

REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

Politics, Markets and America's Schools

JOHN E. CHUBB & TERRY M. MOE, 1990 *Washington, The Brookings Institution*

Reviewed by Herbert Gintis, Baroness Cox, Anthony Green and Mike Hickox

Why do the advanced capitalist societies, while thoroughly infused with market institutions and political norms supporting free choice and voluntary exchange, nevertheless provide most educational services through the state? In our book, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), Samuel Bowles and I argued that this anomaly is easily understood if we interpret schools as fundamentally *institutions of social control*. 'Social control' is not a legitimate political objective, however, in a society predicated on the notion of free choice. It is not surprising, therefore, that when schools appear not to be functioning adequately, and after a period of traditional reform is duly instituted and found ineffective, public opinion turns favourable to competitive markets as a principle for the radical restructuring of educational institutions. John Chubb & Terry Moe's *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (1990) is an ambitious, and to my mind persuasive, attempt to motivate the need for competition in education, to defend the notion of 'choice' in education against its critics, and to provide thoughtful policy guidelines for implementing an equitable and effective system of educational choice.

Public concern over declining student achievement test scores has been growing in the United States since the mid-1970's. In April 1983 a national commission appointed by Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell, published *A Nation at Risk*, which concluded that "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people." In response, many state governments instituted corrective policies involving re-organisation (school-based management, teacher empowerment), better incentives (increased expenditure, higher teacher salaries, career ladders and merit pay for teachers), and more powerful threats (more rigorous student graduation and teacher certification standards, stricter disciplinary policy, more homework, and more standardised testing).

Chubb & Moe present a policy-by-policy criticism of these initiatives. They argue, for instance, that in the aggregate, real per pupil expenditures on elementary and secondary education rose 50% between 1973 and 1989, while school performance deteriorated. Moreover, teachers' salaries have no clear effect on teacher performance and teacher certification is counter-productive. "American society", they say, "is full of people who could make excellent teachers, but burdensome certification requirements are the best way to ensure that most of them never teach." Similarly, "attempts to base rewards on performance are steps in the right direction. . . . [but] merit systems tend to get bureaucratized."

Why this uniform history of failure? Chubb & Moe argue that such reforms cannot work, for the most fundamental of reasons: the state control of the educational process is the problem, not its solution:

. . . the reforms adopted thus far are destined to fail. Our reason . . . is that they simply do not get at the underlying causes of the problem . . . [T]he most fundamental causes . . . are, in fact, the very institutions that are supposed to be solving the problem: the institutions of direct democratic control.

The conceptual foundations for this view lie in transactions cost economics (Williamson, 1985) and the economic theory of agency (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), while their empirical evidence draws on an econometric study of the relative performance of private and public secondary schools, along the lines of (and updating) James Coleman, Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore's influential *High School Achievement: Public, Catholic, and Private Schools Compared* (1982).

Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore, deploying the massive High School and Beyond data set, conclude that US *private* schools students educate better than *public* schools, correcting for differences in the characteristics of their respective student bodies. Effective school characteristics, they find, involve clear school goals, rigorous academic standards, order and discipline, homework, strong leadership by the principal, teacher participation in decision-making, parental support and co-operation, and high expectations for student performance. Chubb & Moe replicate this finding: private schools do better, and that they do better not solely because they enjoy access to students with favourable learning characteristics, but because they are better organised and run. I suspect there is specification bias in postulating one-way causation among some of the relevant variables (for instance, a 'high regard for teaching' in a school may entail a better-performing school, or the causation may proceed in the opposite direction), but the results are impressive, if still subject to further econometric refinement and critical scrutiny.

Chubb & Moe's innovation is to go beyond this finding to assert that 'the most important prerequisite for the emergence of effective school characteristics is school autonomy, especially from external bureaucratic influence'. Institutions of democratic control, they proceed to argue, 'function naturally to limit and undermine school autonomy'. The authors take a broad excursion through the agency approach to organisational theory to prove their point that democracy is the problem and not the solution. However, the basic argument is clear and easily summarised.

Parents are responsible for their dependent children's well-being, have the right and duty to act on their behalf, and are, in general, likely to be the social

agents with the strongest incentive to do so [1]. Yet while children are the chief beneficiaries of educational services, parents have no direct power over the deliverers of these services. When schools are democratically accountable, the incentives that teachers and principals face are determined by a general political process in which the interests of parents and children are diluted by the prevalence of agents with distinct political and social goals (such as mayors, governors, school boards, teachers' unions) and agents with no direct interest in the quality of school services (e.g. taxpayers without school-aged children and businesses with no long-term ties to local communities). This dilution of parental accountability logically entails that, *if parents are the best judges of their children's interests, then schools will not act in the interests of children.*

By moving to a competitive market system for the supply of educational services, this structural failure is immediately rectified. Parents in such a system have the same power over those who supply educational services to their children as consumers have over the firms that supply their private needs in a capitalist economy: *the power to switch* [2]. Perestroika in capitalist education; what could be simpler or more straightforward?

The authors carefully flesh out the implementation of such a system. The state must first set requirements for schools wishing to participate in a choice system: "These criteria should be quite minimal", they advise, "roughly corresponding to the criteria many states now employ in accrediting private schools—graduate requirements, health and safety requirements, and teacher certification requirements. . . . Any group or organization that . . . meets these minimal criteria must then be chartered as a public school." To improve parent information, the state must provide a Parent Information Center, collect extensive information on school performance, and facilitate interaction between schools and prospective clients. However, they urge that schools be permitted to make their own admission decisions, subject to the legal prohibition of discrimination. Schools can also expel students or deny them re-admission based on their internal, non-discriminatory criteria. Schools would be permitted to determine their own governing structure (corporate franchise, teacher co-operative, etc.), and statewide tenure laws would be eliminated, the bargaining unit for a teacher's union being the individual school, not the district or the state. In assessing the school's performance, educational institutions must be accountable from below, not from above.

There are three major objections to such a system of educational choice. First, like all market solutions, a competitive educational system could exacerbate social inequality by favouring higher income families. Secondly, while public education now ostensibly mitigates social differences, a competitive system could exacerbate racial, ethnic and social class differences, since groups could voluntarily segregate along such ascriptive lines. Finally, it is not clear that parents with limited educational background can be trusted to make informed educational choices for their children.

Chubb & Moe deal with the issue of unequal family income by recommending that the state supply students with equal educational 'scholarships' (suitably augmented for students with special needs) that can be credited to the school of their parents' choice, and that the participating schools be prohibited from accepting additional tuition payments from parents. Affluent families would thus be obliged to underwrite the full cost of private schools for their children, as is currently the case in the USA.

To counter the tendency of parental choice and voluntary admissions to amplify racial, ethnic, and social class differences, Chubb & Moe suggest that educational policy could foster magnet schools, located in minority areas, offering special resources to attract outside students, to promote racial balance. In addition, schools can be offered subsidies for achieving an administratively desirable or judicially required social mix within the student body. I might add that the ability to set up their own schools offers a degree of empowerment to minority communities that is likely to exceed the benefits from their integration into majority culture. As is well known, the economic benefits of school integration remain to be validated.

Finally, can a society seriously depend upon its parents to make informed educational choices? Chubb & Moe do not discuss this issue. Educational professionals have probably been excessively paternalistic in maintaining (if only tacitly) that education is 'too important' to leave to families. Parents may not choose schools perfectly on the basis of quality of curricula, teachers and facilities, but we have no reason to believe that communities are any more likely to implement intelligent choices (Davis & Ostrom, 1991). When in doubt, it is best to organise institutions to implement the choices of agents who are most directly affected by their functioning. Chubb & Moe make a reasonable case for applying this to educational choice, and educators are well advised to take their arguments seriously.

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NOTES

- [1] Chubb & Moe do not discuss cases where this assumption is incorrect—e.g. parents whose personal weaknesses, or their religious or ideological concerns lead them to treat their children's education as instrumental to the satisfaction of other objectives. Presumably, the state would be empowered to assume the parental role in extreme cases of this type, as it now does in other areas of children's welfare.
- [2] For a political theory of consumer sovereignty in a market economy, see Gintis, H., 'The Power to Switch: On the Political Economy of Consumer Sovereignty', in: Samuel Bowles, Richard C. Edwards and William G. Shepherd (Eds), *Unconventional Wisdom: Essays in Honor of John Kenneth Galbraith* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1989).

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As I delved into this well-argued and stimulating book, with its proposals for radical reform, I was reminded of the phrase in *Troilus and Cressida*: “a coasting welcome”. I wish to give this book “a coasting welcome”. For here, transported across the Atlantic, is an analysis of an education malaise redolent with the concerns troubling many people in this country; and here, too are diagnoses and prescriptions which merit urgent consideration by those responsible for education in Britain’s schools.

Given the current state of education in the USA, as described by Chubb & Moe, and as highlighted by recent research in this country, the medical analogy of malaise, diagnosis and prescription is not inappropriate.

First, the problem: in both nations, recent years have seen repeated research reports of educational underachievement—on both intra- and international comparisons. Particular problems have been identified in the more rigorous subjects such as mathematics, science and foreign languages. In both nations, these problems have resulted in policies designed to alleviate them, but the remedies have yet to prove effective. According to Chubb & Moe, they are destined to fail, because they do not address the fundamental root cause of the problem. They attempt to deal with the symptoms, rather than curing the disease.

Chubb & Moe accept some of the factors identified by previous research as significant indicators of ‘effective schools’. These include characteristics which conventional wisdom (and many more traditional, especially independent schools) have long espoused: clear school goals, rigorous academic standards, discipline and order, teacher participation in decision-making, high expectations of pupil performance, homework and parental support. However they argue that these cannot be imposed by diktat from above, through a bureaucratised and hierarchical education system.

It is precisely this system itself which, according to Chubb & Moe has been immune from critical evaluation by the social scientists on whose research much policy-making is based. “Throughout this rush to reform, there remained a yawning gap in social science research . . . Mountains of research had helped to identify those aspects of organisation that distinguish effective from ineffective schools, but there had been no comparably compelling body of scientific work on the question of how these desirable characteristics could actually be developed and nurtured within existing schools” (p. 17).

This ‘yawning gap’ provoked Chubb & Moe to adopt a different approach and to ask different questions. These generated fundamentally different answers, which caused them to recommend a wholly different system of education: one built on school autonomy and parent-student choice, rather than on direct control by education authorities.

These recommendations are based on a combination of research-based evidence and deductive analysis. The empirical database is large and effectively representative; the analysis is generally convincing, although some criticisms are inevitable, such as the tendency towards tautology in some of the definitional indices. Chubb & Moe recognise that their research will be challenged, but claim they have confidence in their analysis, and argue that debate is healthy. I share their confidence in their overall analysis and hope that the debate on its implications will be constructive, for I believe that it behoves us in this country to take serious note of their conclusions and recommendations.

However, first, it is interesting to note some of their findings because their

policy implications may be relevant here. They found, *inter alia*, that they could analyse the nature of bureaucratic influence on schools with constructs such as an index of administrative constraint and an index of personnel constraint. Among the findings generated by analyses based on these constructs, they found that more than 60% of effective schools had above average levels of administrative autonomy, compared with less than one-third of ineffectively organised schools; effective schools were freer to design their own curricula and to choose their own methods of instruction; and union influence was much stronger in schools that were ineffectively organised.

Other variables which feature prominently in research and discussion on education policy in the USA and in this country, include the relationship between the quality of education and the levels of resources; the relationship between educational attainment and the socio-economic background of pupils; and the quality of parental involvement. Interestingly, Chubb & Moe do not find a clear systematic positive correlation between resources and school effectiveness: "Economic resources are above average in only 11% more of the effective schools than the ineffective ones." And even more to the point "schools with effective organisations are not generally rich. A shade more than half of the effective schools have below-average levels of economic resources" (p. 145).

Chubb & Moe find some systematic correlations between socio-economic background of pupils and the effectiveness of a school which lead them to conclude "that school organisations may benefit enormously—or suffer badly—from the kinds of students they enrol. Yet . . . schools can also fail or succeed regardless of their student bodies . . . In sum, "good" students do not always produce good schools, and good schools do not only serve 'good' students" (p. 147).

The relationship between school effectiveness and parental involvement is positive: "Effective schools are more likely to reach out to parents than are ineffective ones": they are more likely to send newsletters and to notify parents if their children are absent for 2 or 3 days or if their grades deteriorate. Thus, both the quantity and quality of parent-school contacts tend to be greater in effective than in ineffective schools; and effective schools are more likely to have "the informed support of parents".

Many of these findings are consistent with research in this country which has shown that the quality of education which a school provides for its pupils is not determined merely by the resources at its disposal or by the socio-economic background of its pupils. The research by Rutter and his colleagues (1979); our own research for the NCES (Marks *et al.*, 1983, 1986; Marks & Pomian-Szednicki, 1985) and more recent research, such as that by Smith & Tomlinson (1989), and Mortimore *et al.* (1988) have all shown that 'school matters' and the quality of a school can override the differentials of inputs.

Such findings require serious questions to be asked about ways in which schools can best be encouraged and enabled to be more effective in providing the best possible quality of education for all their pupils. The analysis by Chubb & Moe is compatible with research findings here which suggest that just putting more money into the education system will not be sufficient. I do not suggest that there is no need for any more money anywhere (especially in the fabric of many of our schools), but money *per se* will not create the conditions of an effective school. Similarly, rules, regulations and diktats from central or local government will not

suffice. The National Curriculum may be a necessary evil, given the disturbing underachievement in basic subjects in some of our schools, but it will not be a panacea for all aspects of our educational malaise.

The solution, according to Chubb & Moe's analysis, and potentially implied in much recent research here, is radical: it is to change the locus of power and decision-making from government (either central or local) to parents and schools. This implies a dramatic scaling down of the role of those institutions which have long dominated the public provision of education—the democratically elected school boards in the USA and the local education authorities in this country. Only by such means can schools become accountable to those they serve and responsive to their needs; only by such means can teachers be more autonomous and gain more freedom for their own professional practice; and only by such means can all parents have the kind of choice which is currently the prerogative of the wealthy.

Mechanisms for such radical changes include the freedom for parents to set up new schools which the state must be obliged to fund (as is current policy in the Netherlands); the freedom for parents to choose schools and to have assistance with transport (with reasonable financial limits); the freedom for schools to accept, reject or expel pupils; greater freedom and flexibility in the mechanisms of licensing teachers; and greater freedom for schools to determine their own curricula and standards.

The essential safeguards in this new era of freedom are to be found in the concept of choice itself—the market mechanism will ensure that those schools flourish best which provide what parents and students require. This is a radical extension of parent power.

It is also a radical reduction of the power of the education establishment. As such, it is probable that these proposals will be bitterly opposed by those with vested interests in the establishment. However, given the widespread and largely justified concern that currently prevails, the time has come to question the validity of policies which leave such power in the hands of those with vested interests, who have too often failed the young people they are there to serve.

Chubb & Moe's analysis is a trenchant and cogent argument for such radical reform. It could not be more timely or apposite for consideration here, where the problems confronting us are at least as serious as those confronting the American people. This is why I give 'a coasting welcome' to this transatlantic study and hope that we may have the vision to think as radically, and the courage to act in accordance with our visions—for the sake of our children and of our nation.

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This is a remarkable book presenting its thesis in a form which bears all the hallmarks of serious professional concerns, scientific rigour, care and plausibility in support of what is, in the USA, an even more radical policy direction than its counterpart in Britain. It is quite well written, too. In the politics of education there the book is already a 'phenomenon' in the public political arena beyond the narrow confines of academic research. It is also a consummately ideological piece in that it presents a dominant theme plus a residual and contradictory subtext, thus maintaining strategic ambiguity in its 'message'. As such, it constitutes a rallying point which articulates particular neo-conservative interests in support of the idea that the market is the cleanest, most efficient mechanism for delivering 'quality education', but intriguingly couples this with a potentially valuable redistributionist, and in that sense socially progressive, device which runs counter to the direction that the burgeoning, largely rightist, enthusiasms has taken up as its main lessons. In some ways this book may do (rather more successfully, perhaps) for the American new right in the 1990's what Bowles and Gintis' *Schooling in Capitalist America* did for the radical social democratic and the remnants of the Marxist left in the 1970's. It will be interesting to see if there is a parallel impact here.

If things run true to form, Chubb & Moe will be most widely discussed, remembered and have political effects mainly for "what they say" rather than be accorded authority for the "way they say it"; that is, their *methods*. In either case, however, if there are lessons to be gleaned for current British, educational interests, then some attention to comparative contexts is required. This review will follow that order, namely, briefly outlining what is salient in their thesis, raising some methodological issues, and concluding with a brief evaluation of the importance of the book in the light of some contextual considerations. The necessary brevity in each aspect means that this piece cannot substitute for a thorough review of the work.

Markets not Politics, not Bureaucracy

The problem with public education in America is that it is too bureaucratic. The reason is that it is too political. The solution is deregulation, probably to the point of deconstruction of 'public' education. This is the essential message, which, along with 'that which everyone knows', namely, that public educational provision is a failure as indicated by falling standards of achievement and poor showings in international league tables, both economic and educational, and that the private sector does much better at a lower cost. It is in the private sector, of course, that, as a vein of popular perception has it, the market is king (and where professional standards of educational leadership, academic focus and parental involvement are

clearly superior) and so the private sector provides the model of 'effective schooling' most widely accepted as plausible in the last decade. After all, the private sector supplies the most obvious educational 'choice' for Americans.

In all of this, there is nobody to 'blame'; it's 'institutional'. Both problem and solution work through the socially decontaminated mechanisms of 'unintended consequences' rather than conspiracies or culpable cock-ups. There is simply no space for responsible policy planning in public education as presently arranged. This is because the gridlock of bureaucracy is the inevitable outcome of too many voices competing for recognition in the political processes of public education. The consequent potential for mayhem is literally regulated and institutionalised in rules of accountability which defeat the purposes of education. For instance, amongst other things, there is a comfortable symbiosis in which the 'suppliers' (teachers) exchange security of employment for professional responsibility, and the product is constituted and devalued in tightly bounded curricula and tested achievement outcomes set by their employers, the bureaucratic state and metropolitan authorities. Teachers organise into labour unions, and school districts (local authorities) into administrative apparatuses, publicly accountable to the elected school boards, rather than to their clients (the parents and students), or to colleagues as professionally 'empowered' workers, in the case of teachers. Educational supply and demand are not in balance because the clients have no effective voice; there are too few options or pressures to generate alternatives. Rigidity and mediocrity tragically result from a system apparently designed to afford democratic representation in public education. A radical solution is required.

The way out is to follow the lessons of the private sector, and to let the market have its head because, again unintendedly, but in this case benignly, it will generate flexibility, diversity as well as excellence; a revolutionary institutional alternative to the bureaucratic 'organised public monopolies' and their attendant mediocrity, and worse. It is to be achieved though, with a weighted voucher system in which the disadvantaged are to receive more to spend in the educational market which should include both public and private schools. This will presumably lead to the deconstruction of the latter distinction, though they accept that the state will continue for a long time to supply schools, but only have authority over their own schools, not those they will have 'chartered' to anyone who cares to open one and compete for clients. Their solution is not a matter of more spending or more regulation, found in abundance in recent American educational policy, but efficiency which accrues to releasing 'choice'. This is the elaborated message of Chubb & Moe.

Why take any of this seriously? To the, ever so slightly wearied British eye, it sounds all too familiar in the context of educational 'Thatcherism', perhaps even more way out. Two reasons: first, the thesis is supported by the powerful rhetoric of extensive quantitative research, presented for the most part in a very professional manner, apparently thorough and rather impressive. Secondly, much of it is probably 'true'—the issue is though, which bits and what are the implications?

Some Issues of Method

The broad research strategy Chubb & Moe employ is to try to demonstrate that if the problem with public education lies in its uniformity and bureaucracy, part

of the longstanding 'one best school' tradition, then it is necessary to show that things are better in the private sector. Namely, that private schools are less bureaucratic, have more autonomy in hiring teachers, are more focused on academic aspects of schooling, have more positive leadership, and that their educational practices are more effective, less formal in terms of pedagogy and geared to the specific educational needs of the students. This results, in their perspective, from the 'institutional' context of school organisation in each sector.

Their data base is impressive and draws upon High School and Beyond (HSB) 1980 and 1982 follow up of 60,000 students to measure educational 'gains' (between years 10 and 12 of schooling), plus the 1984 follow-up of administrators and teachers (ATS) at over 500 schools in the original 1015 sample to provide data on school organisation. There is an 86% completion rate. They confidently estimate population characteristics of public and private high schools in the US (1980/84).

Are there flaws in the logic of the research strategy itself? Given limitations of space, three issues will be raised here. First, what inferences can usefully be made about the comparative success of the public and private sectors (as proxies for institutional 'democratic/political' and 'market' control, respectively) *today* to the likely successes of a *future* fully operational market system as they describe it? Strictly speaking, 'none', of course, is the answer, as moving from the present contingent empirical specifics to a supposedly benign future requires making a few assumptions. Given that we have never seen one, we can know very little about a full 'market' system in education. Will supply become radically more diverse and articulate with parental demands and, cutting across this issue, in what senses will what results have anything to do with the quality of education? Their responses to this kind of critical enquiry is two-fold and instructive; first, curiously perhaps, they cite 'evidence' (amongst other things, of the celebrated open choice system developed in East Harlem, New York City), but secondly, they reject the empiricism of this kind of question; theirs is an exercise in 'theory' in which virtue resides in 'simplicity' and capturing the essential features of the thing being explained and not giving in to 'complexity'; they are not too interested in trees, it's forests that count (Chubb & Moe, 1990, p. 561).

One is tempted to conclude that this is the key to Markets, Politics and America's Schools; refreshingly perhaps, they are (almost) self-confessedly in the persuasion business, rather than being concerned with what passes so often for much of academic research. Their interest is in not so much what would constitute the contents of a 'good' education (at this point in their thesis they would be required to declare a value judgement, which they are keen to avoid), but more in how to deliver an 'acceptable' education to the customers. In this regard the simplicity and elegance of the market model makes it a powerful rhetorical tool for wrong-footing the myopic fact-mongers whose complexity leaves them without coherence, without 'mission' and with nothing much to say about how to improve educational performance in the USA. Their attitude to such details as which variables are being controlled and examined, is interesting. For instance, the fact that school size differs systematically between public and private education appears to be overlooked in their analyses. The response is that

it is not necessary to investigate this because differential school size is “part and parcel of what we *mean* by effects of the sector” (Chubb & Moe, 1990, p. 562). Quite so, but would a fully fledged market system generate any more diversity and ‘choices’ or would consolidation and incipient monopolies emerge to regulate choices? It could be worth some more consideration, perhaps taking clues from the long history of market mechanisms in economic activities.

Secondly, there are important issues they slide over regarding the current relationships between the public and private sectors which require some care when inferring any independent comparative effects of politics and markets in determining the organisational characteristics of schools in each sector. It is, at least, minimally plausible to suspect (with plenty of evidence to support the proposition) that private schools have advantages and that these effect the comparative results, confounding assertions about educational ‘value added’; primarily, private schools select from a pool of relatively advantaged family backgrounds—advantaged both financially, and in terms of parental and student motivation. Issues of social status, including racial prejudice and isolation are central to accounting for the differential recruitment effects and probably measured achievement in American public (especially urban) and private education.

Thirdly, are there specifications about the sample they draw from the data set and that data itself, on the one hand, and their statistical techniques on the other, which cause concern? A central aspect of the analysis is to contrast high and low achieving schools on the 1980 to 1982 educational gain measures. However, they do not cut out schools which have few teacher responses or significant changes in their organisation during that period. Nor do they differentiate between catholic schools, central to their analysis because they are such a frequently exercised private choice option for working and middle class families, and ‘elite’ or ‘other’ (non-catholic) schools, as other researchers using this data set tend to do. This is likely to introduce distortions making interpretation of educational achievement difficult as it inflates the proportion of private schools in the upper section of the high achieving schools.

Their specific measure of achievement gain may well overestimate the educational achievement gains of schools with a large number of high achievers on the baseline test and so exaggerate the differences between initially high and low achieving schools (Witte, 1990). Added to this, there is clear indication of a more fundamental issue from the HSB data. From the very brief multiple choice test used there is very little educational achievement ‘gain’ occurring at all from the sophomore to junior years (grades 10–12) of high school, so that if accepted as valid, the differences between high and low achieving, and between private and public sector schools pales into insignificance (though the large data set of the HSB materials ensures plenty of statistical significance) in the face of the question (from whatever ideological standpoint) of “What is the point of this period of education, anyway?” (Jenks, 1985; Lee & Bryk, 1988). A problem is that this material may not be valid for evaluating schooling. It includes five tests completed in 63 minutes, but has nothing on foreign languages and social sciences, is doubtful on sciences (10 minutes) and, given their strictures on the failures of educational reforms in the 1980’s, as these are the curriculum areas where enrollment has increased, may not be valuable measures of educational achievement in the first place (Kirst, 1990).

Contexts and Implications

Chubb & Moe may well be sound in judging that much of American public education is stunted by 'bureaucracy' and that this has an adverse effect upon what many would regard as a necessary level of autonomy for educational institutions, and especially for professional morale amongst educators. More parental choice and school level autonomy in the United States will be very valuable in generating educational professional energy and creativity. This is especially so in the massively demoralised inner cities, where distinct improvements, however small, are eagerly seized upon, celebrated as 'solutions', defined, of course, as supporting whichever interest is doing the 'celebrating'. Rarely, if ever, is any systematic effort put into seriously dealing with the problems in institutional, political and economic terms. This is not because there is too much politics, too much 'democracy', and not enough of 'market' mechanisms. It is because the inter-relationship (indeed, interconstitution) of politics and markets results in the institutionalisation of 'bad politics'.

Very specifically, choice (for parents, students or teachers) is not a strong feature of public education in the USA, which makes the issue even more controversial there than here. Educational (and for that matter, any other) choice is not some item which, however laudable the intentions, can be simply 'distributed', it is acquired in political struggles. Chubb & Moe's assumption that the market is a surefire 'bottom up' alternative to too much 'top down' is certainly an 'institutional' matter, but needs more work than they provide if its 'simplicity' is to convince critics, let alone sceptics.

Educational choice is a movement in the USA. It is a multifaceted collection of diverse voices and policy initiatives, and even though for the most part hegemonised by the right, there are many 'progressive' interests, representing deep and continuing frustration at the poverty of public education, as well as the educational significance 'choice' has for motivation, in a system where the myth of comprehensive democratic universality has been shattered. The lessons to learn both there and here are not simply about the inefficiencies of 'bureaucracy'. Without the continuing political support of some of these very mechanisms in many metropolitan authorities the rearguard of 'liberal' (in American parlance), possibly even social democratic activities would have been dispersed long since.

Realistically, Chubb & Moe's advocacy of a weighed voucher system is unlikely to get far for constitutional and financial reasons (whether or not these are regarded as 'political'). It would be open to the charge that public funds are being used for non secular education, a continuing frustration for any voucher system in that very religious society; and to subsidise private education itself, and so helping the well off. If 'weighting' is taken seriously it would cost too much and in the current climate and bring affirmative action in by the back door just when the front seems to be firmly closing.

In Britain, the situation may be different. Given that there is now, in the public sector, a system in which each child is, in effect, a 'walking voucher', attention should be paid to Chubb & Moe's redistributionist ideas. To guard against selection and segregation (of various kinds), should not children from disadvantaged families, and/or as individuals, be worth more in terms of real resources to the schools they attend? Educational value is rarely added for free.

Finally, Chubb & Moe provide valuable reminders of lessons to be learned

from the USA. Inner city education there is a disaster in many areas and a 'choice' of last resort. This is generally more to do with the social, political and economic contexts of the schools as with the schools themselves. In this regard Chubb & Moe are right to draw attention to the broad institutional contexts of education as having implications for the shape and efficiency of the schools. For me, it is the effects upon teacher morale, as responsible, valued and, therefore, effective workers that is crucial. Is British education continuing to move in the direction of over-constraining regulation and 'teacher proofing' of their work? If so, worse is yet to come and we can read *Politics, Markets and America's Schools* with some profit for visions of an even more difficult future for educational entitlement than appears here at present. However, in Chubb & Moe's terms, this may lead us in the direction of activities that look uncomfortably like *politics*.

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Well written and persuasively argued, Chubb & Moe's book is a major contribution to the 'quality of schooling' debate currently taking place in both Britain and the USA, a debate which derives its force from a wider concern with the issue of relative economic decline in both countries. The central thesis is clearly presented, making the book easily accessible to the layperson, and directed so as to appeal to very diverse audiences. While the authors are clearly arguing from a New Right market liberal position, their constant stress on the need to 'empower' teachers—which has few echoes on the British New Right—is more reminiscent of the 1960's Left.

Their basic conclusion is that 'good education' occurs in situations where teachers are allowed to operate on the basis of informal team networks, free from all petty bureaucratic rules and constraints. Bureaucracy is the chief enemy of good teaching. While previous researchers have recognised this, they argue, they have failed to relate this finding to the wider political context within which schools function. State schools which are controlled by the institutions of local democracy—the 'one best system' as Chubb & Moe call it—are especially prone to bureaucratic interference as local politicians and administrators attempt to impose 'higher order values' upon teachers. The situation is at its worst in the

inner city, where perceived 'problems' such as violence and drug-taking lead politicians to impose even more controls upon schools, thus lowering the quality of educational provision. Private sector schools, on the other hand, with only their clients to please, are less likely to create unnecessary bureaucracy.

They conclude, therefore, that the only permanent remedy for the problem of bureaucracy in education is for the adoption of a thorough-going market approach, which would both free the supply side and remove all schools from local political control. While it has proved possible on occasion to make some of these reforms within the context of the 'one best system'—they point to the evidence from successful experiments in East Harlem—they argue that such victories over bureaucracy are always precarious while schools remain within the state sector. Anyone, they suggest, should be free to set up a school, subject to meeting minimum criteria, and all schools would compete for clients in the open market using a system of publicly funded scholarships. To meet the standard objection, made against all such schemes, that this would disadvantage poorer parents, they propose that these scholarships should be loaded to take account of socio-economic status, thus providing an incentive for schools to compete for pupils from inner urban areas.

Leaving on one side the practicality of this scheme, it is interesting to note that it clearly implies a considerable degree of local political interference in the workings of the market, thus apparently contradicting their basic theoretical position. This, indeed, is a problem confronting all advocates of market models who also wish to engage in 'social engineering'!

In essence the book reflects an orthodox market-liberal approach to social issues, most marked in the authors deep suspicion of the democratic process and their belief that only market solutions can offer real sovereignty to the consumer. Thus, they argue that it is in the very nature of the democratic process for the interests of parents to be crowded out by those of politicians and bureaucrats. This is not something, as the Left would claim, that can be remedied by making democratic institutions more responsive to the wishes of the electorate.

However, their approach appears quite radical in the British context, where, despite aiming their attacks at essentially the same target (i.e. the institutions of local democracy), members of the British New Right have tended to opt for centralising rather than root and branch market solutions. Arguably, this reflects the predominance of neo-conservatives, such as Roger Scruton, within the ranks of conservative educators. One notable exception has been the group of pro-voucher diehards, exemplified by Arthur Seldon, who have continued to attack the 1988 Act both for the excessive power which it gives to the DES and for its preference for 'political' (e.g. greater parental involvement in governing bodies) over 'market' solutions.

As I have noted, a major difference between Chubb & Moe, and their British New Right counterparts can be seen in their respective attitudes to the teaching profession. The latter have tended to be suspicious of teachers, seeing them as people to be monitored, disciplined and controlled; at best incompetent, and, at worst, a hotbed for subversive theories. Chubb & Moe, on the contrary, despite a clear dislike for teacher unions, have great faith in the capacity of 'empowered' and liberated teachers to provide good education. Indeed, their claim that only practising teachers at the chalkface are really equipped to adjudicate on educational matters, is oddly at variance with their general market-liberal position. The

majority of market-liberals would tend to see this as an example of 'producer capture'.

The most serious objection to their thesis, which they only attempt to confront in a footnote, is that the educational systems which most promote academic excellence (e.g. Japan and France) are also the most highly bureaucratised and centralised. Indeed, taking this in conjunction with their argument, one might conclude that while a system based on *local* political control is the worst possible case, a highly centralised model offers a better alternative than one based on market forces. Thus, they argue that one key element in 'good education' is for teachers to have clear, unambiguous goals. However, these can equally well result from the central imposition of clearly defined bureaucratic rules (e.g. the National Curriculum) as from the free play of market forces.

Nor is it clear that, at a national level, a market driven educational system would necessarily lead to greater economic productivity. Many proponents of the 'new vocationalism' would deny such a claim, arguing that education is too important to the national interest to be left to the market. One might argue, for example, that the market tends to give inappropriate signals to consumers, based on past experience, encouraging them to take courses that are no longer relevant to the needs of the economy.

However, most suspect of all is their claim that the extension of the free market in education will lead to greater teacher 'empowerment' and to a much wider diversity in the provision of courses. (Ironically, the British New Right has attacked the LEAs for offering *too much* diversity.) Freedom from petty bureaucratic controls does not necessarily produce 'empowerment' in any meaningful sense. A teacher at a nineteenth century 'crammer' might well have been free from such controls, but can hardly be seen to have been 'empowered'.

Moreover, there appears to be no evidence that the free market necessarily produces greater educational diversity. Notoriously, a few exceptions at the margins apart, the traditional British public school system tended very much to create a standardised product. Indeed, this was what the consumers expected in return for their money. In today's world standardisation in the private sector results from the overriding pressures for pupils to gain nationally recognised credentials, the major criterion by which these schools are judged. These pressures mean that there can be no return, under any system, to the rich diversity of local provision for which Chubb & Moe clearly feel great nostalgia.

Finally, it is instructive to make a comparison between the present book, and Bowles and Gintis' classic *Schooling in Capitalist America*, since both trace the origins of the present system to the same historical circumstances, i.e. the triumph of the Progressive movement over local interests in the early decades of this century. However, whereas Bowles and Gintis, working from a Marxist perspective, saw this as essentially a triumph for industrial capitalism, Chubb & Moe place far less stress on this factor, preferring to emphasise the way in which the resulting system has operated in favour of politicians and bureaucrats. For them it is 'consumers' rather than the working class who have been essentially disadvantaged.

While this shift in emphasis is partly an index of the different political standpoints of the two works, it may also reflect the major changes that have taken place in the world capitalist economy since the late 1970s. The lead in industrial development has clearly been taken by Japan and West Germany, both

countries with well-educated populations and high quality educational systems. No longer can it be so easily supposed that the reproduction of capitalism is built on the educational failure of the working class. Unfortunately, this lesson has still to be appreciated by the British sociology of education which remains fixated, to a surprising degree, within the mental universe of 'Correspondence' theory!

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