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Educating Citizens: Who Is Doing That in the United States?

Charles L. Glenn *

Abstract: The creation of systems of public schooling in Western Europe and North America over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was primarily intended to develop the civic virtues, including national loyalty, considered essential to the nation-building process. This project was often carried out in explicit opposition to schooling with a religious character that was provided independent of government sponsorship. In recent decades, however, public schools have for a variety of reasons largely abandoned the mission of moral and civic education and, ironically, it is now faith-based schools that are most consistently seeking to shape loyal and engaged citizens. After a brief survey of research on Catholic and Evangelical schools, the article provides some preliminary findings from a study of Islamic secondary schools in the United States.

Keywords: character education, citizenship, United States of America, Islamic schools

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Introduction

Although schools with a religious character are a familiar aspect of the educational landscape in every free society, and typically receive at least partial subsidy from government, such schools continue to be controversial in some quarters. For two hundred years, there have been objections that religious schools fail to produce loyal and obedient citizens. Proponents of this “civic republican” view hold that “children can practice the civic virtues and establish them over time as habits of character only within a truly *public* school” (Levinson, 1999, p. 115), by which they mean a school operated by some level of government.

This insistence on the uniquely civic role of government-managed public schools and on the dangers represented by schools not under direct government control, especially if they have a religious character, developed over the course of the nineteenth century. Increasingly-assertive national states grew unwilling to continue to allow religious organizations not under government control to play a role in shaping the loyalties and mores of the rising generations.

In many nations of Europe and Latin America, the power of the Catholic Church and its active engagement in political matters made its role in popular schooling a primary target for nation-building movements. It is no exaggeration to say that the deepest political conflicts in Belgium and France in the nineteenth century were not over economic issues but over whether popular schooling would be Catholic or secular (*laïque*), and similar conflicts occurred in Austria, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, in Mexico and Argentina, and elsewhere.

A good sense of what advocates of a state monopoly of schooling believed was at stake in their struggle with the Catholic Church education is provided by the famous statement of General Foy in 1822, that children attending Catholic schools “will have received in these establishments, which are not of the nation, instruction which is not national; and thus the effect of these establishments will be to separate French youth between two camps [*diviser la France en deux jeunesses*].” This theme of *deux jeunesses* would be a constant in France from the Restoration (1815-1830) to the mass rallies for and against non- state schooling of the Fifth Republic (Rémond, 1985, pp. 114, 31).

Of course, schooling is not the only sphere of social activity in which

modern governments have asserted a leading role. Michel Foucault argued that the State has taken over from the medieval Church the role and the techniques of the “cure of souls,” with pretensions extending well beyond the maintenance of domestic tranquility and the administration of justice (Rosenthal, 2009, p. 63). As a result, sociologist Alan Wolfe points out, the modern state finds itself functioning in domains that raise moral issues that do not lend themselves to resolution by administrative procedures: assuming responsibility “for raising children, taking care of the elderly, insuring that the disadvantaged are looked after, and establishing the rules by which people’s fates are interlinked. Modern welfare states are, more than ever before, engaged in the business of regulating moral obligation, even in the absence of a moral language by which to do so” (in Skillen, 1994, p. 70). As a result, citizens with strong moral convictions may find themselves offended by what seems to them the insensitive or even profoundly wrong ways that government handles issues that impinge upon them directly.

It is tempting for reformist elites to substitute government administration for the problem-solving of individuals, families, and voluntary associations through which individuals come together to address their shared needs and interests. Tocqueville noted already in the 1830s that many of his contemporaries claimed “that as the citizens become weaker and more helpless, the government must become proportionately more skillful and active, so that society should do what is no longer possible for individuals.” Voluntary associations, however, play an irreplaceable role in a democratic society, not only in meeting a host of needs at the level where they arose, but because essential “[f]eelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another.” These qualities are essential to the health of a democracy, Tocqueville pointed out, and “government, by itself, is . . . incapable of refreshing the circulation of feelings and ideas among a great people.” To attempt to do so would be to “exercise an intolerable tyranny.” In short, “[i]f men are to remain civilized or to become civilized, the art of association must develop and improve among them at the same speed as equality of conditions spreads” (Tocqueville, 1988, pp. 515-17).

Tocqueville’s warning is commonly ignored by those tempted to achieve some social reform by working directly upon the minds of a captive audience of children. Horace Mann, often called the “Father of

American public schooling,” explained his decision to give up his political and legal career and dedicate himself to education reform: “Men are cast-iron, but children are wax. Strength expended upon the latter may be effectual, which would make no impression upon the former” (in Messerli, 1972, p. 249).

The idea of a State monopoly of education to serve the State’s purposes by shaping the young beyond their power of resistance had been advanced by Plato in *The Republic* and *The Laws*, was reputedly implemented in Sparta, was advocated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and others in the eighteenth century, and was implemented (ineffectively) during the French Revolution in its radical phase in the 1790s and then, more consistently, by Prussia. Elsewhere in Western Europe and North America in the 1830s and 1840s, as we will see below, national governments began to put actual arrangements in place to train teachers and organize schooling with a primary purpose of shaping the loyalties and beliefs of children.

From this perspective, schools that have a different agenda, especially if that entails the development of a religion-based perspective that may be critical of some actions of the State, are perceived as a threat to the vital national interest of nurturing loyal citizens. This can lead to strongly hostile reactions by government, and not only under authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. A good example is the assault on Catholic schooling under France’s Third Republic, culminating in the “civic totalism” of Prime Minister Emile Combes, who insisted that “[t]here are, there can be no rights except the right of the State, and there [is], and there can be no other authority than the authority of the Republic” (Galston, 2005, pp. 24-5). In what Jean Baubérot characterizes as a *laïcité de combat*, Combes’s administration acted on the assumption that religion, at least as represented by the Catholic Church, was socially harmful and must be closely supervised and limited by government.

It is of course a legitimate empirical question, whether youth who have attended faith-based schools tend to be less desirable citizens than their peers who attend public schools, as was commonly assumed to be the case by the Protestant majority in nineteenth century North America and the secular elite in nineteenth century Europe. A related question is whether government-operated (“public”) schools are in fact forming good citizens.

Before we consider the evidence on these questions, however, some clarification of the issues is essential. First, we need to distinguish between

instruction and education, a distinction clear enough in Italian and related languages, but not always made in English. *Instruction* refers to teaching of the skills and knowledge essential to successful participation in a particular society and economy; it is typically provided in schools and in workplaces. *Education* refers to the development of the person, of his or her character and loyalties, everything required to be a decent human being, family member, neighbor, and citizen. Education occurs in schools, of course, but it starts in the family and is commonly sustained by participation in voluntary associations, both religious and cultural.

In any society that is characterized by very extensive cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity, promoting the instructional and educational missions of schools poses distinct policy challenges.

Government in such a case appropriately sets standards for and measures the outcomes of *instruction*, since all young persons need to become competent in essentially the same skills and common knowledge, before they go on to higher education or specialized training.

Education is a much more sensitive matter, since it must ultimately rest upon convictions of the heart and disciplines of the spirit that government in a democracy is not entitled to prescribe. As Chester Finn has noted, “we are loath to allow state-run institutions to instruct tomorrow's citizens in how to think, how to conduct themselves, and what to believe” (Finn, 2003, p. 86). Here we see the contrast between democracy and a totalitarian regime like the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany, which made limitless claims upon those subject to their control. No other enemy of human freedom and dignity is as dangerous as a government that treats the shaping of convictions, loyalties, and fundamental worldview of children as a high priority to be exercised as a State monopoly.

A democratic regime should of course be deeply concerned about the character of its citizens, and about their loyalty to the common good, but it entrusts the formation of the hearts and the habits of youth to their families, to educators, and to the voluntary associations of civil society, intervening only when there is clear evidence that a family or a school or a religious institution is acting in a way that abuses the interests of a child or nurtures anti-social attitudes and behaviors. A democratic regime even accepts that the best citizens may at times oppose the decisions of their own government on the basis of a higher principle than routine loyalty, indeed as an expression of a higher loyalty.

It is for this reason that American national and state governments, and the corresponding authorities in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and in the European Union focus on holding schools accountable for measurable academic outcomes, the results of *instruction*, while leaving very considerable freedom to how children and youth are *educated*.

Brief historical review

In late medieval and early modern Europe, there were two sources of formal schooling, religious institutions (monasteries and then cathedrals and parishes), and municipalities. Both focused on *instruction*, teaching the articles of faith set down in catechisms in the former case, and the book-keeping and language skills required for commerce in the latter. Central governments showed no concern for schooling, apart from a few Calvinist enclaves like Geneva, Scotland, the Dutch Republic, and New England. The colonial legislature of my own Massachusetts, in 1642, required town officials “to take account from time to time of all parents and masters, and of their children, concerning their calling and employment of their children, especially of their ability to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of this country.” Parents and masters who neglected this duty to see to the instruction of children under their care were fined (Cohen, 1974, p. 383).

Over the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, with the rise of Pietism in Protestant areas and a similar phenomenon in Counter-Reformation Catholic areas, the focus of religious schooling shifted from the head to the heart, from instruction to education, with the goal of shaping deep devotion, inner conviction, rather than simply imparting knowledge of doctrinal points. Pietism sought to renew the fervor of the Lutheran and other churches with an emphasis upon personal devotion and sanctified living. Schools inspired by this new emphasis upon religious experience and a virtuous life were established by August Hermann Francke (1664-1727), described as “the first real educator” (Herrmann, 2005, p. 101). The goal of schooling, wrote Francke in his instructions for the schools for orphans established by the Pietist movement, was that children come to a living knowledge of God and to a solidly established Christian character.

Government authorities, notably in Prussia, began to see such schooling as an effective means of developing loyalty to the regime, especially as diverse territories were cobbled together through conquest or matrimony. Philosopher Immanuel Kant would observe, as an obvious truth requiring no justification, that “Man can only become man by education. He is merely what education makes of him” (Kant, 1960, p. 6). The necessary fundamental re-creation of Mankind (*Umschaffung des Menschen*), Kant warned, was a risky and above all a political project.

Johann Basedow (1724-1790) prepared a complete plan for the reform of schooling, with a central state supervising authority and a unitary, sequential structure of schooling. Basedow asked, “Where else can that patriotism which has died out be restored to life other than in schools and academies?” This would require, he insisted, “a complete remaking of schools and of schooling” under the direction of the State (Fertig, 1984, pp. 228f). Basedow’s proposals, with their emphasis upon ‘public virtue,’ aroused widespread enthusiasm, and he received many contributions to establish a model boarding school in Dessau, in 1771; Kant wrote that this was the start of a true revolution in education (Blankertz, 1982, p. 79). Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746-1818), the most active writer on education matters in this period, rendered a harsh judgment upon contemporary schools – “schools of laziness, of stupidity, and of uselessness for life” – and insisted that efforts to remake the German nation must begin with children, since adults were already hopelessly ruined. “In the schools, or nowhere, can a nation be developed to industriousness and to every other moral and political virtue” (Fertig, 1984, pp. 264f).

Consistent with this theme of State leadership in educating its subjects, in 1787 King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia established a government office for education, the *Oberschulkollegium*. The responsible state official, Karl Abraham von Zedlitz proposed a comprehensive plan that sought to create a uniform (though internally differentiated) system of schooling under state oversight, and this was quickly approved by the king (Schleunes, 1989, pp. 39-40).

Fichte and the Prussian Model

The crisis of Napoleon’s invasion and conquest of the various German states reinforced the urgency of using popular schooling to shape a new Humanity worthy of the new Society under construction on the ruins of the

Ancien Régime. Rousseau had already suggested as much in his *Social Contract*, forty years earlier. At the low point of Germany's fortunes, a philosopher in French-occupied Berlin gave what were perhaps the most publicly-influential series of lectures ever delivered. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) called for the birth of a German nation through education. In his *Addresses to the German Nation*, Fichte identified the State as "the means for achieving the higher purpose of educating and developing the element of pure humanity in the nation." Fichte called for a truly "national education" to fashion a "new self," a "new life," to "mold the Germans into a corporate body, which shall be stimulated and animated in all its individual members by the same interest." Only in this way, he argued, could the nation rise again from the destruction which it had suffered at the hands of Napoleon: "in the education of the nation, whose former life has died away and become nothing but a supplement to that of another [nation], to an entirely new life . . . In a word, I propose a total change of the former system of education as the only means to preserve the existence of the German nation" (Fichte, 1978, p. 21). Fichte "assumed that the State would be guided by ethical right, and would know the morale suitable for the community;" thus he "deplored family instruction" (Kneller, 1941, p. 91) or any education not under State supervision.

The weakness of the existing schooling, Fichte argued, was that it had been unable to present to its pupils the image of a moral world-order so vividly that they were filled with a burning love and desire for it, with such glowing emotion that they would seek to realize it in their lives. The old instruction had been unable to penetrate with sufficient power to the very roots of impulse and action; the new national education must possess that power. "By this new education we want to build Germans into a single body [*Gesamtheit*], that in all its members will be stimulated and animated by a single interest". Thus it must be applied to every German, so it would not be the education of a single class but that of the Nation itself, not just popular education but *national* education (Fichte, 1978, p. 22).

The phrase 'national education' would come to be loaded with meaning over the course of the nineteenth century, and not just in Germany; it signified education seeking to shape, even to create, a national consciousness. This was certainly the meaning that Fichte attached to the phrase, and it was significant, for example, when Mussolini renamed the Italian Ministry of Public Instruction as the Ministry of National Education

– and significant, also, when the post-war Italian government changed the name back again (Charnitzky, 1996, pp. 424, 492). Similarly, the French Ministry of Public Instruction became (and has remained) the Ministry of National Education in 1932, reviving a title employed during the 1790s by supporters of state control of education, as a way of signaling an expanded mission of schools to transform society.

As an instrument of the state, the school should become the primary institution for remaking the scattered elements of the kingdom into a Prussian – indeed, a German – people. Distinctions of the traditional social orders should be abolished, with only talent determining one's position in society (Meinecke, 1977, pp. 44-45). This 'national education' would be something entirely unprecedented, something that no people had ever experienced; it would create a new identity and a common will.

Citizens of this larger German nation – which did not exist as an organized state – must be educated to have a sense of a common fatherland; only in this way could Germany be raised from the ruins of the now-abolished but for centuries ineffective 'Holy Roman Empire' and given its independence (Fichte, 1978, pp. 27, 145).

In recent decades, Fichte lamented, 'enlightened' governments had come to believe that they could rely upon coercion to achieve their goals, and had thus neglected the religious and moral education of their subjects. With the proposed system of national education, however, it would no longer be necessary to employ coercion, since in every heart would burn a love of the community, of the State, and of the Nation, a love which would destroy every selfish impulse (Fichte, 1978, pp. 177f).

Diffusion of the Prussian Model

We have lingered over Fichte because it was Prussia that, partly under his influence, became the international model of State-sponsored education for the purpose of nation-building (Glenn, 2011). It is true that this theme was anticipated decades before by Rousseau and implemented ineffectively by the Jacobin party during the radical phase of the French Revolution, but it was Prussia that was admired and emulated by education reformers in France, the United States, and elsewhere beginning in the 1830s.

Philosopher and historian François Guizot, Minister of Education and then Prime Minister under Louis Philippe, insisted that, to achieve a "certain governance of minds,"

[t]he State obviously needs a great lay body , a great association deeply united to society, knowing it well, living at its heart, united also to the State, owing its power and direction to the State, such a corporation exercising on youth that moral influence which shapes it to order, to rules (in Rosanvallon, 1985, pp. 232-3).

Such would be the teachers in village schools across France, trained and supervised by the State; they would govern the minds of the French, as gendarmes would govern their bodies, Guizot promised. And so public schooling became the primary instrument of turning “peasants into Frenchmen” (Weber, p. 1976).

A similar process occurred in the United States, with the public school understood to be the primary instrument for the formation of citizens (Glenn, 1998; Glenn, 2012). This was especially the case in response to the massive immigration from Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. “Americanization,” rather than creating economic opportunities, was understood to be the most essential mission of public schools. Most opinion-leaders deplored the spread of Catholic and other faith-based private schools (but, significantly, not that of elite independent schools) as threatening to create permanent divisions in American life. This resistance has continued among the progressive intelligentsia; thus, for example, Amy Gutmann, while conceding that evidence “suggests that private schools may on average do better than public schools in bringing all their students up to a relatively high level of learning, in teaching American history and civics in an intellectually challenging manner, and even in racially integrating classrooms,” nevertheless insists that “public, not private, schooling is an essential welfare good for children as well as the primary means by which citizens can morally educate future citizens” (Gutmann, 1987, pp. 65, 70).

To take just one more example, those laboring for Italian unification in the nineteenth century looked to State-controlled schooling as the primary instrument for creating a sense of nationhood and a common standard language. In the celebrated words of Massimo d’Azeglio, “purtroppo s’è fatta l’Italia, ma non si fanno gli Italiani” (in Soldani & Turi, 1993, p. 17). Public schools would “make Italians.” It has been pointed out that both the liberal and the fascist governments that ruled united Italy identified civil

society with the State, and postwar Italian governments inherited this tendency to see education as an “ideological apparatus of the State” rather than as an expression of an independent civil society (Dalla Torre, 1999, p. 85).

The public school, as it emerged from the crucible of political struggles in Europe and North and South America during the nineteenth century, was thus unapologetically concerned with forming subjects/citizens. The debates over the role and functioning of public schools focused largely on *educational* rather than on *instructional* goals and strategies.

France: L'école de la République

It was in France that this mission was most relentlessly articulated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Socialist leader Jean Jaurès insisted, for example, that “moral instruction should be the first thought of our teachers” (in Thomson, 1969, p. 146). The education provided in public schools made no pretense of neutrality; indeed, those who shaped it would have regarded a value-neutral school as an abomination. Their goal was to inculcate a secular faith. This was described by a retired teacher, recalling the director of the normal school which she had attended before World War I, who “inculcated the notions of moral grandeur, of conscience, of duty, which should be the solid framework of a healthy secular education. It was the time when one was working ardently to consolidate the basis of the secular school; still under attack from the clerical party, it was however gaining ground, for it had partisans convinced of the beauty, the nobility of the enterprise” (in Ozouf, 1967, p. 94).

As a result of this strong emphasis upon moral formation, “young people emerged from the [teacher- training ‘normal’] School penetrated with the idea that a secular teacher had a mission to fulfill. . . . They were much less sure to have received an appropriate pedagogical education” (Ozouf & Ozouf, 1992, p. 264). Normal school directors were responding to Ferry’s challenge, in 1880, “to make for us not only teachers, but educators!” (Ferry, 1996, p. 436).

This focus on moral education as the primary mission of the public school was promoted strongly by sociologist Emile Durkheim, who wrote in 1925 in his textbook for teachers-in-training that moral education is not only intrinsically interesting to all teachers. It is especially urgent today. Anything that reduces the effectiveness of moral education, whatever

disrupts patterns of relationships, threatens public morality at its very roots. The last twenty years in France have seen a great educational revolution, which was latent and half-realized before then. We decided to give our children in our state-supported schools a purely secular moral education. It is essential to understand that this means an education that is not derived from revealed religion, but that rests exclusively on ideas, sentiments, and practices accountable to reason only – in short, a purely rationalistic education (Durkheim, 1973, p. 3).

Durkheim made it clear that the life-orientation provided by public schools would be in explicit competition with that offered by traditional religions, and would in fact offer an alternative belief-system. After all,

if, in rationalizing morality in moral education, one confines himself to withdraw from moral discipline everything that is religious without replacing it, one almost inevitably runs the danger of withdrawing at the same time all elements that are properly moral. Under the name of rational morality, we would be left only with an impoverished and colorless morality. . . . We must seek, in the very heart of religion's conceptions, those moral realities that are, as it were, lost and dissimulated in it. We must disengage them, find out what they consist of, determine their proper nature, and express them in rational language. In a word, we must discover the rational substitutes for those religions' notions that for a long time have served as the vehicle for the most essential moral ideas. . . . We must disengage them from their symbols, present them in their rational nakedness, so to speak, and find a way to make the child feel their reality without recourse to any mythological intermediary (Durkheim, 1973, pp. 9, 11).

Durkheim left the teachers and future teachers who read his book on moral education with the conviction that they had a more significant role than did parents in the formation of future citizens. "The center of gravity of moral life, formerly in the family, tends increasingly to shift away from it. The family is now becoming an agency secondary to the state." Teachers in public schools saw themselves, and were seen, as being on the front lines of the struggle with clericalism and religious obscurantism. After all, Durkheim assured them that "the teacher . . . must believe, not perhaps in

himself or in the superior quality of his intelligence or will, but in his task and the greatness of that task. . . . Just as the priest is the interpreter of God, he is the interpreter of the great moral ideas of his time and country” (Durkheim, 1973, pp. 75, 155).

The sociologist was in a sense echoing what top education official Ferdinand Buisson had written, decades before, in his widely-used *Dictionnaire de pédagogie*, describing the role of the teacher as “incompatible with neutrality, or indifference, or obligatory silence on all moral, philosophical, and religious questions.” After all, the teacher “continues to have charge of souls” (in Mayeur, 1995, p. 155).

Indeed, a collection of Buisson’s essays was published under the title “the Secular Faith” (*La foi laïque*, Buisson, 1912).

A study of French public school teachers found that, in the period before World War I, teachers were less likely to be disciplined for incompetence than they were for failing to uphold the secular mission of the public schools (Ozouf & Ozouf, 1992, p. 102). Secular activists began to advocate a state monopoly of schooling (Ozouf, 1982, p. 231). Opponents of religion were found not only in the masonic lodges but also in more than a thousand organizations of “freethinkers”, “pursuing ardently the completion of the work of the French Revolution and intervening in all sectors of the life of the country to secularize the State and the society, to ‘ensure the complete *laïcité* of the French spirit.” Educational freedom, they insisted, was merely a sophism for as long as there was a church seeking to distort the souls of children: “there can be no freedom in the presence of clericalism” (Lalouette, 1997, p. 292). In 1902 – the same year that the National Association of Freethinkers, whose president was Ferdinand Buisson, was founded – all schools operated by Catholic teaching congregations, described by Prime Minister Combes as “foyers of moral insurrection against the Republic,” were closed. In 1903, nearly 20,000 members of religious orders were expelled from the country, and a law adopted in 1904 forbade them to teach, no matter how many government-recognized qualifications they had obtained or how long they had served faithfully in public schools (Chevallier, Groperrin & Maillet, 1968, p. 139).

As in France, so also in the United States and elsewhere Catholic schools were often perceived as the enemy of the agenda of nation-building through the education of children in a common morality. The American Catholic Church largely refrained from the political activism that

exacerbated opposition in Europe, and the opposition to Catholic schools was overwhelmingly Protestant rather than secular, but there was the same conviction that they were inimical to the task of making the children of immigrants into loyal citizens. This led, in most of the states, to the adoption of state constitutional prohibitions against public funding of “sectarian” schools, though a 1925 decision by the Supreme Court struck down an attempt to ban such schooling altogether (see Glenn, 2012).

Collapse of Civic Education

While the project of civic education in government-operated schools possessing a near-monopoly on schooling – at least for those unable to pay for private alternatives – had troubling implications for freedom of conscience and association, it was undeniably effective in promoting national loyalty and a tendency to meet the requirements of common life in society, if not to be highly engaged civically.

This function of public schooling has now largely collapsed, at least in the United States (there are indications of similar problems in France and other countries, see Nemo 1991, but we will not pursue those here). While the condition of American public schools is hotly debated, the concern is overwhelmingly with test scores in core academic disciplines, the focus of instruction rather than of education. Patricia Graham, former Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, charged that current discussions about American education are “a cacophony about practice, silence about purpose” (in Vryhof, 2004, p. 50).

William Damon, Director of Stanford University’s Center on Adolescence, argues that in fact “our academic skills gap pales in importance to the neglect of character and civic education that we have allowed to develop,” and that “there is undeniable evidence of vanishing attention to civic and moral virtue among those who make US education policy” (Damon, 2011, pp. 3, 6). He points out, in support of this contention, that the current Obama Administration, while directing billions of dollars of additional funding to schools across the country, eliminated the development of character as a priority.

The general public seems aware of the effects of this neglect; according to a nationwide Gallup Poll, “78 percent of the public rates ‘the state of

moral values in the country' as either very weak or somewhat weak and about 76 percent believe that moral values have deteriorated in the past 25 years" (Davenport & Skandera, 2003, p. 82).

Apart from such moral confusion – for which public schools, while not necessarily the source, seem scarcely to be the remedy at present – there is a worrying decline, among American youth, in engagement with the political process by which free societies are governed. Damon reports on a recent study in which “our research team found less than 1 percent of a sample of today’s students expressing interest in pursuing careers of civic leadership” (Damon, 2011, p. 85).

How have public schools drifted so far from their traditional mission? There are multiple causes, indeed a “perfect storm” has battered them in recent decades. Here are some of the reasons.

Loss of Clear National Purpose

One factor has been an uncertainty, in influential circles, about the wisdom of encouraging patriotism (often characterized as “jingoism”) in contrast with an amorphous “global citizenship,” a position articulated for example by Martha Nussbaum in her essay “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” (2002). Critics have noted that the pictures of Washington and Lincoln have disappeared from classroom walls, and that students no longer read inspiring stories of national heroes.

Despite its clear importance in motivating civic commitment among the young, the notion of positive American identity has come under sharp attack in many influential circles of our intellectual culture today. Many opinion leaders in education, business, and the mass media now embrace the assumption that the inevitability of globalization requires a worldview that ignores national boundaries (Damon, 2011, p. 74).

As this attitude has trickled down to teachers, it has led to a much reduced emphasis on nationality as a focal point for identity and engagement. Damon reports that “in one of our studies, when one student was asked what American citizenship meant to him, he replied, “We just had that the other day in history. I forget what it was.” Another told an interviewer, “I mean, being American is not really special . . . I don’t find

being an American citizen very Important.” A third replied, “I don’t know, I figure it really shouldn’t mean anything.” And a fourth said, “I don’t want to belong to any country. It just feels like you are obligated to this country. I don’t like the whole thing of citizen ... I don’t like that whole thing” (Damon, 2011, pp. 86-7).

In such a climate, the public school’s traditional evocation of a common American citizenship as the basis for civic virtue can no longer be heard. But, as Charles Taylor has pointed out,

A citizen democracy can only work if most of its members are convinced that their political society is a common venture of considerable moment and believe it to be of such vital importance that they participate in the ways they must to keep it functioning as a democracy. Such participation requires not only a commitment to the common project but also a special sense of bonding among the people working together. This is perhaps the point at which most contemporary democracies threaten to fall apart (Taylor, 2002, 120).

On the individual level, as his fellow-philosopher Leszek Kołakowski observes in *Modernity on Endless Trial*, “I do not believe that whoever is interested in, and worrying about, the spiritual fragility of young people can deny that the erosion of a historically defined sense of “belonging” plays havoc in their lives and threatens their ability to withstand possible trials of the future (Kołakowski, 1990, 159).

This has led, in other countries as well, to emptying the curriculum of content that once was considered valuable for its own sake; Melanie Phillips complains that English schools “have ceased to transmit to successive generations either the values or the story of the nation, delivering instead the message that truth is an illusion and that the nation and its values are whatever anyone wants them to be” (Phillips, 2006, p. xx).

Emphasis on Personal Autonomy

A second, and related, factor is the emphasis on autonomy as the highest goal of education, a theme which has gained the status of orthodoxy in education circles, while it has been so strongly reinforced by what youth experience through various media as to become almost irresistible. “This

invitation to moral autonomy is like a powerful bribe offered by popular culture (Myers, 1989, p. 69). Damon points out that “[d]uring the latter half of the twentieth century: educators and childrearing experts became enamored of the romantic view that celebrates children’s autonomy and disparages discipline and authority of any kind” (Damon, 2011, p. 29).

Of course, totalitarian regimes aside, there has always been a sense that adulthood requires the ability to make life-choices, and that one goal of schooling is to prepare the young to do so wisely. What is new in recent decades is the insistence, by those who guide elite opinion, that developing personal autonomy should be the main business of public schools, and indeed of colleges as well. David Purpel concedes, in a book introduced by two of the icons of left-liberalism in education, that “in some ways the quality of our critical capacities may have been ‘too’ effective in the sense that they have undermined some of the foundations of our civilization” (Purpel, 1989, p. 69).

The most striking aspect of the emphasis, by education theorists, on autonomy and unconstrained choice is its intolerance: it is not itself represented as a choice. There is instead for every child, at least in intention, a compulsion to become autonomous. Thus Meira Levinson asserts unapologetically that “[f]or the state to foster children’s development of autonomy requires coercion – i.e., it requires measures that *prima facie* violate the principles of freedom and choice. . . . The coercive nature of state promotion of the development of autonomy also means that children do not have the luxury of ‘opting out’ of public autonomy-advancing opportunities in the same way that adults do” (Levinson, 1999, pp. 38-9). Nor should this educational objective of autonomy itself be subject to public debate, since, she insists, it is a fundamental premise of the liberal state which is not open to question! (Levinson, 1999, p. 139).

As among the French secularists of a century ago, this insistence on the promotion of autonomy in its most absolute form has led to a condemnation of schools with a religious character. Schools should not, Levinson insists, “attempt to advance or to shape themselves in accordance with fundamental or divisive conceptions of the good; rather, all schools must be structured as autonomy-promoting communities which are ‘detached’ from local and parental control.” The inevitable result would be that “there would in practice be little if anything to distinguish private schools from state schools – which is exactly the way it should be.” Faith-based schools in

particular, would have no place in such a scheme, since religion promotes a “socially divisive conception of the good” and thus “religious schools would violate the liberal educative aims of commonality, autonomy, and citizenship” (Levinson 1999, pp. 144- 5, 158).

A direct effect of this “emphases on individual autonomy and nonconformity,” historian George Marsden concludes, was to “weaken the nation’s resources for cultivating moral capital.” After all, the new “celebration of autonomy” implied “that one should leave the petty constraints of one’s community of origin, and become a law unto oneself.” This led, contrary to expectations, to increased anxiety rather than to the sense of liberation and enhanced human stature promised by the prophets of autonomy.

Unfortunately, “if one sought to construct a new identity, the ideal of autonomy did not in itself provide a standard for determining what constituted self-fulfillment” (Marsden, 2014, pp. 132, 42).

Multi-culturalism and Concern not to ‘Impose Values’

The prevalent emphasis, in American public schools, on multi-culturalism appears, in some respects, as the antithesis of autonomy, since it assumes that we are not only shaped profoundly by our particular cultural heritage, but that we should make it the cornerstone of our identity if we wish to be “authentic.” In practice, however, it has no such effect, since the superficial multi-culturalism of the school curriculum cannot take seriously the aspects of culture that “go all the way down,” such as religious beliefs and practices and social mores that do not accord with prevalent norms in society. It is such loyalties and points of orientation, anchored in specific traditions and communities, that make implausible all facile assertions that cultures are simply different flavors of the same basic stuff. Multi-culturalism in its common pedagogical form is the antithesis of real respect for culturally-rooted ways of life and moral convictions.

Legal scholar Michael McConnell has pointed out that a superficial cosmopolitanism “is more likely to undermine coherent moral education, which in the real world is rooted in particular moral communities with distinctive identities, by substituting a form of moral education that is too bloodless to capture the moral imagination.” American society has paid a high cost for public schooling’s failure to cultivate the “parochial” loyalties that can anchor more universal commitments to human rights.

Few young Americans know much, or care much, about the cultures, histories, religions, and aspirations even of their own nation. Our problem is a loss of confidence in any vision of the good, and a lack or passion for anything beyond material gratification. How can publicly accountable schools educate in such an intellectual climate? Every affirmation or principle is simply an attempt to “impose values” on someone else. The teaching of any perspective (whether cosmopolitan or patriotic or something else) is deemed refuted by the mere existence of another perspective (McConnell, 2002, p. 78f)

Obsession with measurable results

There is presumably no need to deduce evidence of this over-mastering concern in recent decades, as policymakers and educators anxiously scan the comparative results – among nations, among regions and jurisdictions within nations, and among individual schools – on standardized tests. From an equity perspective, this is to be welcomed, since it has displaced to a considerable extent the assumption that academic outcomes are determined by social class and other factors and nothing much can be done about that. As educators are held accountable for how well their pupils perform on appropriate measures, we can hope for an enhanced focus on effective instruction.

Unfortunately, this focus on the outcomes of instruction has caused many – perhaps most – public schools to neglect their other mission of education. “Classroom time is seen as too precious to spend on ‘non-academic’ matters such as acquiring virtue or helping the child acquire a moral compass to guide the skills the school has taught” (Damon, 2011, p. 34).

This one-sided emphasis in fact is short-sighted since, as Scott Seider and others have shown, schools that promote character tend also to produce good academic results. Researchers have, for example, found “performance character strengths such as self-discipline to be stronger predictors than IQ of middle school students' academic grades, school attendance, hours spent doing homework, and acceptance into highly competitive high schools (Seider, 2012, 3). Neglect of character while focusing on test scores is more likely to encourage cheating than purposeful effort.

The Results of this 'Perfect Storm'

As political scientists Lorraine and Thomas Pangle have observed, “[g]overnment and public policy increasingly have come to be seen as lacking any legitimate concern with the formation of the character of the citizenry.” This has had the effect, they argue, that “balances delicately articulated in our original, founding public philosophy have been decisively tilted: rights have eclipsed responsibilities, freedom has obscured virtue, tolerance has rendered suspicious the passing of moral judgments, and concern for autonomous choice has come to outweigh concern for human fulfillment found in dedication and devotion” (Pangle & Pangle, 2000, 23).

It is important to note that this does *not* mean that public schools do not educate in the sense of helping to form character and life-orientation, but only that they do not do so according to a deliberate strategy and may, indeed, convey messages and shape attitudes that are anything but consistent with the requirements of civic virtue. “By refraining from moral language,” Damon argues, “schools not only abdicate their responsibility to teach virtue, they accomplish precisely the opposite, inadvertently imparting to students the cynical message that virtue is not an important life asset.” In fact, “all schools undeniably envelop their students in a moral climate of one sort or another, whether wholesome and uplifting or corrupting and dispiriting” (Damon 2011, pp. 51, 62).

Of course, there is a deeper problem that should not be attributed to the schools alone but to deficiencies of the wider culture, especially as it is increasingly dominated by seductions over which parents have little control . . . and may have little desire to control. After all, as psychologist James Comer has pointed out, this is the first time in history in which children receive the majority of their information unfiltered by adults, either through the media or the internet (Kress, 2007, p. 174). The late Christopher Lasch described the increasing number of social critics who

attribute the disorder and confusion of contemporary culture to the collapse of moral inhibitions, the climate of permissiveness, and the decline of authority. They deplore hedonism, the “me-first mentality,” and the widespread sense of “entitlement” – the belief that we ought to enjoy happiness, personal success, admiration, and respect without earning these things, as if they were part of our birthright. An “adversary culture,” according to this assessment, has

popularized attitudes formerly held only by alienated intellectuals: disrespect for institutions, authority, and tradition; rejection of society's claims on the individual; hatred of the bourgeoisie; demands for unlimited sexual freedom, unlimited freedom of expression, unlimited access to experience. A kind of principled negativism; a transvaluation of all values; an unmasking of the base motives underlying claims of moral rectitude: these habits of thought, hallmarks of the modernist sensibility, have allegedly filtered down to students (Lasch, 1984, p. 200).

Sociologist Anthony Bryk and his co-authors attributed the inability of public schools to continue to serve the character-forming function intended by Horace Mann and other reformers to their permeability by this wider culture. "Mirroring the spiritual vacuum at the heart of contemporary American society, schools now enculturate this emptiness in our children. . . . The problems of contemporary schooling are broader than the ineffective use of instrumental authority. At base is an absence of moral authority" (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, pp. 322, 326).

Ironically, this abdication of their traditional responsibility for the formation of character and loyalty to common purposes on the part of public schools means that today most faith-based schools are more focused on the formation of citizens than are most public schools. While the public school curriculum (and that of many elite independent schools) presents value-choices as personal preferences, what James Hunter calls "truths that have been deprived of their commanding character" (Hunter, 2000, xiii), the education provided in faith-based schools is unapologetic about asserting transcendent values as having the undiminished authority to direct our lives.

The Evidence

Only in recent decades, however, has there been social science research seeking to learn whether students in and graduates of faith-based schools are less civic-minded, more intolerant, less patriotic, and in other respects less fitted to be good citizens than those educated by public schools. Studies by James Coleman and other sociologists have dispelled the belief

that Catholic schools fail to produce good citizens (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987), a belief that the contributions of millions of Catholic school graduates to every aspect of American life should have dispelled long before.

Bryk and his colleagues found that, contrary to the belief in some circles that they are primarily engaged in indoctrination, “Catholic schools maintain a steadfast belief in the capacity of human reason to arrive at ethical truth. Developing each student’s intellectual capacities to ascertain such truth and honing a critical disposition in pursuing it constitutes the central academic purpose of these schools – a purpose common for all students, regardless of their origins or vocational plans.” In contrast with the recent avoidance of character development by most public school teachers, in the Catholic schools they studied “[r]esponsibility for character formation was shared broadly among the faculty and was as much a part of their job as the courses they taught or the extracurricular activities they supervised” (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, pp. 54-134). In contrast with the value-diffuse “shopping-mall high school” described in another celebrated study (Powell, Farrar & Cohen, 1985), the Catholic schools were clearly-focused on an understanding of the goals of education that would have been familiar to Horace Mann and other nineteenth-century reformers:

Schools organized as communities exhibit a set of common understandings among members of the organization. These include tenets about the purpose of the school, about what students should learn, about how teachers and students should behave, and – most important – about the kind of people students are and are capable of becoming. Such educational concerns in turn reflect more fundamental beliefs about the nature of the individual and society. Not any set of values will do. . . . Such a commitment requires regular public expressions of concern and action toward the common good as well as a shared understanding of the nature and importance of the common good (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 277).

Consistent with this observation, comparative research by David Campbell found that “students in Catholic schools perform better than students in assigned public schools on all three objectives of civic education – capacity for civic engagement, political knowledge, and

political tolerance” (Campbell, 2001, p. 258). The weight of many studies, he concludes more recently, decisively refutes the “conventional wisdom among education theorists: whatever their other faults, traditional public schools are in a class of their own when it comes to producing democratic citizens” (Campbell, 2012, p. 229).

Though Catholic schools have become part of the American mainstream (through not sufficiently so to remove objections to providing them with public funding), their place on the suspected list has been taken by the thousands of evangelical schools, most quite small, that have sprung up over the past forty years. Like Catholic schools in the nineteenth century, many are financially marginal and unable to employ trained teachers or provide a rich curriculum. Worse, they are suspected of promoting narrow, “sectarian” views, exactly what the proponents of the public school fear.

Research on evangelical schools has been much more limited than that on Catholic schools, though see sociologist Alan Peshkin’s in-depth study of “Bethel Academy” in Illinois. Peshkin, confessedly no friend of faith-based schooling, concluded that the “public schools’ material advantages are overshadowed by their comparatively poor discipline, social problems, undedicated teachers, and indifferent parents, and also by their inability to develop character and to teach the truth” (Peshkin, 1986, p. 84). As part of his study, he administered the same survey to students at the “fundamentalist” school and at the local public high school:

75 percent of the public high school students responded that school should emphasize character development, but only 39 percent reported that in fact it did so 59 percent of them said that “earning a lot of money” was very important to them, compared with 10 percent of the Bethany students 93 percent of the Bethany students compared with 80 percent of the public high school students responded that they would approve of a black family moving next door 93 percent of the Bethany and 95 percent of the public school students agreed that “people who don't believe in God should have the same right to freedom of speech as anyone else” 83 and 84 percent respectively disagreed with the statement that “only people who believe in God can be good Americans” 72 percent of the public school students but only 33 percent of the Bethany students agreed that “it's hard to get ahead without cutting corners

here and there” . . . 79 percent of the public but only 24 percent of the Bethany students agreed that “the way things are nowadays, I find it difficult to know just what to believe” (Peshkin, 1986, pp. 325, 329, 332-6).

Several years ago, a large-scale study, coordinated by David Sikkink of Notre Dame University, looked at the effects of different types of schooling upon the subsequent attitudes and behaviors of adults. The study was able to hold constant a whole host of background factors in analyzing results from a survey of individuals aged 24 to 39 who could be distinguished by the type of secondary schooling that they had received:

unlike other studies in the field, the statistical analysis – controlling for over 30 variables known to impact development, such as the closeness of one’s relationship to parents, religious service attendance, race, and educational attainment – was better able to isolate the effect of school type on the spiritual, socio-cultural, and educational outcomes of students six to 21 years after high school graduation (Cardus, 2011, p. 12).

The study found that,

in contrast to the popular stereotype of Protestant Christian schools producing socially fragmented, anti-intellectual, politically radical, and militantly right-wing graduates, our data reveal a very different picture of the Protestant Christian school graduate. Compared to their public school, Catholic school, and non-religious private school peers, Protestant Christian school graduates have been found to be uniquely compliant, generous individuals who stabilize their communities by their uncommon and distinctive commitment to their families, their churches, and their communities, and by their unique hope and optimism about their lives and the future. In contrast to the popular idea that Protestant Christians are engaged in a ‘culture war,’ on the offensive in their communities and against the government, Protestant Christian school graduates are committed to progress in their communities even while they feel outside the cultural mainstream. In many ways, the average Protestant Christian school

graduate is a foundational member of society (Cardus, 2011, p. 13).

There are various theories about why faith-based schools might produce exemplary citizens. Nancy Rosenblum argues, for example, that “publicly supported religiously integrated education is actually a more reliable and effective form of democratic education than secular education offered in public schools. Because public education generally shies away from controversial comprehensive values of any kind, its civic education is ‘thin.’ By contrast, religious groups bring their own stories and sacred histories to bear in support of democracy, endorsing civic virtues and democratic institutions from their own points of view, and thickening the grounds of commitment to democracy” (Rosenblum, 2000, p. 19).

Despite such evidence, one continues to hear concerns expressed about the effects of evangelical Protestant schooling on good citizenship, defined as tolerance for differences and the willingness to cooperate for the common good. Research has not yet had a perceptible impact on the perception, among those primarily concerned with the formation of citizens and with national unity, that evangelical schools are a dangerously negative influence. As public awareness increases that there are now several hundred Islamic schools in the United States, we can expect even graver concerns to be expressed about them.

There is even less empirical research on character and citizenship development in Islamic schools in North America than there is on evangelical Protestant schools. Apart from several dissertations, there is a book-length study by Jasmin Zine of several Islamic schools in Ontario (Zine, 2008), and the study which our Boston University team is conducting in seven secondary schools across the United States. By interviews and focus groups with students, staff, and parents, we are seeking to understand the motivations behind the choice of Islamic schooling, and its effects on the behaviors and attitudes of Muslim students as they negotiate their relationship with American society and with the youth culture that they encounter outside of school.

Here it is possible to give only a very preliminary overview of what we have been learning.

Parents placing their children in Islamic schools seem primarily motivated by concern to protect their children from the influence of American youth culture, often after several unsatisfactory years in public

schools. Thus their concerns are more behavioral than strictly spiritual; we have not been hearing concerns that their children might abandon Islam or indeed convert to Christianity if not attending an Islamic school, but rather that they might become like rootless, hedonistic American youth.

Staff reported concerns are primarily in two areas: that they can meet the high expectations of parents for academic excellence (often aiming at medical careers for their children), and that they can provide students with a solid understanding of Islam that will protect them from the temptation of the jihadist messages they encounter on the internet. Staff frequently describe their students as future representatives of Islam in American society, and want to ensure that they can give a good account of their religion in both word and deed.

Students – at least those we interviewed – shared that concern about contributing to public perception of Islam, and their enjoyment of service projects in the community, of shared activities with students from schools of other faith traditions, and of the opportunity – in some cases – to take courses in the local community college with non-Muslims. A number of the girls talked about how wearing the hijab outside of school gave them opportunities to explain their faith to curious strangers.

Somewhat surprisingly, many students expressed special appreciation of their Islamic studies class as a setting within which they were free to discuss a whole range of choices and difficult situations, and several contrasted this with their previous experience in public high school, where such sensitive matters could not be discussed because of the lack of a common vocabulary and mutual trust. This is consistent with Nancy Rosenblum's suggestion that faith-based schools supply a safe setting for discussion of controversial issues and thus for learning how to function in a democratic society.

A common complaint of students was their schools' strict behavioral rules about interactions with the other sex, which they attributed to attempting to reproduce the social customs of the countries of origin of school administrators and parents in a manner inappropriate to the American context. Some expressed concern that this would make them socially awkward when going on to college. On the other hand, they reported that the open sexual expression in public high school had made them very uncomfortable. This seems to us an area where some negotiation would be possible without abandoning underlying principles.

When asked whether they perceived difficulty in being Muslims in America, many of the students seemed rather taken aback by the question. Most of them expressed no doubt that they were fully American (often this involved some tension with their immigrant parents), and explained to us that being Muslim was in fact their way of being American. One of them told us, “America is kind of like a melting pot, right? And to be able to blend in, you have to stand out in a way. I think faith gives you that edge.”

It was abundantly clear, from our interviews and focus groups, that the development of character was a central concern of these Islamic schools, and in ways that went well beyond matters of ritual practice. The character that school staff and parents were concerned to foster would certainly be consistent with Muslim traditions, but again and again they stressed that it should equip youth for full participation in American society, including in public affairs. The future that they imagined for the youth, and that the youth imagined for themselves, was one of full and active citizenship.

Tentative Conclusions

The traditional role of public schooling, that articulated by Fichte, by Guizot, by Horace Mann, by Massimo d’Azeglio, by Durkheim, and by many other reformers was primarily concerned with forming civic virtue and loyalty to common purposes. This role was, too often, exercised in a way that failed to respect the beliefs of parents and the contributions of voluntary associations, including churches, to the formation of youth, but there is ample evidence that public schools enjoyed considerable success in making citizens.

This role, as we have seen, has been to a large extent abandoned as the result of a variety of contrary pressures as well as what we can only call a loss of nerve on the part of those guiding public education.

Ironically, it seems now to be faith-based schools, long perceived as a threat to the formation of good citizens, that are most consistently seeking to develop in youth the character traits necessary to a flourishing liberal democracy. Their diversity of approaches to this mission is in fact more consistent with the pluralistic character of American and other Western societies than was imagined possible by Horace Mann and his allies. Faith-based schools continue to insist that

[a]cademic knowledge and skill is important, but education also concerns shaping the human will to display a sense of craft in one's work, a commitment to caring in personal relations with others, and a shared sense of responsibility for social welfare. . . . these personal dispositions of citizens are as important to a productive economy and a convivial public life as the content knowledge and academic skill that the schools must value (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 322).

This is not to say, of course, that public schools cannot function as strong character-forming communities, with the right leadership and sufficient freedom to select staff who share the mission of the school. It would be possible to cite many examples of magnet schools and charter schools that have provided such an education for citizenship (Seider, 2012). Unfortunately, current education reform efforts make it difficult to create such positive environments in regular public schools (Bryk, 1988).

We can only hope that policy-makers will come to accept that imposed uniformity does not lead to effective education. Philosopher Hilary Putnam reminds us that "there is no such thing as a universal conception of 'the good life'" (Putnam, 2002, 94); the fact that faith-based schools, pursuing their often very distinctive ideas about the nature of human flourishing, have nevertheless contributed significantly to the shared life of society, argues for a structurally-pluralistic educational system appropriate to a liberal democracy.

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