be addressed in evaluating service-learning’s outcomes vis-à-vis democracy and social justice, and then explore conceptual resources for developing an adequate framework.

Does participation in an intensive service-learning experience during college contribute to the development and exercise of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for effective citizenship in modern democratic society? This is one of the research questions posed at the outset of a three-year-long, in-depth qualitative case study of the impact on alumni of the International and National Voluntary Service Training (INVST) Community Leadership Program (CLP) at the University of Colorado Boulder. Interviews of 18 alumni from across the
program’s 24-year history were supplemented by participant observations and analysis of organizational documents – including regular alumni newsletter updates – to identify features of social justice and democratic identity in alumni narratives of their life and career trajectories. The findings help to contextualize and interpret organizational data on subsequent careers of program alumni as well as with evaluating program outcomes – specifically, how well the program achieves its stated goal to “develop engaged citizens and leaders who work for the benefit of humanity and the environment” (INVST Community Studies, 2014).

The task of evaluating the impact of service-learning involves clarifying the intended aims of a program at the outset, and operationalizing these so that they can be measured and assessed (Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001). It became apparent as the CLP study progressed that the central goals that motivate the service-learning for civic engagement movement must be clarified, not only for purposes of accurately evaluating outcomes of past and present practice, but for the preservation of the democratic and justice character of service-learning given efforts toward greater institutionalization in higher education (Furco & Holland, 2009; Speck & Hoppe, 2004).

Over the last decade-and-a-half, an intensifying debate amongst civic engagement scholars has raised new questions about the role and effectiveness of service-learning programming in educating for democratic citizenship (Kahne, Westheimer, & Rogers, 2000; O’Grady, 2000; Varlotta, 1997; Vergee, 2010). Kliewer (2013), for example, poses the question: “Given the degree to which the civic engagement field has been institutionalized in higher education, why has the field failed to achieve clearly defined democratic and justice aims?” (p. 72). He states in the title of his article that, at least as presently practiced, “the civic engagement movement cannot achieve democratic and justice aims” (p. 72; emphasis added). This
provocative claim is based on the argument that given the ideological forces at work in our broader social and economic contexts, the practice of service-learning fails to promote essential democratic education aims related to social justice, and may in fact serve to reproduce and even legitimate unjust and undemocratic outcomes. Responding to such a claim calls not only for empirical investigation but also conceptual clarification. To conduct meaningful evaluation, the aforementioned “clearly defined democratic and justice aims” must in fact be clearly defined.

Service-learning outcomes cannot be evaluated without attention to the ideological frames that influence popular meanings ascribed to the pedagogy’s central goals. The challenges associated with developing an adequate theoretical framework for the evaluation of service-learning programming especially have to do with a shifting ideological context – specifically, the growing influence of neoliberalism – which has redefined popular notions of “citizenship” and “civic” in consequential ways. Clarifying the substantive meaning of these terms is essential to assessing whether and to what extent these aims have been achieved in programs such as CLP.

Length parameters of the typical journal article preclude providing detailed description or analysis of the qualitative data here; instead, this will be the task of a subsequent article that is being prepared. Nevertheless, rather than presenting this article as a stand-alone conceptual treatise, I have opted, for better or worse (perhaps for better and worse) to situate the theoretical questions and proposals that follow within the larger INVST CLP evaluation project. In doing so, I hope to avoid a pitfall that often attends highly stylized forms of academic writing that, in Medawar’s (1963) phrase, presents a “totally misleading narrative” of the relationship of process and outcomes in research (p. 378). As philosopher of education Bridges (2006) observes, philosophers and others whose work is primarily conceptual sidestep such accusations “by their practice of saying nothing by way of preface to their writing about the method they have
employed in its derivation and construction” (p. 181). Accordingly, while I intend and expect the
corollations reached in this paper to be valid across a range of evaluation contexts, I have
situated these within the specific institutional context from which they emerged. Hopefully, this
renders both the usefulness and limitations of my conclusions more transparent.

Information gathered through various sources about CLP alumni revealed a wide array of
diverse experiences during and after participation in the program. An adequate model must allow
for situating these various experiences in terms of desired democratic and justice learning, and
enable analysis of patterns of both success and failure related to achieving these outcomes. Some
of the more dramatic patterns in CLP alumni narratives tracked socially significant categories of
difference (race, socioeconomic status, gender, etc.), highlighting the influence on student
learning of inequalities among students as well as between students and community partners.
Within a pluralist society such as the U.S., democracy and justice educational goals should,
ideally, be more or less valid in the case of students who are privileged and for those who are
relatively disadvantaged, and provide theoretical guidance for evaluating disparities in how
students of different backgrounds and group membership are impacted by participation in
service-learning and civic engagement programming.

In light of these considerations, I propose a model that synthesizes and balances key
elements of service-learning’s two major theoretical traditions, what I refer to as Freirean-
critical and Deweyan-pragmatic (Deans, 1999). The proposed model, which centers a
substantive yet flexible conception of democratic identity that is consistent with the civic mission
of most universities, incorporates a number of different goals articulated by diverse service-
learning scholars and practitioners but which runs explicitly counter to neoliberal redefinitions of
democracy and citizenship. By detailing the considerations that motivated the construction of
this model, I hope to convey the need for renewed reflexivity and creativity on the part of those who design and evaluate service-learning curricula and programs, a need made all the more pressing by the growing institutionalization of service-learning at many colleges and universities.

Background

Advocates have long argued that service-learning represents a promising, even imperative, response to the many perceived pedagogical and organizational challenges facing twenty-first century higher education institutions (Stern, 2014; Tinkler, Tinkler, Gersti-Pepin, & Mugisha, 2014; Wofford, 1994). I use the term service-learning inclusively, covering a wide range of opportunities available in the context of higher education, in keeping with the classic and often-cited definition from Bringle and Hatcher (1995):

Service learning is a credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (pp. 112-122; emphasis added)

A standard periodization of modern service-learning’s development would likely include its invention in the late 1960s and early 1970s; its continued growth at the margins, leading to the creation of large formal organizations in the 1980s; the explosive development of new forms of practice and organization, followed by a wave of research and theorizing throughout the 1990s and into the early twenty-first century; and finally, the current phase of service-learning’s development, marked by goals of increased institutionalization within colleges and universities. While such a narrative is likely familiar to service-learning scholars and practitioners, rarely noted or critically examined is the relationship of this history to simultaneous processes of marketization and corporatization in higher education.
The roots of service-learning for civic engagement can be traced to transformations that roiled university and college campuses in the late 1960s, especially during what Geiger (2011) terms “the great student rebellion” (p. 61) of 1967 to 1969. Perhaps most notably, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and the national organization Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) linked calls for democratization of their institutions – for both greater student autonomy and participation in official decision-making – with a demand that the university become more involved in pressing issues facing the wider society (Geiger, 2011; Hayden, 2008). During this period, the term “ivory tower” gained new currency as a pejorative, suggesting insularity and impracticality, and was increasingly applied from within and beyond the university walls (Driscoll, 2008). The proliferation of participatory, experiential approaches to teaching and learning was one response to student and faculty demands for greater social relevance (Kezar & Rhoads, 2001).

The marketization of higher education is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2011). As Schrecker (2010) suggests, “Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s…[universities] were evolving into ever more bureaucratized organizations with an increasingly market-oriented set of priorities” (p. 154). One of the most important mechanisms of marketization was federal legislation whereby, in the early 1970s, public support for higher education shifted from “institutions to student aid, making students consumers” (Slaughter & Rhoades, p. 436). The logic of free market competition and increasingly corporate models of governance became powerful forces across the entire higher education sector as institutions competed not only for students and tuition dollars but also for research grants and the new opportunities for technology and product development made possible by changes to patent and conflict-of-interest laws in most states (Geiger, 2011; Slaughter & Rhoades). By the onset of the
During the 1980s, service-learning enthusiasts coalesced around new organizations that promised increased cross-institutional coordination and influence; foremost amongst these were the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL), created by students in 1984, and Campus Compact, founded by three university presidents in 1985. In 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed into law the National Community Service Act, which allocated $275 million for k-16 service-learning programs (Myers-Lipton, 1998), inaugurating what was arguably the decade in which service-learning underwent its most vibrant phase of organizational, theoretical, and practical development. Service-learning’s ascent to the upper echelons of pedagogical fashion culminated with its christening as the pedagogy of the 1990s across many U.S. campuses (Hironimus-Wendt & Lowell-Troy, 1999).

The INVST CLP was established at the University of Colorado Boulder at the start of this period. At its inception in 1989 as a kind of “domestic Peace Corps” opportunity for college students, the CLP was conceived as a solution to the problems of unmet social needs and of increasingly disaffected/alienated young people as well as the growing influence of “private materialism” (Myers-Lipton, 2008, p. 243) on campuses and in the society at large.

Widespread experimentation in service-learning curricula and organizations supported a wave of empirical research on service-learning’s effects and more explicit and systematic
theorizing (Hironimus-Wendt & Lovell-Troy, 1999). As Timmons (1992) observed, in the early 1990s “most of the support for service-learning comes from educators’ beliefs and experiences” (quoted in Myers-Lipton, 1998, p. 245) rather than from research on teaching and learning. From 1990-1994, the CLP’s founding director conducted research on program outcomes, which eventually served as the basis for his doctoral dissertation in Sociology (Myers-Lipton, 1995) and a subsequent pair of articles (Myers-Lipton, 1996, 1998). One of these (1996) appeared in the third volume of the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, one of several new specialized journals whose creation signaled the increasing production of and demand for service-learning scholarship. Other research on the program was conducted at this time: The CLP was featured in a study by Kraft and Swadener (1994); the Corporation for National Service selected the CLP to be part of a national evaluation of “Learn and Serve America, Higher Education Programs” in 1995; and the program was part of a national study that resulted in the publication of the seminal manual *A Practitioner’s Guide to Reflection in Service-Learning* (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996). The legitimation of service-learning research and practice within higher education was well underway, and “early adopters” (Vogel, Seifer, & Gelmon, 2010) such as the CLP reflected as well as promoted the pedagogy’s growing popularity.

Service-learning entered into national political discourse in 1993 when the Clinton administration studied the CLP and two other programs as models for a proposed nationwide program to train college students for community service. This and other interest from the highest levels of government during the 1990s corresponded to the crystallization and mainstream dominance of the neoliberal paradigm that had already been remaking the U.S. social, political, legal, and economic landscapes since at least the late 1960s. Associated with the New Democrat coalition within the Democratic Party and the Clinton Administration in the U.S., and with Tony
Blair and his New Labour Party in the U.K., this new brand of politics became known as the *Third Way*. The Third Way deployed a conciliatory rhetoric of consensus that seemed to transcend old divides between the political right and left (Mouffe, 2000). Divisions between the public and private sectors were softened or eroded and new “partnerships” were established for the private (and profitable) provision of services previously controlled by government (Giddens, 2003, p. 16). This strategy paid off with big electoral dividends and, eventually, profound policy consequences. In 1996, passage of “welfare reform” was signed into law by a Democratic administration – although “welfare abolition” more accurately describes this approach – fulfilling Clinton’s campaign promise to “end welfare as we have come to know it” (Clinton, 1991).

Support for programs such as AmeriCorps was increasingly seen by politicians (and university presidents) on both the right and left as a winning proposition. In the words of Pennsylvania Democratic Senator Harris Wofford, service-learning “holds so much promise for reforming education at all levels, while at the same time renewing our society, national imagination, and collective spirit” (quoted in Myers-Lipton, 1998, p. 244). True, resistance from Republican lawmakers watered down the initial legislation, and prevented Clinton’s initial goal of 100,000 volunteers per year from ever being realized (Mulhere, 2014). Nevertheless, it became clear that allying oneself with voluntary service initiatives meant that one could be viewed as a supporter (and reformer!) of higher education while simultaneously addressing social problems, and all this at a minimal cost to government and without divisive battles over social and economic policy. In this historical perspective, the Clinton administration’s “new centrism” was similar in substance if not always in style to the “compassionate conservatism” of his successor, George W. Bush. Of course there were at that time many real differences between
the two major U.S. political parties – then, as now, partisan polarization at the federal level was on the rise. The embrace of service initiatives cut across these divisions, promising political gains while entailing little to no financial cost – which is to say, little to no political risk.

As neoliberal agendas of privatization and marketization have increasingly come to dominate public institutions, challenges to the viability of a “traditional” university education have been resuscitated (Bok, 2006; Frank & Gabler, 2006). As in the past, these challenges gained traction during a period of economic crisis. Critics focus on the question of whether students are ready for employment in the labor market upon graduation and on whether universities are operating such that their products and services might improve the overall competitiveness of the U.S. economy. At the same time, costs associated with attendance are steadily increasing, largely a result of declining support from state legislatures and an increased reliance on tuition subsidized by student financial aid (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2011).

During the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the subsequent recession period, many service-learning and voluntary service initiatives feared they would be first on the chopping block. While there was a significant reduction in federal funding for AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America, the feared elimination of service-learning programs by campus administrators never materialized. Indeed, in the run up to the 2008 presidential election, candidates Obama and McCain both unveiled their own national service plan, which were nearly identical in substance (Shear & Waisman, 2008). President Obama signed a bill based on his campaign proposal into law in 2009, reauthorizing earlier federal acts of 1973 and 1990 as the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. This legislation was framed in terms foreshadowing the Obama administration’s introduction of a spate of neoliberal reforms aimed at higher education, including a proposal for a system of public labeling of institutions based on graduation and
employment figures and increasing public/private partnerships between higher education and the for-profit sector – especially between community colleges and the business community.

Given the combination of pressures facing university and college administrators, embracing service-learning has gained appeal as part of a good strategy for countering criticisms of higher education that targets its alleged insularity vis-à-vis the wider society and, in particular, to the world of work. Support for a few small but well publicized service-learning programs also lends an air of credibility to the trumpeting of renewed commitment to long neglected words like *civic* and *public* in higher education institution charters and mission statements. The idea of *engaged citizenship*, however, has taken on a different meaning, in the context of the neoliberal privatization of formerly public institutions: The engaged citizen is conceived as a *semi-private* citizen, voluntarily providing one’s time, labor, and material resources to ameliorate the pressing social needs that government (and by implication, the larger public) is unable or unwilling to address (Meens, 2012), while gaining academic credit and experience to bolster one’s resume.

The influence of neoliberal ideology in these developments has gone little noticed by most scholars and practitioners of civic engagement (Kliewer, 2013). More specifically, leading proponents of greater institutionalization (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Furco & Holland, 2004; Klentzin & Wierzbowski-Kwiatkowak, 2013) typically fail to consider ways that neoliberalism’s erosion of the public sphere and transformation of dominant notions of citizenship contribute to the appeal of service-learning among both government officials (Meens, 2012) and university administrators.

Institutionalization of service-learning is presently regarded by many civic engagement scholars and practitioners as a promising goal for the movement. In this view, once service-learning has achieved official legitimacy and support its promise for the transformation of higher
education can finally and fully be realized (Furco & Holland, 2009). For others – a relative minority – official embrace signals the tragic demise of whatever in service-learning was worth promoting. In this latter perspective, institutionalization involves something akin to what Kenneth Burke (1937) famously called the “bureaucratization of the imaginative” whereby a one-time vital and innovative practice undergoes a “process of dying” as it becomes integrated into relatively inflexible, pre-existing socio-cultural structures. Whatever else one might say concerning prospects for institutionalization, there is little doubt that decisions are being made now concerning the organization, theory, and practice of service-learning that will exert great influence on the shape of things to come. Therefore, as processes of institutionalization gain momentum in many corners, understanding service-learning’s long-term impact on students over the past several decades is all the more critical – for judging what the increased institutionalization of present structures and practice likely portends, and for thoughtfully informing and hopefully influencing decisions concerning what forms service-learning ought to take and why.

Challenges in Evaluating Service-Learning Student Outcomes

The vast majority of service-learning programming explicitly aims to foster civic engagement and promote democratic ideals (Campus Compact, 2003). Does participation in service-learning support increased student civic engagement in the long-term? Does service-learning support the goals of more democratic and justice-oriented citizens, communities, and a more equitable society? To begin to answer these questions, Myers-Lipton’s (1994, 1996, 1998) study of the CLP employed a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent control group design with pre- and post-test surveys. He found that participants demonstrated a significant increase in levels of “civic responsibility,” “locus of control (societal),” and “civic behavior,” as well as a notable
decrease in participants’ levels of “modern racism” (1996). These increases were larger than those measured for students in two control groups – one that participated in community service but not service-learning, and another that did not participate in community service or service-learning (1998).

Myers-Lipton (1998) highlighted several critical issues arising from his study. For one thing, Myers-Lipton was not an independent researcher but rather a staff member and instructor at the time as well as the primary investigator, raising the possibility of researcher bias. For another, there was no way to assess whether the effects Myers-Lipton measured would be durable or if they would fade over time and as students moved into different contexts. Finally, quantitative analysis could not answer the question of why the changes he measured had occurred, and so he called for qualitative research to investigate the basis of his results.

In undertaking a study to provide a (somewhat belated) response to Myers-Lipton’s (1998) call for qualitative follow-up to his work, I initially sought to address the challenge of explaining observed statistical effects. I also hoped to answer the question of whether changes in attitudes and behavior measured in his study had persisted over time.

Unlike at the time Myers-Lipton’s conducted his study, the current service-learning research literature does provide several longitudinal studies that have documented modest to significant gains in civic responsibility and pro-social attitudes and actions attributable to service-learning (Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005; Kiely, 2004, 2005; Moely & Ilustre, 2013), some have even surveyed students up to ten years after participating in service-learning programming (Warchal & Ruiz, 2004). Given the significant ideological transformations that occurred during the during in timeframe of these longitudinal studies, I began to wonder about the validity and reliability of the standard battery of survey metrics based on what are now decades-old political
constructs (compare, e.g., Moely & Ilustre, 2013 and Myers-Lipton, 1994).

For this reason I conceived a retrospective study using iterative qualitative methods that would allow participants’ relevant civic and political constructs to become an explicit variable in the evaluation and explanation of effects over time. Alumni were asked to describe their experience prior to and within the program as it related to their activities and identities vis-à-vis democratic citizenship and social justice. In-depth narratives of personal and group experiences within the program allowed for identification of changes over time and across cohorts in how students understood the mission and goals of the program. What precisely constitutes the “treatment” that participants in the CLP received and how this relates to long-term impact itself became a focus for interpretation within the interviews.

Alumni narratives rely heavily upon keywords and shorthand terms that they explicitly associate with the culture of the CLP, such as “engaged citizen,” and in some cases, dialogue among participants and between participants and the researcher led to fine-tuning of distinction between intended and unintended effects. The substance of interviews gradually confirmed the methodological importance of a shifting ideological context. A major obstacle to evaluating service-learning’s civic and democratic effects is that these key terms (civic, citizen, citizenship, democracy), and the nature of the relationship between them, typically remains undertheorized within the field. The central task in designing effective empirical research on the CLP became, therefore, clarification of the substantive content of key normative terms.

Words such as *civic* and *citizenship* frequently operate as what anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1987) termed “floating” or “shifting signifiers” – they take on different meanings for different users and across use-contexts (pp. 63-64). This is apparent, for instance, when scholars equate “civic engagement” with “community engagement,” using these terms
interchangeably (Kliewer, 2013, p. 72). Community engagement is defined by the Carnegie Foundation as “the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and mutual reciprocity” (Saltmarsh & Driscoll, 2012). In such definitions, “civic” and “community” function as modifiers indicating an orientation toward any group that exists beyond one’s own person, friends, and/or family – or, in this case, beyond one’s campus.

Fostering such an orientation toward others can support a variety of outcomes. As Butin (2010) writes, “There are surely numerous historical examples of totalitarian regimes that prided themselves on citizens’ sense of civic responsibility,” and so, “[service-learning] that enhances students’ civic responsibility…does not necessarily also develop a stronger democracy” (p. 12). To use an extreme example, members of the Hitler Youth in Germany of the 1930s and 40s may offer a good approximation of an ideal of “civic mindedness” – members performed extensive voluntary service activities and likely felt a very strong commitment to their local, national (and perceived racial) communities – yet this commitment did not necessarily involve or promote democratic ideals.

The further stipulation that such collaboration must involve “mutually beneficial exchange” and that the context of this exchange be structured by “partnership and mutual reciprocity” seeks to limit the definition of engagement to positive forms, but even these provide no guarantee that outcomes will be consonant with democracy and justice goals. What counts as reciprocity will depend upon what different parties to the transaction value, which in turn depends upon their understanding of proper goals of social practice. As the example of the Hitler Youth illustrates, the substantive content of the ideals that individuals and communities organize
themselves around matters a great deal for whether increased civic-mindedness, civic responsibility, and civic engagement will be a force for good or ill.

As mentioned previously, Kliewer (2013) argues that contemporary service-learning practice within a higher education context increasingly dominated by neoliberal ideology may in fact facilitate undemocratic and unjust outcomes. He asserts that

If the civic engagement community cannot adequately respond to neoliberal ideology, we risk producing a type of citizen completely defined in relation to a market society, thereby precluding robust forms of civic engagement in which citizens organize, cooperate, and act outside the bounds of market and economic activity. (p. 73)

In other words, if the conceptions of civic and citizen that inform service-learning pedagogy are aligned with the individualistic and consumeristic logic of neoliberal ideology, then achieving outcomes of increased civic engagement may be destructive to democratic and justice-oriented engagement that is based on competing principles of solidarity and equality.

Neoliberalism erodes the democratic public sphere through a displacement of the metaphor of the forum by that of the market (Bohman & Rehg, 1997). The metaphor of the public sphere as a deliberative forum represents one of the foundational principles of democratic culture and politics, namely that a diverse human collective can come together on equal terms and discover – or perhaps create – a genuinely public good. Such a good is public in the sense that it transcends each individual’s interests without being antithetical to them, and that this shared interest belongs equally to every citizen qua citizen (Feinberg, 2012). To understand oneself as a citizen is to see oneself as part of a social project in which one’s interests necessarily involve and interact with the interests of others – in other words, to apprehend what Tocqueville (1835/1990) termed “self interest rightly understood.”
Under the influence of neoliberalism, by contrast, the public sphere is defined in terms of the metaphor of the free market. The citizen is analogous to the private consumer (or, in the case of voluntary service, a charitable provider) of individually and socially produced goods (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal critics of public education, for example, argue for greater school choice and voucher systems on the basis that these enable parents (the “consumers” of educational services) to “vote with their feet” (Chubb & Moe, 1990) as to which educational product they prefer. This metaphor pictures voting as the expression and pursuit of one’s own (or one’s child’s) private good through a strategy of positioning for maximum social and economic advantage. Such self-maximizing by individuals, neoliberal school reformers argue, will give rise to efficiency in the overall social and economic system, and this will ultimately benefit everyone involved.

What forms does service-learning take under the sway of neoliberal ideology? The bare language of “voluntary service to others” on its face seems an anti-consumeristic (“voluntary”) and anti-individualistic (“to others”). Such service is compatible with the neoliberal erosion of the public sphere, and in fact may support it. Voluntary service can be interpreted as a sign of the failure of the public to address pressing community needs, and as a form of flight from the political sphere, which neoliberalism has cast as a struggle among competing interest rather than a collective pursuit of the public good.

The altruistic dimension of civic engagement activity, in this view, should be minimally political or even apolitical – for if politics is redefined in market terms as social positioning for private advantage, then service to others and politics do not mix. In fact, contemporary engagement initiatives frequently prohibit activities deemed “too political” alongside those that are explicitly religious. AmeriCorps, for example, identifies “attempting to influence legislation,” “organizing or engaging in protests, boycotts, strikes,” and “conducting a voter
registration drive” on its current list of 15 “prohibited activities” (AmeriCorps, 2013). Do such prohibitions suggest that such activities are properly outside the “civic” domain? Interestingly, a major study published by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE, 2011) found no relationship (positive or negative) between participation in AmeriCorps State and National service programs and whether a person participated in that most basic form of political engagement – voting; data spanning eight years indicates that people who performed voluntary service for one or more years were no more likely to vote than their similarly situated peers who had expressed interest in the AmeriCorps program but never enrolled.

Academic service-learning is distinct from volunteerism and community service, and so participation in the AmeriCorps program is a poor proxy. However, a group of service-learning scholars and practitioners who convened a conference in 2008 on the challenges facing the civic engagement movement cited the neglect and avoidance of the essentially political nature of engaged citizenship as one of the movement’s most consequential failings (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). Clearly de-politicization is recognized as an issue in academic service-learning (Robinson, 2000). These scholars fail to consider, or at least to articulate, the reasons for this de-politicization – whether it might be symptomatic of the influence of neoliberal conceptions of civics and citizenship in the field of service-learning. As Mouffe (2000) argues, Third Way, neoliberal politics has de-politicized democracy in ways that undermine and obscure its implications concerning social justice. Recognition of the neoliberal redefinition of citizenship and civic engagement is necessary if the problem is to be confronted and addressed and if the interrelated nature of democracy and justice goals is to be recovered. Limitations of Dominant Theoretical Frameworks
Perhaps the most influential proponent of participatory and deliberative conceptions of democracy was John Dewey (1927/1946), who argued that the public is not something pre-existing and fixed, but rather must be brought into being through intelligent, communicative action. For Dewey, a society of shared interests becomes a democratic community only when its citizens become conscious of interdependence as well as individuality, and so achieve solidarity without effacing individual and group differences. Dewey’s (1916/1997) vision of democracy was one of a pluralistic community engaged in collaborative inquiry, sometimes but not always through public dialogue and deliberation, into shared problems and their root causes, and coordinating collective action to create inclusive and mutually beneficial solutions.

Politics is defined by Deweyan democrats as a process of collective inquiry that, even through contestation and conflict, builds solidarity that constitutes the public as such (Dewey, 1927, 1946). A depoliticized neoliberal conception of citizenship has now distorted and even supplanted the Deweyan notion that framed the service-learning and civic engagement movement in earlier decades. This perhaps has been supported by some theorists who view Dewey’s thought as lacking resources necessary for understanding and critiquing power relations and structural inequality (D’Amico, 1978; Thayer-Bacon, 2008). To address this alleged failing, a more recent strand of “critical” service-learning theory has been explicitly defined in opposition to neoliberal ideology (Giroux, 2008; 2014; Groenke, 2009). Myers-Lipton (1996, 1998) framed his study of the CLP in terms of critical education theory, which, in his characterization, “focuses on how dominant socioeconomic groups maintain power over the educational process, as well as how subordinate groups resist this domination” (p. 245). He approvingly cites McLaren’s (1989) statement that the objective of critical education theory is “to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices…to heal,
repair, and transform the world” (p. 160; quoted in Myers-Lipton, p. 245). Thus, Myers-Lipton’s research on the CLP stands in a theoretical tradition inspired primarily by the work of Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire (1970, 1998) that remains extremely influential across the field today (Kajner, Chovanec, Underwood, & Milan, 2013).

With its attention to issues of power and inequality, as well as the way dominant ideology can disempower and dehumanize both oppressed and oppressor populations, critical educational theory remains a valuable resource in the context of neoliberal ideology. Such approaches “generally reflect a stand against repression, poverty, oppression, and injustice as well as for justice and equality,” and “include disrupting power and co-constructing knowledge” (Kajner et al., 2013, p. 38). Since the time of Myers-Lipton’s study, however, awareness of problems in applying critical educational theory in U.S. higher education contexts also has grown (Durst, 2006; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Gabel, 2002). Freire’s (1970) foundational work in critical pedagogy is mainly concerned with educational processes that are likely to empower members of disadvantaged populations to become “politically literate” and so to become agents in historical processes. Regarding its relevance for U.S. higher education, Allen and Rossatto (2009) explain that, “Critical pedagogy is premised on the notion of the oppressed student as the idealized subject whose empowerment must take precedence in evaluating, devising, practicing, and imagining schooling” (p. 167).

While service-learning practice informed by critical pedagogy has sought to expose relations of inequality and oppression and then to empower students in U.S. institutions of higher education to transform these, Freire (1998) himself warned against the uncritical adoption of his analysis and pedagogical proposals which are specific to colonial and neo-colonial contexts of extreme poverty. More specifically, the very concept of the oppressed as a social position is
defined in terms of another, that of the oppressor. In Freire’s sense of these terms, it is unclear whether most students in universities and colleges in the U.S. belong to the former or the latter category. Thus, Allen and Rossatto (2009) pose the question, “Should critical pedagogy be used with U.S. middle- and upper-class White students without significant changes in the theory...itself?” (p. 165). Their answer is: no.

What are the potential consequences of engaging in critical pedagogy aimed at the further empowerment of students who are already relatively privileged? Practitioners and scholars have long worried that service-learning experiences may in some cases support students’ pre-existing biases and attitudes toward members of marginalized and disadvantaged populations, thereby reinforcing social inequality – it is possible that in some cases “service-learning may simply reinforce students’ deficit notions that blame the individual or the so-called culture of poverty for the ills that allowed students to engage in such service in the first place” (Butin, 2010, p. 12). A relatively new body of research focused on the educational experiences of privileged students, primarily in the contexts of exclusive private secondary schools and elite, highly selective colleges and universities, indicates that “the service ethic” frequently promoted in such settings serves a variety of purposes related to the constitution and maintenance of privileged identities for elite students (Gaztambide-Fernandez & Howard, 2010; Howard, 2008).

The pedagogical goals explicit and implicit in service-learning practice undergirded by critical education theory – with the form of engagement conceived as civic and the character conceived as democratic – have typically failed to take into account the actual social position of students in U.S. institutions of higher education. The aim of empowering students as historical agents formed the theoretical basis for Myers-Lipton’s (1998) study, and remains influential in much service-learning scholarship and practice. Yet many (if not most) of the students that have
participated in the CLP over the years are already privileged – their identities constituted, in part, by confidence in their ability and right to contribute to (and even dictate) social conditions (Howard, 2008). Outcomes of increased empowerment may therefore, in the case of privileged students, be destructive to democratic aims. Democratic renewal may, in many contexts, require that privileged citizens exert less power, become more receptive to the experiences and claims of less advantaged others, and be more able to listen and exercise sociological imagination in deliberative contexts. Accordingly, a theoretical framework to assess service-learning’s democratic and justice outcomes will need to attend to dynamics of student dispositions and identity formation, especially dynamics of identification, disidentification, and the desire for new learning across social power differentials. It will not aim to empower all students, at least not equally or in the same way.

Freire’s critical pedagogy is often invoked by supporters of “transformative” models of service-learning in opposition to “charity” or “volunteer-based” models (Verjee, 2010). A dichotomous distinction between paradigms of charity-based and transformative service-learning, however, may be counterproductive, as it forces a false choice between preserving/reinforcing the status quo and social transformation. Indeed, a variety of democratic “characters” may be compatible with and even required by a genuinely democratic conception of engaged citizenship (Kahne, Westheimer, & Rogers, 2000) – for example, the activist, the volunteer, the negotiator, and the rational deliberator. The distinction between charity-based and transformative service-learning provides little guidance to theory and practice, given that democratic and justice aims will likely crosscut complex social practices. As MacMullen (2011) suggests, in some instances democratic and justice goals may require forms of “status quo bias” in civic education – inculcating, for example, a general commitment to support existing
institutional arrangements necessary for meaningful political equality. What is needed, it seems, is a framework that enables principled judgment as to what in the status quo ought to be preserved and what must be transformed if democracy and social justice goals are to be realized, rather than a simple commitment to either “public work” or “social transformation.”

Toward (Re)Constructing a Democratic Justice Framework for Evaluation

To what extent can efforts to evaluate service-learning outcomes help reconstruct and sustain the movement’s historic democratic and justice goals? Given the challenges and limitations of prevailing theory discussed above, I argue that the best chance for this lies in a creative return to theoretical foundations, whose resources must be interpreted anew in light of contemporary circumstance.

Dewey’s ambitious philosophical integration of experience, education, and democracy became the major touchstones for pedagogical and curricular innovation in the late 1960s and early 70s that sought to integrate theory with practice and make university education relevant to pressing social problems (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Saltmarsh, 1996). Because it speaks to issues of social relevance facing the university again today, Dewey’s philosophy remains a powerful strategic resource for framing the goals of service-learning. More importantly, Dewey’s centering of the issue of the nature and possibilities of a genuine public stands as a desperately needed corrective to the privatization and depoliticization of citizenship that accompany neoliberalism. To highlight the creative, practice-based and context-specific nature of Dewey’s normative version of democracy, I refer to the tradition emerging from his thought as the Deweyan-pragmatic.

The Deweyan-pragmatic tradition and critical pedagogy of the sort associated with Freire, are more compatible at the levels of theory and practice than is sometimes supposed (Deans,
1999). Here, much can be learned from recent work bridging the putative opposition between deliberative and participatory theories of democracy in political philosophy (della Porta, 2013; Hildreth, 2012). Participatory democracy is concerned with structural inequalities, and seeks to fundamentally transform these through democratization of social institutions generally. The participatory citizen is an active (even activist) citizen that shapes public life and policy through direct engagement. Deliberative democracy, by contrast, is characterized by a focus on discursive reasoning about common problems that aims at generating outcomes acceptable to all. With its focus on legitimating political decisions and rational consensus, deliberative democracy to some extent takes status quo background conditions for granted. The deliberative citizen offers reasons and gives due consideration to the reasons provided by others, all of which are subject to mutually acceptable standards of rationality. A rough and ready contrast can be drawn between a deliberative focus on “word” and a participatory focus on “deed” (Hildreth, 2012).

As Hildreth (2012) suggests, participatory and deliberative practices, often treated in the academic literature as competing and contradictory ideals of “genuine” democracy, may be “distributed and sequenced” within a larger normative framework. Drawing upon Dewey, Hildreth suggests that these distinct but complementary democratic “moments” fit within a larger iterative process of cooperative inquiry. Different standards for democratic action can be invoked to assess the requirements of different moments. Indeed, different democratic “characters” may be essential for the success of distinct democratic practices.

Furthermore, “One of the exciting features about recent work in participatory and deliberative theory is the close connection to practice” (p. 5). In the Deweyan-pragmatic approach, the ultimate test of theory is practical, in whether it enables the realization of valued ends in actual practice. Similarly, the normative ideals that inform service-learning evaluation
can be integrated when we attend to the imperatives of democratic practice. Within the context of a long-term evaluation of the INVST CLP’s impact, it became clear that despite the influence of a Freirean lexicon of “empowerment,” something such as the ideals of democratic solidarity and “growth” (Dewey, 1938) were more flexible in making sense of experience, allowing for the fact that in order to achieve an authentic democratic identity some students need to learn skills associated with receptivity rather than activity and agency.

Examining the relationship between college-level service-learning experiences and the long-term civic behaviors and attitudes of participants requires situating these attitudes and behaviors in terms of a framework for understanding the learning necessary for effective and responsible participation in democratic politics and public life. Philosopher of education Amy Gutmann (1999), a self-described follower of Dewey, offers a framework that is particularly well-suited to this task. In her seminal book, *Democratic Education*, Gutmann conceptualizes the primary goal of civic education to be the inculcation *democratic character*. She defines democratic character in terms of the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for effective participation in politics, understood as the process of “conscious social reproduction” by society of its material and cultural conditions. Gutmann’s conception also explicitly includes three criteria – *non-discrimination, non-repression*, and a *democratic threshold* – which act as a check on participation that would undermine democracy itself. These criteria provide a basis for theorizing forms of participation likely to compromise and undermine service-learning’s democracy and social justice educational goals, including social inequalities between participants, and between participants and partners.

For the purposes of studying the INVST CLP, Gutmann’s framework – non-discrimination, non-repression, and a democratic threshold – was supplemented with insights
from critical multicultural education, which begins with a Deweyan-Freirean critical interest in structural inequality, and thoroughly explores problems related to educating students about privilege as well as how dialogue and deliberation can be achieved in settings where students interact across social power differentials (Sleeter, 1995). Finally, since civic learning is, in this view, concerned with developing the dispositions associated with democratic character, an adequate framework also should incorporate work on the psychological and narrative dimensions of identity development, especially “the capacity for civic engagement” (Levine, 2011; Youniss & Yates, 1997).

The resources provided by the critical multiculturalism literature are even more significant in light of the fact that, as Keen and Hall (2009) have demonstrated, dialogue across difference within the classroom-based (as opposed to field-based) component of service-learning experiences is a key to understanding positive effects on student dispositions. This was borne out powerfully in the case of the CLP. Researchers must beware of the tendency, evidenced in the scholarly literature, to juxtapose students, who are positioned as privileged, with service recipients or community partners and their constituents, who are often positioned as vulnerable or disadvantaged, as the most important or even sole axis of difference (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Social power and disadvantage are relative to contexts of interaction, and so privilege and oppression are not absolute values (Allen & Rossatto, 2009; Dewey, 1938). Attention to dynamics of privilege and oppression amongst students, even in a group whose members appear to the instructor or researcher to be of similar background and social class, should be registered as theoretically significant variables as well.

Conclusion

Whether or not service-learning supports democracy and justice outcomes depends upon
a variety of considerations. On the one hand, “As with any teaching strategy, service-learning’s value depends on its implementation” (Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998, p. 276). On the other, the assumption within the field that *when properly implemented* service-learning *necessarily* serves democratic and justice aims can leads to ad hoc explanations of evidence to the contrary, which effectively insulates the variables nominally under evaluation from critical scrutiny. It is possible that failures to achieve social justice and democracy educational goals results from failures of conceptualization rather than implementation. Issues of conceptualization must be considered alongside issues or implementation. The historical and theoretical considerations explored in this paper indicate that scholars and practitioners must take a hard look at the structure and substance of the *concepts* that inform practice in terms of democratic and social justice theory if assessment of such outcomes is to be valid.

A reconstructive synthesis of Deweyan-pragmatic and Freirean-critical theoretical traditions is a good starting point for developing an adequate conceptual framework. This should be supplemented, I have argued, by the well-developed literature on critical multicultural education, which takes seriously the complex ways that students within relevant educational contexts are both privileged and oppressed in relation to different social phenomena, and that some forms of “empowerment” may themselves represent a democratic deficit. Awareness of the issues raised in this paper, and the theoretical resources highlighted for addressing them, will not only aid in the meaningful assessment of the impact of service-learning programming, but also help to clarify the essential features of service-learning worth working to institutionalize, as well as which forms proponents would do well to abandon.

Notes

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See, for example, the University of Colorado Boulder’s campus-wide Flagship 2030 Strategic Plan initiative at http://www.colorado.edu/flagship2030/

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

Dissertation Summary

In conclusion, I reiterate what I take to be the main themes of the dissertation in the form of a few key insights that emerge from the three articles taken together. First, the current struggle for the future of public schooling expresses the historic tension between democratic values and competing market ideology. In recent decades the latter force has decisively gained the upper hand. This appears to reflect a relatively fundamental shift in American values and beliefs, and its effects can be observed in the increasingly marginal status of philosophy of education and other critical scholarly disciplines (chapter 2), in the thoroughgoing transformation of the federal and state roles in education policymaking (chapter 3), and even in efforts promoting civic education (chapter 4).

Second, democratic ideals are not Platonic. These have emerged and evolved in history, as they both shaped and been shaped by their relationship to institutions and practices. This is especially apparent in the history of schooling (chapter 1). The changeable and ultimately functional nature of democratic ideals is the source of their ongoing promise but also their vulnerability, as is apparent in the successful cooptation of the language of democracy by liberal-aggregative “democratic” theory. Resisting such cooptation and taking back the conceptual language of “democracy” is an especially vital front in the battle to preserve and renew Deweyan democratic possibilities. While the contest over the meaning of democratic terminology and concepts appears to have been lost in the context of federal education policymaking with the advent of the accountability regime with NCLB (chapter 3), this fight is still ongoing – e.g., in
higher education as the civic engagement and service learning movement reach new levels of influence and face pressures with increasing institutionalization (chapter 4).

Third, deliberative-participatory democratic theory in the Deweyan tradition provides a powerful frame for critiquing the regime that presently dominates educational policy and practice, and for constructing viable and potentially superior alternatives. Smithian efficiency and neoliberal ideology seem to owe their hegemony more to their ability to legitimate elite interests than the power of their ideas to productively analyze or construct solutions to pressing material and cultural problems. Given the uncertainties of rapid technological and cultural change and their practical and theoretical as well as moral and political advantages over the alternatives that presently prevail, democratic renewal will remain a genuine possibility. While the picture is undeniably mixed, these insights do suggest a basis for optimism on the part of Deweyan democrats. Despite their present marginalization, democratic ideals are far from a spent force.

**Emerging Issues and Next Steps**

I conclude by suggesting two emerging issues that seem to me strategic opportunities for furthering the project advanced here. These are the emerging *anti-testing movement* and the *democratic education deficit among American elites*.

The emerging *anti-testing movement* appears to signal that public perception and discourse has shifted concerning key elements of the accountability regime, even since the time of the writing of chapter 3. If this is the case, this is certainly a welcome development. Yet understanding its real significance requires normative analysis in terms of its rhetorical and conceptual underpinnings, as well as its likely consequences. What form resistance to accountability presses takes, whether it persists and how long, and what structures and practices
it substitutes for test-based accountability if it succeeds matter a great deal for whether this energy (e.g., in the “opt out” movement) represents a return to and renewal of democratic ideals in public schooling, or a further retreat into individualistic goals and withdrawal from public institutions and commitments.

An under-studied and under-theorized failing of schooling, public and private, the *democratic education deficit* among elites and their children is a failure to prepare the nations most privileged and powerful children with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for effective democratic citizenship (how much less *democratic* leadership!). The problem itself is new; what seems to be emerging is the will to conceptualize this as a problem (a lot has changed since “the 99%” occupied Wall Street), and the empirical data to begin to grasp its dimensions (Howard, 2008; Howard & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2010). When the requirements of education for democratic character come more fully into view (Gutmann, 1999; Howe & Meens, 2012), so do concerns of a serious democratic deficit among the majority of elite children, who are disproportionately schooled in contexts of extreme socioeconomic and racial isolation (Howard, 2008) – “nursed in the sentiments of Caste,” as Senator Charles Sumner once put his concern for similarly positioned children, “their characters are debased. And they become less fit for the duties of citizenship” (cited in Anderson, 2010, p. While proposals to address a national crisis of “democratic incompetents” (Anderson, 2010) occupying positions of power through compensatory educational measures for democratically disadvantaged elite children might elicit more smirks than supporters, drawing attention to this issue would at least put the idea that founded the common school going in the first place, back on the table for consideration

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