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## Privatization and Democratization: The Usages of Democracy in Chicago's School Reform Discourse

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Privatization and Democratization: The Usages of Democracy in Chicago's School

Reform Discourse

A Thesis Presented to

The Faculty of the Social and Cultural Foundations in Education

School of Education

DePaul University

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

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DePaul University

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## Introduction

In the spring of 2009, United Neighborhood Organization, the Chicago's largest Latino community organization and the largest single charter school operator in the state of Illinois, secured a \$98 million grant from the state to open eight new charter schools (Mihalopoulos and Ahmed, 2009). The Chicago Tribune cited the UNO's political prowess and close relationship to Mayor Daley as key to its success thus far. The UNO chief executive, Juan Rangel distances his organization's approach from what he views as the "fight-the-power style of some African-American and Latino leaders" (Mihalopoulos and Ahmed, 2009). Rangel goes on to say, "Is this community going to see itself as another victimized minority or are they going to be the next successful immigrant group? There is an assumption that this community mimics the African-American community -- where it's been and where it's going. That's not the case at all. It has very little in common with the African-American experience" (Mihalopoulos and Ahmed, 2009). The schools practice assimilation, and neither the Spanish language nor Latino cultures are integrated into UNO curricula. For UNO charter schools, American citizenship entails individual hard work to progress in an unquestioned economic and political system, and community betterment is achieved by working within the existing power structures and relationships.

The UNO example points to the complex and intricate ways in which the control and management of public schools are woven into the fabric of the state and our understandings of democracy. Public education, especially in the current age of neoliberal practices of school innovation and entrepreneurship, is framed in the dominant discourse as a site of opportunity and possibility for the improvement of the future by promoting consumption and work framed as active citizenship, to uphold the

“democratic” values, or the neoliberal economic values and forms of subjectivity, of American society. However, democratic values are not static or concrete, but can be transformative or, as they often are, can be recuperated by bourgeois society to maintain the status quo and the power of the formal state. For the UNO charter school network, the democratic subject described by Rangel is not “rebellious” and does not “fight the power”, in contradiction to other discourses of democracy, one for example that has pit U.S. democracy against fighting the power of Soviet totalitarianism (Rancière, 2006).

The problem driving this inquiry is the opacity of the language and meaning of democracy and democratic principles as they are used within the context of the recent push for school privatization in Chicago. The following will attempt to make clear the slippages of meaning within public discourse of the democratic subject, the American citizen, and freedom and equality in relationship to charter school proliferation in Chicago. In order to do this, I utilize Rancière’s (2006) concept of the double discourse on democracy to identify the contradictions inherent within the linkage of democracy to the free market principles which guide school privatization efforts in Chicago. Rancière’s double discourse<sup>1</sup> highlights the paradox of democratic governance and the inherently ungovernable democratic civilization. This paradox complicates and makes impossible the logic that reconciles democratic freedom and the freedom to choose preselected, privately managed public education ‘services’. In the review of literature, I create a theoretical foundation for the understanding of school privatization within the context of the fractured, partial, and multiply-sourced neoliberal ideology which drives it, its

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<sup>1</sup> Rancière’s (2006) double discourse refers to work of “composing forces and of balancing institutional mechanisms intended to get the most possible out of the fact of democracy, all the while strictly containing it in order to protect two goods taken as synonymous: the government of the best, and the preservation of the order of property” (p. 2).

relationship to the state, and the neoliberal usage of the democratic principles of freedom and equality. I then locate and utilize this foundation as a means to analyze the discourse surrounding the push for school privatization in Chicago, and expose the contradictions and fractures within the distortion of democracy by the relative reciprocity among those who have access to capital and a stake in the success of the state as a global economic player, as well as the subject produced through identification of democracy with values of entrepreneurialism and consumerism. Through a discourse analysis, I uncover four major ways in which democracy is discursively formed in support of the neoliberal marketization and privatization of Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

First, school privatization frames freedom (entrepreneurial freedom, market freedom, freedom from bureaucracy, etc.) in ways that support Chicago's global city agenda in which the transformation of education is an important aspect (Sassen, 1996; Lipman, 2008; Demissie, 2006). Second, on an individual level, democratic action is equated with choice. Democratic individual actors are consumers who have the power to influence change through which schools they choose or choose not to send their children. Thirdly, on the macro or collective level, democratic action is equated with policy change. This policy change has come from a group of Chicago's government and business elite. The recent advent of venture philanthropy and business intervention in education has also had a major impact on policy governing schooling. And, fourth, those who disrupt the order of democratic governance are anti-democratic. These disrupters are, specifically, teachers and teachers unions who are framed by the government and business elite as a threat to democracy.

The relationship between the understanding of democracy – this concept that supposedly ensures citizens of the state freedom and equality – and the privatization of public schools in Chicago is critical to the understanding of the very word ‘democracy’ and the ways in which students, parents, teachers, and others are cast as democratic subjects and citizen-subjects. Complex tensions exist within the ever-changing divide between the public and private realms, how and by whom determinations are made about their delimitations, and the blurriness of the boundaries where these two realms meet and overlap. School privatization is a part of these complex tensions, in which there is a push from the state and economic players to blur the lines of public and private within what is still referred to as ‘public’ education. School privatization, set in the unique local and globally-interconnected urban environment such as Chicago, complicates the dominant narrative of schools as neutral sites of mini-democracies and schooling as serving the honorable purpose of forming the next generation of democratic citizens (Dagger, 2007). Much work has already been done to expose public education’s connection and interrelatedness to the maintenance of social inequalities, hierarchical power structures, and the wealth economy (Apple, 2001; Giroux, 2001; Giroux, 2002; McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001). This paper aims to not only build upon these connections but to center as a pressing issue facing public education the immediate threat to ‘democracy’ that school privatization poses. The democracy that is threatened by the way in which school privatization has and continues to take shape is one that cannot be aligned with a form of society or governance but a most basic right of woman and man, to act within, participate, and determine public life.

There is a “fundamental paradox” within “the split between the discourse of the “rights of man” and that of the ‘rights of citizen’” (Balibar, 1994, p. 40). This paradox takes shape in the seemingly incongruent pairing of the collective responsibility of citizens and the individual liberties of woman and man. Radical democracy, often advocated for by critical pedagogues and others on the left, poses an interesting dilemma to the ‘public’ aspect of public education. Education is considered a right to the people and the state’s responsibility to provide. However, according to Rancière (2006), the use of democracy as a form of governance and society “doubles the consensual confusion in making the word ‘democracy’ an ideological operator that depoliticizes the questions of public life by turning them into ‘societal phenomena’, all the while denying the forms of domination that structure society” (p. 92).

Critical education scholars often focus on citizenship through radical pedagogic practices in the classroom and the defense of public schools as sites of possibility for the creation of democratic spaces (Ayers 2004; Apple 2001). Is it possible to separate state-run education and the “consensual confusion” of democracy as an ideological operator? A goal of this work is to identify and complicate slippages in meanings of democracy in order to not only expose contradiction and complexity within the distinct motivations of the movement for school privatization in Chicago, but also to question the slippages in the term ‘public education’. The larger discussion to which this work contributes is the argument for the separation of ‘public education’ from a specific form of management, structure, or state-sponsored public sphere, and the association of ‘public education’ not with the “power of wealth” but “the power of kinship that today comes to assist [democracy] and to rival it” (Rancière, 2006, p. 97). Rancière poignantly states,

“Democracy is only entrusted to the constancy of specific acts” (p. 97). Baring the complexities and motivations underlying the relatedness of school privatization to the anti-democratic, pro-capitalist sentiments driving them might help us think toward a more truly public education that embodies democracy through “singular and precarious acts” which together can build a set of “egalitarian relations” to form a more truly democratic way of living and being with one another (p. 97).

Participation as defined in dominant public discourse around education in the current age, especially within the current environment of charter schools, pivots on the notion of consumer choice. The definition of participation in education is regarded differently for those who provide and control the services, and those who must choose between the services laid out before them. In a study of the association of democracy with charter school reform and the widespread support of this reform from suburban school administrators, Wells, Slayton, and Scott (2002) state:

To the extent that the people with political, economic, and social capital within these districts uniformly support charter schools and in fact see them as a logical extension of how they make sense of their postindustrial venture-capital worlds, the only vocal, visible, or organized resistance seems to come from the local teachers and classified unions, which do not fit into the ideology of suburbia and its flexible accumulation” (p. 357).

Those who do not fit within the ideology set forth by those with capital, through deregulation and de-unionization efforts, have less power in the developments of schooling. This is very different from the more radical democratic practices which are not tied to citizenship but to the rights of woman and man and to action. Rancière (2006)

states that democracy is “the action which constantly wrests the monopoly of public life from oligarchic governments, and the omnipotence over our lives from the power of wealth” (p. 96).

The push for school privatization in Chicago is an exemplar site of the struggle for public life against the powers of wealth and the state. According to the Illinois Network of Charter Schools, Illinois has been increasing yearly the number of charter school contracts it awards – over 85% of which are awarded for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) – and the massive amounts of money the state and school district award education management organizations (EMOs) to build and start-up new schools in times of financial and budgetary crisis for both CPS and the state of Illinois. The time is ripe to take apart the charter school discourse specific to Chicago and lay bare the uses, nuances, and implications for the conceptions and materiality of democracy in and around schooling, and the role that public education plays in interconnected struggles to fortify or transform these conceptions

Chicago’s myriad politics, perspectives, communities, and hierarchies provide a rich context from which to unpack varying associations of democracy with concrete developments and changes to its public education system. Education is intricately linked with the continuous dynamic processes shaping Chicago’s spaces and people. Public schools in many Chicago communities are not solitary, bounded entities disconnected from the rest of the world. They are inextricably linked to processes of gentrification, privatization, and globalization (Saltman, 2007; Lipman 2008). It is not possible to theorize a separation between ‘real’ democracy and the logic of market democracy utilized and ideologized by many school privatization advocates without recognizing and

integrating the complexity of concrete decisions, circuits of relationships, and all-together messiness of the push for school privatization.

In theorizing the use and conceptions of democratic principles within charter school proliferation, there is risk of falling into a binary that pits the evil neoliberal market democracy against the utopic idea of radical democracy (Giroux, 2002; Saltman, 2000; Apple, 2001). Brown (2006), in discussing Stuart Hall's suggestion that "the various powers and rationalities configuring the present would be better grasped according to the logic of dreamwork than the logic of philosophical entailment", states:

Patterning political analysis after dreamwork thus threatens to puncture a left political moralizing impulse that wants everything the right stands for to be driven by nefariousness, smallness, or greed, and everything we do to be generously minded and good, an impulse that cases Us and Them in seamless and opposing moral political universes (p. 690).

Political orders and rationalities are "incoherent, multiply sourced, and unsystematic" in nature. The work cannot be done from a leftist god-like standpoint of which the critics of neoliberalism and school privatization are immune from the ambitions "to secure a cultural and political hegemony and impose a moral order" (p. 691). The work of separating out the motivations, intentions, and ideologies behind a neoliberal version of democracy driving education change in Chicago should neither be done without acknowledging that motivations often stem from the failures of the system as it is and has been, nor without acknowledging that radical democracy is not akin to a 'new' society but is a singularity defined only by the actions and relations which compose it.

Radical democracy is not “based on any nature of things nor guaranteed by any institutional form” (Rancière, 2006, p. 97). It is a set of relationships, struggles, and actions in which an outcome free of domination or unequal power relationships is not guaranteed. Saltman (2000) states, “Any meaningful democratic theory of school choice must grapple with the issues of radically redistributing to the people the control of capital and the control of identification production (meaning-making technologies)” (p. 52). Reflexivity must be prevalent as well as the consistent complication of an Us and Them or ‘owners of the means of production’ and ‘the people’ binary.

Nevertheless, issues of domination and inequality stemming from decisions to privatize schooling in favor of those who have social, economic, and cultural capital have material and accountable roots. Public education, a site of possibility and also repression, has become an important space in the struggle to define and delimit democracy and the public sphere. This is evidenced by the increasing interest of the business sector in acting as venture philanthropists, the equation of quality education with high test scores, the increasing language of performance, cost efficiency, productivity, and management, and the linkages between the health of the U.S. as a global economic player and schooling (De La Torre, 1996; McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001; Giroux, 2003). By parsing out the linkage of democracy with neoliberal ideology, this work develops and complicates what Wells, et al. al (2002) identify as the articulation of “a new, commonsense understanding of democracy as separate from – or at least more independent of – the free market” (p. 357).

## **Review of Literature**

Understanding democracy in today's society is a complicated task, as the term and its uses vary from the justification of war to the spread of neoliberal, capitalist global practices to the radical hope for a more free and equal society. Over time, the term democracy and its meaning have been adjusted and adapted for specific political purposes (Rosanvallon 1995). A recent transformation of the term is its interchangeability with 'representative government', a transformation Rosanvallon (1995) characterizes as a tactical move during late-eighteenth century France to mediate the mass participation in governance born by the revolutionary spirit while maintaining the power of dominant interests. Democracy, since its redefining in current political discourse, embodies vagueness and carries with it countless variations beyond trite phrases such as 'the power of the people' (Rosanvallon 1995). These variations are motivated by particular political interests, and the term's use in school privatization discourse is no exception.

Wells, et al. (2007) argue that charter school reform has neoliberal roots, and that democracy has come to be understood by many school officials pushing for the proliferation of charter schools as interchangeable with many neoliberal aspirations like increased competition, increased revenue, deregulation, parental (consumer) choice, and successful public-private partnerships. Charter schools have gained in popularity over the years as a solution to the failings of public education and, according to Wells, Slayton, and Scott (2007), have been put forward to combat the real problems of "resources, power, institutional interests, failure, and hence, continued bureaucratization, and expansion" (p. 357). The power of charter school logic is not only rooted in the alignment

of democracy with the free market (a situation that will be parsed out in later pages), but in the recuperation of the failings of traditional education.

The language of school privatization is often couched in the discourse of education reform. This is a somewhat dubious relationship, and leaves little space within dominant discourse surrounding education to create an alternative to either the privatization of public schools or working with the system as it was. As Apple (2008) states, “The language of educational reform is always interesting. It consistently paints a picture that what is going in schools now needs fixing, is outmoded, inefficient or simply ‘bad’. Reforms will fix it. They will make things ‘better’” (p. 244). The language of reform creates a binary of which the only two options to bettering education are going on with the present system of schooling despite its failings or allowing for what has always made America the great nation it is – innovation and entrepreneurship.

The latter is what has arguably made school privatization seem like such a fantastic idea to school administrators, business women and men, and policy makers. It has been framed in a way that aligns public education, a key pillar of American democracy, with the success or failure of the U.S. as a global economic player. School privatization is linked with creating a strong economic environment through entrepreneurship, profit<sup>2</sup>, and consumerism (Wells, et.al, 2002; Giroux, 2003; Fitzimmons, 2006; Manteaw, 2008 Saltman, 2000). The success or failure of the U.S. as a global economic player is critical not necessarily to the democratic principles of freedom

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<sup>2</sup> Giroux (2003) states, “What is good for Disney and Microsoft is now the protocol for how global capitalism defines schooling, learning, and the goals of education, especially as it is imposed through the dictates of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank abroad, and corporate power at home. Schools are no longer considered a public good but a private good and the only form of citizenship increasingly being offered to young people is consumerism” (p. 7).

and equality, but to those who have the largest claim to power and wealth in the global economy and the state as a mechanism to maintain and increase those claims.

School privatization is not a lone ‘reform’ that can be separated out from other changes and developments in and the struggles over the education system but is interrelated with other effects and ideologies that erupt from the linkage of public education to U.S. success in the global economy. Public schools in many ways have become hierarchized through high stakes testing, and other reforms that emphasize choice. I choose to highlight the linkages between democracy and school privatization because it has played a major role in these interrelated changes to education, and is the most blatant and far-reaching transfer of control from public management and (ideally) accountability to private ownership, deregulation, de-unionization of workers, and private accountability to those with more resources and capital (Apple, 2008; Giroux, 2001; Lacireno-Paquet and Holyoke. 2007; Lipman, 2004, Lipman, 2008).

This literature review complicates the notion of ‘market democracy’ and the use of neoliberalism in justifications for but also against charter school proliferation. In like mind with Kingfisher and Maskovsky (2008), I seek to move the analysis of neoliberalism within the context of school privatization beyond what the author’s identify as a structure/agency binary. They state that thinking about neoliberalism as “a unitary external structural force – conceived either as a set of economic policies or discourses – that bears down on states, civil society institutions, populations, whose agency is conceived of narrowly as either accommodation or resistance” is dangerous because it sets up neoliberalism as all-encompassing while possibly ignoring “it’s contradictions, fractures, partialities, contingencies, and both dialectics and determinations by other

social forces” (p. 119). Breaking down this binary aids in theorizing the relationship between democracy and public education in two major ways: In the way it is utilized or conceived of within charter school logic in Chicago or how it used to construct the political environment of democracy in the context of creating education institutions; and, secondly, in the way that it is utilized to shape parents, teachers, students, community members, and other roles within education, or how it constructs the democratic political subject.

*Democracy – A Double Discourse*

Schools are often thought of as a site in which political subjects are formed into the American democratic citizen (Elwood and Mitchell, 2010). Within the dominant discourse, students are not necessarily seen as political but as practicing the political. Schools are set up as citizen incubators, molding knowledgeable, caring members of local communities and the larger community of the state who will work towards bettering society. Barack Obama, in a 2008 speech in Flint, Michigan, stated:

These past eight years will be remembered for misguided policies and missed opportunities. We still have no real strategy to compete in a global economy. Just think of what we could have done. We could have made a real commitment to a world-class education for our kids, but instead we passed “No Child Left Behind,” a law that--however well-intended--left the money behind and alienated teachers and principals instead of inspiring them (p. 246-7).

The role of schools, according to the dominant discourse, is to form the student as neoliberal political subject, and the goal of democracy is aligned with increasing the United States’ ability to compete in the global market (Torres, 2002). On the other side,

the political subject is made into an economic subject defined by upward economic mobility, justifying the economic subject's stake in the state's success in the global economy. There is a narrative at work in the framing of schooling as a savior to the U.S. as economic player that has an impact on the goals and purpose of democracy.

Rancière (2006) describes the varied uses of democracy as a double discourse in which, "Democratic government, it says, is bad when it is allowed to be corrupted by democratic society, which wants for everyone to be equal and for all differences to be respected" (p. 4). He states, "It is good, on the other hand, when it rallies individuals enfeebled by democratic society to the vitality of war in order to defend the values of civilization, the values pertaining to the clash of civilizations" (p. 4). Schools in the U.S. are understood as a space in which democratic individualism is, "tempered to an extent by an appreciation for relational coexistence; that is, individual freedoms are equally dispensed by the state in return for contributions to a stable social milieu" (Rhoads and Calderone, 2007, p. 105). A binary exists between a democracy in which there is orderly governance of the people by the people and a democracy that can be threatened by the disorderliness of a democratic society, in which participation is not limited to elected or appointed officials.

Rancière (2006) continues his argument of the paradoxical nature of democracy's dominant usage. Freedom, a trait of democracy, contains within it possibilities of dissention, chaos, and disorder. He states in reference to the Iraq war:

[I]t is because democracy is not the idyll of the government of the people by the people, but the disorder of passions eager for satisfaction, that it can, and even must, be introduced from the outside by the armed might of a superpower,

meaning not only a State disposing of disproportionate military power, but more generally the power to master democratic order (p. 6).

Freedom contains within it the possibility and likelihood of disorder. To be free is to be able to dissent. The use of state military force in order to maintain the order of democracy granted to a freshly “liberated” Iraq is paradoxical to the democratic principle of freedom.

Democratic society contains within it an intensity and vitality that has been constituted in two distinct forms, one in which there is widespread participation in public affairs, and the other in which democratic life is the freedom to fulfill individual satisfactions. “Hence, good democracy must be that form of government and social life capable of controlling the double excess of collective activity and individual withdrawal inherent to democratic life (Rancière, 2006, p. 8). Democracy is disorderly and evil, but at the same time, is also the cure of evil, whether in the form of the more subtle repressions of state apparatuses or outright military force.

The order of the democratic nation-state is plagued by the very qualities which make its governance democratic, freedom and equality – terms which also partake in double discourses. Democratic freedom is often pushed upon capital in order to defend and justify a pure, free market economy. Doreen Massey (1999) illustrates the ways in which the neoliberal version of globalization confers the freedom of capital with democratic freedom, while also manipulating what she terms, as a geographer, space and place. She calls it a double imaginary in which members of the global north incur a “self-evident right to global mobility” in the form of free trade. Referring to right-wing proponents of free trade, she states, “The term ‘free’ immediately implies something good, something to be aimed at. Yet, come a debate on immigration, and they

immediately have recourse to another geographic imagination altogether. It is a vision of the world which is equally powerful, equally – apparently – incontrovertible” (p. 38). The second imagination is the notion that there are defensible places in which local people have a right to their local places, or nationalism. She powerfully states:

In one breath such spokespeople [for free trade] assume that ‘free trade’ is akin to some moral virtue, and in the next they pour out venom against asylum-seekers (generally assumed to be bogus) and ‘economic migrants (‘economics’, it seems, is not a good enough reason to want to migrate – *what* was that they were saying about capital?!) (p. 39).

At one point, neoliberal ideology allows freedom to capital, but constructs a threat to American democratic society to use as an excuse to deny the freedom of individuals. Freedom of the flow of capital is acceptable and desirable, but not the freedom of the flow of people and labor. It is one method of maintaining democratic order through governance, in which ideals of freedom and equality are used in ways that support global neoliberal capitalism and maintain certain interests over others – interests whose maintenance or achievement would be threatened by the disorder of mass public participation in common affairs like the economy.

Democracy is a powerful conceptual tool that has been wielded against progressive and radical change by the state and its institutions. The formal democratic state, according to Marx, is constituted by the “appearances under which, and instruments by which, the power of the bourgeois class is exercised” (Rancière, 2006, p.3). Rancière (2006) differentiates between formal democracy and ‘real’ democracy in which “liberty and equality would no longer be represented in the institutions of law and State but

embodied in the very forms of concrete life and sensible experience” (p. 3). Rosanvallon (1995) demonstrates that democracy, as concept in current political discourse, is relatively new. It has been only since the 1830s that the term transformed from referring to archaic political regimes to characterize political regimes of the present. The ways in which democracy and its variations have changed over time have been characterized by particular political moments and strategies. However, Rancière (2006) advocates a definition of democracy which would make clear the political motivations and interests behind the variations by separating and falsifying democracy as a form of government or society and embracing the vitality and intensity of democratic life. A more real democratic life is one filled with dissent, the challenging of authority, and the constant struggle for happiness and joy in private lives and in social bonds and relations. This intensity has often become subject to control through its labeling as crisis. Rancière (2006) states that the responsibility of the democratic state has been to control this crisis, or democracy’s “reign of excess” (p. 8).

Public education, controlled, managed, and funded ultimately by the state, is a site for the formation of the American democratic citizen, and the political subject. However, the ‘political’ subject is developed under the auspices of a universalizing membership to the state in which a disruption to the stability of society (read the maintenance of bourgeois class power) is un-democratic. Balibar (1994) discusses the identification of equality as the same as freedom in the development of the new French state following the revolution. He proposes the following hypotheses regarding “the ideological tensions of modern politics as restructured by the revolutionary proposition” (p. 50). Within these

hypotheses, he attempts to discover the contradictions within the universalization of citizenship.

1. The equation of freedom and equality is indispensable to the modern “subjective” recasting of right, but is powerless to guarantee its institutional stability. A *mediation* is required, but it takes the antithetical forms of “fraternity” (or community) and “property.”
2. Each of these mediations is in turn the object of a conflict, and is practically divided, the former into national community and popular community, the latter into labor-property and capital-property: the combination of these two oppositions is the most general ideological form of the “class struggle.”
3. Each of these mediations, as well as their conflictual expressions, *represses* another kind of “contradiction”: in the case of fraternity/community, sexual difference, in that of property (labor or capital), the division of “intellectual” knowledge and “corporal” activity. As a consequence there are *two* entirely heterogeneous kinds of “contradictions,” which not only do not allow themselves to be reduced to unity, but which in a certain way have to give rise to incompatible but rigorously inseparable discourses – at least for as long as the discursive matrix of political action continues to be founded on the concept of man the citizen from which we began (pp. 50 – 51).

Man equals citizen based on the identification of freedom being the same or equal to equality, or “the affirmation of a potentially universal right to politics” (p. 51). But he critically inquires as to what sort of politics every man is awarded or can claim a right: An insurrectional politics, “a politics of permanent, uninterrupted revolution”, or a

constitutional politics, “a politics of the state as institutional order” (p. 51). The separation of these types of politics brings about a complexity to the notion of using the institution of public education as a means to engage young people in a ‘real’ democratic politics.

Freedom and equality’s versatility of use in democratic governance to maintain the order of United States society can also be noted within the drastic reorientation of standards-based education. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, more commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), introduced and promoted strict standards-based schooling, high stakes testing, and connected “strong accountability measures [with] a (largely uncritical) faith in marketization” (Apple 2001, p. 112). Apple (2001), while critiquing two authors’ books which favored and promoted the logic of NCLB, stated the books were technically sound but argued, “Yet this is coupled with a less-than-satisfactory political sensibility about the complexities and social and cultural effects of the thin democracy and thin morality associated with markets and privatization” (p. 112). The thin democracy Apple refers to occurs out of a relationship between the state’s regulation of democratic disorder and the neoliberal infusion of economic rationale into the term ‘democracy’.

On the one hand, the ‘state’ cannot necessarily be described empirically or as having a clear, enduring, and pervasive agenda. Derrida (1994) calls the contradictions between the state’s desire to be a successful global competitor and the state’s desire to maintain “its ‘social advantages’” a double interpretation, or “the concurrent readings [the euphoria of liberal-democratic capitalism] seems to call for and oblige us to associate” (p. 100-103). The interests of the state as a global competitor (e.g. cheap labor)

are at odds with the interests of the state as protector of society (e.g. living wage).

Moreover, discussing 'the state' as an homogenous force with homogenous motivations for the regulation and control of society disregards its complex and extensive connections with the national narrative and the people whom it regulates, allows or is subsumed by its power, and form its subjects.

It can be argued that school privatization and de-democratization is more a result of the growing organization and power of corporations and private, centralized, and consolidated ownership over the means of production or class struggle. As such, privatization and de-democratization of formerly public schools is a result of the reduced need and willingness of the state to mediate the power of the people via state governance structures because of the economic restructuring that has reduced the people's power and organization. However, framing it in this way limits understandings of the state's role in the very economic restructuring that weakened its power to improve the overall welfare of its people. The reduced need and willingness of the state to mediate the social and economic welfare of its people is a result of its appropriation by the dominant class. The state is used as a mechanism to maintain the dominant class' interests in the global market. Derrida (1994) states, the state and interconnected mechanisms such as the aggravation of foreign debt:

are starving or driving to despair a large portion of humanity. They tend thus to exclude it simultaneously from the very market that this logic nevertheless seeks to extend. This type of contradiction works through many geopolitical fluctuations even when they appear to be dictated by the discourse of democratization or human rights (p. 102).

The farce of democratic (oligarchic, according to Rancière) governance is used to justify the actions of the state in the interests of the dominant class while passing its actions as taken in the interests of its democratic people. The increased power and organization of corporations and private, centralized, and consolidated ownership over the means of production is a direct result of their appropriation of the state and its apparatuses.

Pease (1997), in describing the postcolonial recharacterization of nationalism, identifies nationalism as fiction created by the state ideology to form a justification for the existence of the state. "A horizon of narrative expectations emanating from a national origin and organized by a national purpose" is an ideological mystification of the state (p. 4). Pease (1997) states,

Narrativizing a relationship between a "people" and a civi-territorial complex thereafter construed as "natural," national narratives effected imaginary relations between national peoples and the states that secured them to their apparatuses. The conjunction of "nationness" with narrativity activated a two-tiered process dividing the manifest organization of the state apparatus (wherein the Reason of State was Sovereign) from the latent fantasy (wherein state subjects imagined themselves granting this power to the state) (p. 4).

The state does not have a clear, enduring, and pervasive agenda in and of itself that is enacted upon its subjects. However, a complex and almost circular relationship exists in which the narrative of nationalism is formed collectively by the people, legitimizing and naturalizing the state and its actions through a totalizing narrative of national belonging and community. The state is not separate from nor does it act upon the people, but is

enacted through and by the individual psyches of the collectively experienced nationess of the people.

An important site for the introduction and subsumption of the people into this totalizing narrative of national membership is the public school. In a study of 13 years worth of teaching and academic texts in three states, Abowitz and Harnish (2006) completed a discourse analysis of texts within education, social studies education, philosophy, and political theory in which citizenship or citizenship education was the central topic. The authors found to be pervasive a “pallid, overly cleansed, and narrow view of political life in Western democracies promoted by the dominant discourses of citizenship in K–12 schooling” (p. 654). School serves, in large part, to legitimize the authority of the state and justify its autonomy as it governs the ungovernable democratic society. Compulsory schooling is “an extended initiation rite that symbolically transforms unformed children into enhanced individuals authorized to participate in the modern economy, polity, and society, and it does so by definition” (Boli and Ramirez, 1992, p. 30). The way in which the system of state-sponsored schooling is constructed initiates young people into a limited form of democracy authorized by and in the interests of the state.

The privatization of public schooling indicates a tension with the changing circumstances affecting the role and the construction of the state’s power. Torres (2002) complicates the relationship of schooling and the state in the context of globalization. He states that globalization has contributed to a changing role of the nation-state as it works to defend and maintain its autonomy amid the forces of world economies (p. 373). Privatization of education has become part of what Torres (2002) describes as, “new

institutionalism and organizational rules that are the result of the consolidation of a new world order—with education playing a central role—in the world system (p. 371). In other words, privatization of education is an important component of the state's struggle for legitimacy and sustenance from a narrative of national membership despite the de-territorializing nature of globalization as it relates to the world economy. The state, with its multiply-sourced motivations, purports a democracy that supports its struggle to impose itself as a powerful global economic actor. Democracy is used as a tool in a double discourse to align the autonomy of individuals with the autonomy of the state. A narrative of national membership and the delimitation of democracy as citizenship is an important component to the stability of this discourse.

While schools are initiation sites for national membership, democracy and the construction of democratic political subjects are not created or corralled by the state. Elwood and Mitchell (2010), in their work examining the role that interactive geovisualization technologies might play in fostering collaborative learning, critical thinking and civic engagement among young teens, challenge the notion that the formation of democratic political subjects occurs only within the public space of schools. They find that students' struggles over self – who they are and how they are – works in the everyday spaces and interactions of their lives. Students are political subjects and moments of political formation occur within and through everyday experiences and negotiations – not only through civic education or citizenship training. However, the formation of young people as democratic and political subjects external to schooling is not legitimated by dominant discourses in education. The state utilizes schooling in order to perpetuate itself and its sovereignty, and those young democratic subjects formed

alternative to schooling and citizenship training are not authorized by the state because of the potentiality for disorder.

State-sponsored schooling does not democratize political subjects nor can it claim a “living past or ... a living future”. Derrida (1994) states that democracy is, “always still to come and is distinguished from every living presence understood as plenitude of a presence-to-itself, as totality of a presence effectively identical to itself” (p. 123). Schools are state institutions that attempt to form democratic citizens that would veer away from radical or progressive disturbances to the stability of the status quo and to the stability of the state’s power and authority. However, democratic life occurs within, through, and external to schooling because it is part of everyday life and interactions. Democracy as lived experience does not maintain a society or a form of government, but provides the conditions for which to create a common, collectively-lived world. Democracy holds within it the possibility to form this free common world through sets of egalitarian relations. However, democracy is precarious, and because unequal power relations are ever-present, democracy is always in danger of being replaced by a version of itself. If anything, democracy continuously destabilizes forms of both government and society. State sponsored schooling in and of itself does not participate in the formation of democracy itself. Democracy occurs within and outside and in moments of action. The issue is not if or how schooling contributes to a more democratic society, but how the interests of the state, which are utterly connected to its success in the global economy, frames democracy as something unrecognizable to itself.

School privatization utilizes the language and concepts of democracy within and in relation to the creation and actions of education. Charter schools are freer from public

oversight than traditional schools. They constitute a major change in the concept of education – education as a market, and have catalyzed a host of new education interest groups, especially the business community and conservative interests (Lacireno-Paquet and Holyoke, 2007, p. 189). Charter schools compete for students, have the freedom to alter their pedagogical and organizational structures in order to compete with other schools, and can be forced to close if they prove unsuccessful in either the competition for students or performance and achievement. Within the context of charter school proliferation, freedom and equality are infused in the debate in particular ways. Proponents of charter school proliferation utilize the concepts of freedom to describe parental choice, deregulation, and decreased accountability to the state. The concept of equality is often vaguely tossed around, but it is inscribed in the logic of charter schools through the freedom that parents now have allowing them send their children to whatever school they deem best, or equal opportunity.

By framing freedom and equality in terms of school choice and supposed equal opportunity, neoliberalism subverts the term democracy in such a way as to frame out the underpinning interests, motivations, and consequences behind charter school proliferation. Traditional education is framed as a failure and harmful to society (Lacireno-Paquet and Holyoke, 2007, p. 189). This framing is legitimized by the failure of traditional education to embody and promote freedom and equality in relation to racial justice via the No Child Left Behind Act. The lack of freedom and equality are utilized to delegitimize traditional public education and to promote the freedom to private ownership, entrepreneurialism, competition, and capital. All who oppose charter school proliferation either do not promote (market) democracy or naively wish to continue a

failing system. Harvey eloquently notes the power of neoliberal thought in promoting a subversive discourse of democracy: “The founding figures of neoliberal thought took political ideals of individual liberty and freedom as sacrosanct, as ‘the central values of civilization’, and in doing so they chose wisely and well, for these are indeed compelling and great attractors as concepts” (Harvey, 2006, 146).

A contradiction in meaning is taking place within the greater discourse on charter school proliferation. On the one hand, schooling is framed as being “democratized” as it is becoming privatized and marketized, and freedom and equality abound as in the “free” market. On the other hand, schooling is sinking away from the control of the public, and, more and more, business and others with enough capital to become education entrepreneurs will emphasize “certain knowledge forms at the expense of others” (Manteaw, 2008, 120). Control of schooling is increasingly becoming concentrated into the hands of a few, who then provide services among which consumers have the freedom to choose. Freedom, in this case, is the relative reciprocity among those who have the capital and ability to control and be a player in the education market, and equality is “a function and a right of this status” (Balibar, 1994, p. 46). Meanwhile, all the rest who must consume education services in order to survive and work can, as citizens and members of the state, either be placated by a market version of democracy or struggle within and externally to the system against this logic that, according to Harvey (2006), “has become incorporated into the common sense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world” (p. 145).

Charter schools are dramatically altering the ways in which education has traditionally been carried out (Lacireno-Paquet and Holyoke, 2007). This dramatic

change is part of a theory of political economic practices that is “the first instance of a theory ... which proposes human well-being can be best advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2006, p. 145). The state’s role is to create the education market, as is currently underway with the awarding of more and more charter school contracts. After this is done, the state’s role is to secure property rights, individual liberty, “free” markets, and “free” trade through its strengthened military, but to otherwise remain peripheral to the markets. The state is transitioning to a smaller role in the creation and administration of schooling, and the disorder of democratic society is controlled by its access to capital, and the extent to which members of society through schooling are initiated and legitimated by the state as participants in the democracy of the state.

The problem that schooling does not create nor maintain a more ‘real’ democracy, which exists in moments, actions, and struggles, is part of a serious issue inherent to democracy as an idea. Democracy is innately susceptible to slippages. Derrida (2002) states that “the great question of modern parliamentary and representative democracy, perhaps of all democracy . . . is that the *alternative to democracy* can always be *represented as a democratic alternation*” (p. 30-31). These slippages are a part of the tidal wave of neoliberalism that has swept over the world, but they are not uncontested nor are they stable or totalizing. The following quote illustrates the paradox within the inevitability of democracy’s slippage into its alternative: Dewey (1993) states, “Since a democratic society repudiates the principal of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education” (p. 110).

School privatization attempts to create a voluntary disposition and interest in the success of the state as a global economic power, and frames a successful state only in the terms which maintain the interests of the state's dominant class. However, democratic society, through real acts of democracy as lived experience, also challenges this power as democratic civilization inevitably destabilizes governance and authority by demanding more freedom and resisting authority.

Far from proposing a utopic version of radical democratic schooling as an opponent of the inundation of democracy and education with neoliberal ideology, the following analysis attempts to breakdown and fracture the alternative to democracy representing itself as a democratic alternation. The slippages of democracy within the recent push for school privatization in Chicago occur within and throughout a public discourse taking place in multiple spaces, publics, and among many separate but intertwined groups of people. The partiality of neoliberal ideology exists through the multiplicity of publics and counterpublics through which democracy is enacted (Fraser, 1997; Brown, 2006; Wells, et. al, 2002).

The public sphere cannot be simply described as anything that is outside the household or family. The public sphere is utilized to describe “the state, the official-economy of paid employment, and arenas of public discourse” (Fraser, 1997, p. 70). Failure to differentiate usages of the concept of the public sphere, a vague and amorphous space:

has practical political consequences, for example, when agitational campaigns against misogynist cultural representations are confounded with programs for state censorship, or when struggles to deprivatize housework and child care are

equated with their commodification. In both these cases, the result is to occlude the question whether to subject gender issues to the logic of the market or the administrative state is to promote the liberation of women (Fraser, 1997, p. 70). Democracy's enactment entails many consequences, contestations, and struggles for change and/or power within the realm of the public and the political. It is within the identification of the multiply-sourced, incoherent public and political realm that the fractures and contradictions of the neoliberal market democracy driving school privatization can be exposed.

There are many ways in which individuals participate in public life, but the term 'public life' is inherently complex and intertwined with power and hierarchical relationships. Fraser (1997) critiques Habermas' conception of the bourgeois public sphere as the one and only sphere of public life. Instead she argues that "the bourgeois public was never *the* public" (p. 75). She states,

On the contrary, virtually contemporaneous with the bourgeois public there arose a host of competing counterpublics, including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics, black publics, and working-class publics. Thus, there were competing publics from the start, not just from the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Habermas implies" (p. 75).

Fraser gives the example of the way in which the black church became a public arena for African-Americans who were not allowed to participate in the dominant, white public sphere. She states they created and dissemination national media and held national events to emphasize the success African-Americans had in developing a counterpublic.

Arendt (1958) also insists on a break with the assumption that “a society must be conceived of as one single subject” (p. 47). She further states the push to lump together the whole of the public: “society always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest” (p. 39). Counterpublic spheres present a striking alternative to the neoliberal individualist narrative that singularizes individuals and their relationships while, at the same time, lumps together all needs and desires of consumer individuals. The neoliberal discourse shaping school privatization is not totalizing but it does quiet and subjugate counterpublic discourses (such as the critical academic discourse on radical democratic education) that counter and challenge the transformation of public schooling. For example, President Barack Obama does not cite critical education scholars like Michael Apple, Paulo Freire, or Henry Giroux to legitimize his plans for the proliferation of charter schools but Bill and Melinda Gates and other prominent business and philanthropic people.

The following discourse analysis utilizes a variety of texts in an attempt to expose the double discourse of democracy, address the contradictions inherent among democracy and its slippages into a marketized version of itself, and locate the fractures, partialities and contradictions within a specific context in order to problematize what some describe as the totalizing and hegemonic nature of neoliberal ideology within schooling.

### **Conceptual Framework and Methodology**

The following will attempt to make clear the slippages of the language and meaning of democracy and democratic principles as they are used within the context of the recent push for school privatization in Chicago. The following discourse analysis will produce a complication of the relationship between the proliferation of privately managed

schools in Chicago's public school system and the ways in which rhetoric and notions of democracy, citizenship, and the public sphere have been utilized in response to this proliferation. For a framework of analysis I draw on Rancière's (2006) theorization's on the tensions between 'real' democracy as the lived experience and actions of society in the struggle for equality and freedom, and a formal democracy of the state that wishes to control the excesses of individualism and mass public participation of members of society. Rancière does not fundamentalize a true democracy as a form of life or organization but contextualizes understandings and utilizations of democracy within socio-historic periods of political and intellectual thought.

This contextualization of democracy within school privatization efforts in Chicago is useful as public education is considered by many as a site that (re)produces our democratic future as a society. Understanding and parsing out the framing and slippages of democracy has major implications for not only students' (future) democratic subjectivity and as the future upholders of democratic society, but also for parents' democratic subjectivity as choosers, as well as teachers as workers and administrators as managers. As schooling is a site for society's initiation into democratic and public life, and often characterized as a site for the possibility to promote more radical democratic practices, it is important to center it in order to reclaim the definition of democracy and denounce its variations

I utilize the methodological framework of a discourse analysis in order to target a particular discursive formation within Chicago's dominant discourse on education.

According to Rose (2007), discursive formations "consist of the relations between parts of a discourse", and occur whenever "one can define a regularity (an order, correlations,

positions and functionings, transformations)” (p. 143). Rose defines discourse in a Foucauldian sense, in that discourse is a form of power. For Foucault, discourse is powerful because it “disciplines subjects into certain ways of thinking and acting, but this is not simply repressive; it does not impose rules for thought and behaviour on a pre-existing human agent” (p. 143). Gill (1996) states, “all discourse is organized to make itself persuasive” (143). Discourse analysis focuses on those strategies of persuasion (Rose, 2007, 147). I utilize a discourse analysis to discover how the rhetoric of democracy works to persuade or “produce effects of truth” that transform the meaning and understanding of democracy within the discourse surrounding school privatization.

Using the city of Chicago and its many communities and public spheres, I collected data from scholarly education studies related to democratic citizenship, citywide and community newspapers, public government and community meeting records, web sites and other internet information from organizations, government, educational institutions, and associations. I developed key themes identifying and relating the discursive formation which shapes the ways in which democracy is understood in the context of school privatization. This research is limited by the sheer size, depth, and interrelatedness of discourses, issues, and networks of people in the city. It is also limited, due to the nature of a document analysis, by the lack of personal forms of data collection, such as interviews. Because I have limited my research to documents, I did not include the participation of some of the more intimate aspects of Chicago communities which participate in and impact this discursive formation.

Documents fulfill dual roles in research, according to Prior (2008). They are “receptacles of content”, and also are “active agents in networks of action” (p. 822). Prior

(2008) states, “documents should not merely be regarded as containers for words, images, information, instructions, and so forth, but they can influence episodes of social interaction, and schemes of social organization, and they [should] enter into the analysis of such interactions and organization” (p. 822). The documents I use are a partial but substantial source of insight on the relationship between the conceived purpose of public schools’ role in the dynamics of democracy and the struggle over the meaning of the very word ‘democracy’.

The theoretical framework through which I contextualize and draw meaning from the discourse emphasizes Rancière’s (2006) framing of the double discourse in which the state fears and loathes democratic civilization because it is a threat to the state’s survival and authority. As such, the oligarchic system of representational government becomes, through discourse, interchangeable with and the foundation of democracy. Beginning with the so-called triumph of democracy over totalitarianism with the fall of the Soviet Empire, Rancière (2006) states this was, for a time, considered a victory of “individual liberty over State oppression” (p. 16). Totalitarianism is an external threat to democracy while, internally, the excesses of individual particularity and consumerism are a threat. After the fall of the Soviet Empire and the weakening of emancipation movements in the West, a Marxist criticism of the rights of man became useful in understanding the anti-democratic sentiments of the Western elites, that “human rights are the rights of egotistical individuals in bourgeois society” (p. 17). He argues that these egotistical individuals of bourgeois society can be interchanged with “greedy consumer” and are a “socio-historic species called today’s democratic man” (p. 17). He argues in this framing

of democracy that egalitarian relations have become the relations of client and service provider, and the only equality is commercial equality.

My conceptual framework draws on this interchangeability between ‘greedy consumer’ and ‘democratic man’ to identify the ways in which democracy is first reduced to:

a form of society, [second] to make this form of society identical to the reign of the egalitarian individual by grouping under the latter all sorts of disparate properties, everything from mass consumption to the claims of special minority rights, not to forget union battles, and finally, to charge ‘mass individualist society’, henceforth identical to democracy, with pursuing the limitless growth inherent to the logic of capital (Rancière, 2006, p. 20).

School privatization is inextricably linked to this particular logic of democracy, or the ‘mass individualist society’ of which parents are to choose among often specialized and hierarchized, privately managed public schools.

The proliferation of privately managed public schools, and the neoliberal ideologies fueling the phenomenon which seek to deregulate, break down bureaucracy, de-unionize, and marketize public education confuses and interchanges the democratic people with the consumer. This is done in such a way as to legitimize a narrative of democracy that aligns with the dominant and encompassing narrative of capitalism, maintaining the power of those who have and accumulate capital, bourgeois society. Rancière (2006) states that those who dream of restoring a government of elites “obey the logic of consensual order: the logic that makes the signifier democracy into an indistinct

notion lumping together into a single whole a type of state order and a form of social life, a set of ways of being and a system of social values” (p. 92).

Rancière’s theorization is critical to an understanding of democracy within the context of charter school proliferation and public education. The privatization of public schooling is exemplar of the fight over the delimitations of the public and private spheres. He states, “The democratic process is the process of a perpetual bringing into play, of invention of forms of subjectivization, and of cases of verification that counteract the perpetual privatization of public life” (p. 62). The framework of analysis is based in a desire to expose contradictions and lay bare that public education is a site in which the struggle over the meaning and usage of a founding principle of our organization and interaction as members of a state and citizens of a nation, that of democracy. Rancière (2006) states, “To understand what is at stake in the work: not simply the tones of anger and scorn with which it can be imbued but, more profoundly the slippages and reversals of meaning that it authorizes, or that one authorizes oneself to make with regard to it” (p. 93).

As Rancière attempts, I seek to use the context of the school privatization efforts in Chicago to determine how the signifier democracy is utilized, and how this signifier constructs and delimits the political environment of democracy in the context of creating education institutions, and how it constructs and delimits the democratic political subject. School privatization and the related insurgence of the power of parent-consumers as democratic subjects to choose which school to send their children are set up as remedies to the past failings of public schools and they have material motivations and consequences.

As neoliberalism is not an all-encompassing structural force but fragmented and contradictory, with partialities and contingencies, neither is the slippage of democracy into a neoliberal free market framework an external, all-encompassing force. In my analysis of the discourse surrounding the push for school privatization, I identify themes which make apparent the slippages of democratic principles of equality and freedom. The themes will identify how democracy has been recuperated covertly into the rights of the bourgeois by anchoring them in an actual city of people, relationships, decisions, actions, and motivations. The analysis problematizes the logic of market democracy within public education, and makes apparent the struggle over the meaning of word democracy within an institutional system that has been put in place to uphold and maintain its very existence in the state and society.

The framework of this paper also builds upon Lipman (2008), Saltman (2007), and others to make apparent the contradictions within and between the realities and the rhetoric of democracy, citizenship, and the public sphere within the context of the privatization of schooling in Chicago. This work contributes to a larger struggle for the reappropriation of education from the perpetuation of the state's authority to the democratic daily lives of everyone. Education can no longer be viewed as a neutral space in which students are democratized as citizen-subjects. The system of education is not a coherent, bounded whole easily fixed by higher test score standards or the newest, most innovative curriculum. Weis and Fine (2004) make an important comment on the role research should serve to expose how social and political groups are not formed and shaped in a vacuum absent of larger social influences:

The key point here is that social theory and analyses can no longer afford to isolate a group, or represent their stories as transparent, as though that group were coherent and bounded; instead we must theorize explicitly, that is, connect the dots, to render visible relations to their groups and to larger sociopolitical formations (p. xvii).

Education has been a seriously contested area in our changing, globalizing world, and one cannot ignore its importance in the formations of social, political, and economic environments. The system of education has been a site for the recuperation of democracy into a marketized version of itself, and as such, has been inserted nicely into the capitalist narrative of how and for what we should all be doing with our lives. It is also a site of possibility and struggle for the reappropriation of democracy to a narrative that challenges the privatization of public spaces and interactions, and the very nature of what society considers the political.

Fraser (1989) argues that academic knowledge production is intensely political and should be connected to emancipatory social transformation. While introducing her critique of Foucault's focus on "power/knowledge" in *Unruly Practices*, she reflects on how she developed from her activist political past into a radical academic by "discerning a voice and a stance that exemplified an alternative intellectual practice" (p. 3). At the time the book was published, she used her academic position to intervene in "various political- and social-theoretical debates of the 1980s" (p. 2), and emphasizes the importance for academics to "perform the difficult but not impossible trick of straddling the ground between a scholarly profession and a social movement" (p. 3). She concludes that academics must utilize "whatever cultural or public spheres we have access to" (p.

11). While I intend to utilize whatever public spheres I have access to, I also understand that academic work, even if it is not considered mainstream or legitimate, is laden with power dynamics.

Academia in urban communities such as Chicago is a dominant public arena and has inherent limitations in the struggle for social transformation. My analysis of the factors and variables that influence the formation of citizens through education is tempered and also made possible by the access and privilege I have had in society. As a middle-class, white female, I have accumulated social, cultural, and economic capital through my class and racial status. The framework of my research is founded on the notion of the radical academic, but also to the understanding that real work must take place to build communities and, thus, build stronger counterpublic spaces, the conditions for democratic action and subjectivization.

### **Findings**

The following analysis uncovers four major ways in which the discourse surrounding the push for school privatization in Chicago is able to slip into a neoliberal, marketized version of itself. First, Chicago's government and business elite have slated Chicago to become a global city attractive to global business, and the transformation of education is an important aspect to this agenda (Sassen 1996; Lipman 2008; Demissie 2006). School privatization discourse utilizes the language of freedom to align charter school proliferation with the democratization of Chicago's schools, with increased entrepreneurial freedom, including curricular and other school management freedoms, and freedom from bureaucracy. Chicago's dominant class, working to maintain the city's survival as well as the state's, draws upon universalizing notions of city and state

membership in order to transform Chicago in ways that will ensure the city's global economic success.

Second, on an individual level, democratic action is conferred with choice. Democratic individual actors are consumers who have the power to influence change through which schools they choose or choose not to send their children. Thirdly, on the macro or collective level, democratic action is conferred with policy change. This policy change has come from a group of Chicago's government and business elite, as well as, the impact from the recent advent of venture philanthropy and business intervention in education. School privatization through charter school proliferation is regarded by the venture philanthropy community as the final and only good idea that can save public education from complete failure (Scott 2007).

Fourth, those who disrupt the order of democratic governance are anti-democratic, specifically, teachers unions. Teachers are attacked at many different angles as a threat to democracy. They are depicted as greedy individuals who would look out for their own particular well-being before that of the city and others. Charter schools have been decidedly anti-union, have been able to hire a percentage of teachers without traditional teaching credentials, and school administrators have been given widespread authority to fire teachers as part of a turnaround strategy.

The following will explore these four themes in greater depth. These themes are not all encompassing of the discursive formation within the push for school privatization in Chicago that transforms democracy through neoliberal ideology. However, they are significant to the illustration of the double discourse on democracy, and provide a point from which to begin to create a common sense understanding of democracy as a more

egalitarian way of living and being with one another that cannot be subsumed into the logic of markets and capital.

*The Global City Agenda and Democracy as Entrepreneurial and Managerial Freedom*

The city, according to Koval (2006), is in the process of “an ongoing economic transformation” in two characteristic ways (p. 4). “A knowledge-based, computer-driven information technology and service sector is rapidly emerging as the economy’s most dominant force” and “a bifurcated labor force, metaphorically dubbed “the hourglass economy,” is emerging as a result” (p. 4). He goes on to state that “mobility stagnates and placement in the economic hierarchy increasingly becomes linked to the acquisition of educational credentials” (p. 4). Education’s strong tie to the transforming labor economy means that it is highly contested space in which the city’s business and government elite have a serious edge over local control and a large stake in the way young people are educated and credentialed.

An example of a way in which education is molded to reflect the interests of the strong centralized government and business elite is the language used in the overall push toward school privatization. The Wall Street Journal reports Mayor Richard M. Daley stating, “You can’t have a monopoly and think a monopoly works. Slowly it dissolves. And I think that charter schools are good to compete with public schools.’ Nobody says there’s something wrong with public universities facing competition from private ones. ‘I think the more competition we have, the better off we are in Chicago” (Levy, 2009, p. A9). Daley’s use of ‘we’ sets up the public as a coherent whole while ignoring the diverse impacts competition, choice, and ultimately the hierarchization of schooling will have on the city’s spectrum of residents. These statements are a part of larger political

and economic issues surrounding the power-laden struggle over control of the city's future.

In the same Wall Street Journal article, Mayor Daley states that the “goal of education should be global competitiveness” (Levy Feb. 7 2009). For Daley and many others, education is, in large part, tied to the labor economy in which schools serve the purpose of producing laborers to give the city an edge in the global marketplace. Public schooling is a key link in the gentrification processes that have and continue to allow Chicago to become a global cosmopolitan city that will attract business headquarters and urban professionals (Lipman, 2008; Demissie, 2006). In many of Chicago's neighborhoods, industrial jobs were numerous but have left in search of cheaper labor or have shut down.

Globalization is a highly contested term, but many agree that with the onset of new information technologies in the last few decades, localities have been greatly affected by “the speeding up of economic and social processes [that have] experientially shrunk the globe, so that distance and time no longer appear to be major constraints on the organization of human activity” (Inda and Rosaldo 2002, p. 20). Some scholars have come to the conclusion that, in the emergent organizational structure of human activity, major cities will play an important role as central marketplaces for finance and organization of global systems (Sassen 1996, p. 631; Lipman 2008, p. 121; Demissie 2006, p. 20). That cities will play this role is contested, but according to Mayor Daley, those who hold power in Chicago agree on cities' increasingly important role in the global economy. Chicago has seen major changes in its economy since

deindustrialization, and there has been a definite push to increase the city's recognition at the global level.

Jennifer Robinson (2006), in *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*, argues that in discussing urban issues like public education, we should steer clear from reductive analyses that do not address cities as multiplexes of shared spaces. Theorization of urban areas has split between that of the developing cities in the third world and the idealized construction of the global city (Leaf, 2007). Whether this construction is reality is under debate. However the ideal of the global city is a powerful narrative, and one in which the Mayor and many others have internalized. Charter school proliferation is located within a specific set of contested situations, relationships, and circuits of power and capital. The city government and Chicago's business elite are pushing neoliberal free-market ideals in order to push Chicago to become a global city. The struggle over education, and especially school privatization strategies, are directly at the heart of Chicago's global city narrative. In many ways, this narrative, procures a sense of immediacy or crises for which, if the city is to sustain and grow its power in the global economy – to the benefit of its citizens – then strategies and planning must take place to ensure the environment is ripe for global business (whose interests are often antithetical to that of its fellow citizens, i.e. cheap labor).

Chicago has been slated by top city officials for some time to be a competitor at the global level. Almost two decades ago, Mayor Richard M. Daley clearly expressed his desire to see Chicago compete as a global city, recognizing that Chicago's blue collar history in manufacturing is just that, history. Daley stated, during his 1989 mayoral campaign, "The city is changing. You are not going to see factories back...I think you

have to look at the financial market – banking, service industry, the development of O’Hare Field, tourism, trade. This is going to be an international city” (Phillips-Fein 1998, p. 28). Daley’s acknowledgement 20 years ago that Chicago’s economic vitality will depend on its transition to an information and services economy is illustrative of the impact globalization has had and will continue to have on Chicago.

This agenda is framed as necessary to the democratic livelihood of Chicago as a city in the global economy. The alternative is the subordination and exploitation of Chicago to the powers of foreign or other cities’ economic prowess or the abandonment of the city by its people to move to more profitable locales. The vision of Chicago as a great international city necessitates and legitimizes the combination of necessary and incomprehensible economic forces working via global markets. This dynamic is exemplified by the education market, whose mediation of choice and opportunity serves to simultaneously provide the hope of individual success through the disruption and destruction of existing bases of social connection, community, and potential spaces for resistance.

In order to support the global city agenda, community areas, especially those near the central business district (the Loop), are being redeveloped to attract human capital to support the finance and service industries. Lipman (2008) succinctly connects global forces to local community change:

As cities compete directly in the global economy for international investment, tourism, highly skilled labor, and production facilities, including the producer services that drive globalization (Sassen, 2006), marketing cities and specifically

their housing and schools has become a hallmark of urban development.

Downtown luxury living and gentrified neighborhoods, as well as new 'innovative' schools in gentrified communities and choice within the public school system, are located in this inter-city competition (p. 121).

Schools are an integral aspect to this development. Middle- and upper-income families who will be a part of Chicago's new economy will not move to the city without quality educational options for their children.

Greenlee, et al. (2008) in the Data and Democracy Project out of University of Illinois-Chicago, have shown that newly privatized schools being opened can directly be mapped to gentrifying areas. They state that many of these policies are aimed at areas of the city with large minority and low-income populations with the intent to gentrify their communities (p. 1). Understanding the intersection of housing, school reform, and economic renewal is especially important because it most affects Chicago's west- and south-side populations to the greatest degree. Bentancur (2002) identifies gentrification as "a struggle for contending interests vying for control" (p. 780). The struggle ends with displacement. The ones who hold less power socially, economically, and politically are forced from their community and their homes because of rising property tax, rent, and general living costs.

Moberg (2006) states that Chicago must improve education and both basic and advanced job skills in order to "foster supportive cultures among businesses in common industries and professions" (p. 42). He emphasizes education's connection to the health and well-being of the economy, and thus to the health and well-being of the city's residents. Improving educational opportunities and resources to improve the economy is a

common argument (Bennett and Schaefer 2006). Aronowitz (2008) understands these struggles over education as so connected with the workplace, that young people are trained from an early age to quiet dissent or decline from “individual or collective action” (p. 17). Students are practicing to become democratic citizens, and their political subjectivity is supposedly formed based on the notion that each is an equal participant in a whole and coherent democratic society. However, in a global city, the labor economy is bifurcated along a divide in which the majority of jobs for many of Chicago’s residents has become or is becoming low-skill, service oriented positions (Moberg 2006). Only those who serve the global city agenda are afforded democratic participation in the transformation of the city. All others are regarded as anti-democratic and selfish (as is parsed out in a later finding).

Rhoads and Calderone (2007) state that education is carried out in public schools according to a “universalizing notion of formal membership in the state as well as to an a priori belief in the equal distribution of substantive rights to all participating denizens” (p. 105). Actions surrounding the control and management of education, in the context of school privatization and other mechanisms that marketize schooling, are configured on this very same universalizing notion of citizenship or membership. However, notions of citizenship do not go uncontested within and surrounding processes of schooling. They state,

Nowhere is [the process of identity politics undermining the universalizing discourse of liberalism] more poignant than in schools, where so-called “democratic pluralism” is conceived as a utilitarian principle, and where visible and invisible demarcations of difference are constrained and ultimately erased by

the need to maintain a Durkheimian sociability and a limited conception of citizenship (p. 106-6).

Democratic actors within this discursive formation are subjectivized as upholders of social order and survival, weakening the legitimacy of counterpublic disorder that takes place in the dissent against unfair employment opportunities and the displacement that occurs through the concerted urban development strategies working to make Chicago a successful global city.

*The Education Market as a Democratic Space, Parents Democratic Participation as Choice*

For Althusser (1971), education is an ideological arm of the institutional state apparatus (ISA), and explicitly denies a difference between public or private institutions. He understands ISAs as “a force of repressive execution and intervention ‘in the interests of the ruling classes’ in the class struggle conducted by the bourgeoisie and its allies against the proletariat [which] defines its basic function” (p. 11). Democratic government aligns with neoliberalism as a project by and for the ruling class to restore class power through the upward redistribution of wealth (Harvey, 2005). According to Harvey (2006), the state’s role in the neoliberal project is to “create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to [the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms]” (p. 145). If a market did not exist previously, the state’s job is to create one. In the case of education, the No Child Left Behind Act did just that. NCLB placed such standards on schools that failure became a possibility, a crisis to be capitalized on later by the rhetoric of choice and charter schools. Boyd (2007) states that NCLB created the conditions for school privatization by means of the “enormous pressure created by adequate yearly progress

requirements, and the consequences for failure, including school choice and supplemental tutoring options” (p. 11).

Chicago has played its part in utilizing the national education intervention of NCLB to create the conditions for its own intervention and creation of an education market. This intervention, Renaissance 2010, was a plan created by the Commercial Club of Chicago, a group of the city’s business elite, in 2004 that would close 60 low-performing schools and open 100 new schools, two-thirds of which were to be charter or contract schools (contract schools are privately managed public schools very similar to charter schools) (Lipman and Haines, 2007, p. 474). In the Civic Committee report (Civic Committee of the Commercial Club, 2003) and in the school system’s official press releases and public statements, flexibility and innovation are linked to freedom from union contracts and elimination of elected local school councils (LSCs). The mayor and the Commercial Club will contend that Ren2010 will create options and choice, promote innovation, and raise achievement. Lipman and Haines (2007) state that, “they argue it is time to open up the public schools to competition, reduce the power of teachers unions, and create new forms of school governance” (p. 475).

This formation within education discourse confers equal meaning to the freedom of capital to move and accumulate within markets to the freedom of schools to innovate and fail within a school district. The democratic freedom awarded parents and students is that of choice. Freedom to influence school governance, how and what students learn, and to question the reasons why and for what students go to school is only afforded to those with the capital and entrepreneurial capabilities to create and manage schools within the dominant education discourse.

Charter school proliferation, according to CPS, will create “new and innovative schools that will provide high quality educational options to serve the diverse needs of Chicago’s public school students” (Office of New Schools, 2009b). However, the diverse needs of students are decided upon by the education entrepreneurs’ innovations. The people or ‘consumers’ are corralled into democratic-like actions, such as the rally held during the Expo CPS hosts to inform parents of their charter school options. CPS states, “Expo participants will also have a chance to voice their support for school choice by gathering together at noon to hear from advocates for school choice, including CPS CEO Ron Huberman and several school and community leaders” (Office of New Schools, 2010). However, parents are not provided the opportunity by the public schools to question or voice dissent over their changing school environments.

As parents are ‘consumers’, with choice comes individual responsibility. CPS states, “Your Child, Your Choice. Education plays a vital role in preparing your child for success throughout her life. New and charter schools allow you to place your child on the path to achieving all of her dreams and aspirations” (Office of New Schools, 2009a). The rhetoric individualizes the role of schooling as a part of individual success, and limits the focus of possibility for this success to new and charter schools. In an article titled, “How to Choose a Quality Education”, parents are advised to have an idea of how and in what areas they would like to see their children succeed, visit schools to get a sense of the culture and atmosphere, compare statistics, compare afterschool activities and student-teacher ratios, and identify what their child will need to apply (if a selective enrollment school), put his or her name in the lottery of possible attendees, or enroll (Mandou, 2010, p. 13).

Also a part of the theme in which democratic actor is aligned with consumer is the framing of charter schools against the backdrop of failing traditional public schools and the lack of safety and nurturing in urban students' environments. "In the short years that charter schools have been in existence, they have worked tirelessly to create safe and nurturing environments for students and provide students with the resources they need to reach their full potential" (Office of New Schools, 2010). Charter schools are framed as moving out of the mire that was traditional public schooling. Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) identify this individualization of parents as choosers as part of a logic of domination. They state that schools function to "separate issues of politics and democracy from the economic sphere and to displace the notion of conflict from its class-specific social context to the terrain of individual rights and conflict" (p. 89). The discourse on education frames the public through individualized issues, and locates failure outside of the social, political, and economic structures that shape urban environments. Instead of critiquing the failures of these structures, the discourse identifies crisis within the culture of urban schooling itself. Immediate action and action with little oversight is justified through this framing of crisis (Saltman, 2007). Harvey (2006) states, "If conditions among the lower classes deteriorated, this was because they failed, usually for personal and cultural reasons, to enhance their own human capital (through dedication to education, the acquisition of a protestant work ethic, submission to work discipline and flexibility and so on)" (p. 152). Charter schools are identified as saviors to the poor conditions of Chicago's urban school system.

*Venture Philanthropy and Business as the Voice of the Future of Democracy*

The struggle over the meaning of the word democracy is complicated by the recent advent of venture philanthropy in education, or the charitable investment of capital with the expectation for returns in the form of performance, increased numbers of successful charter schools, and more successful charter school models (Scott 2009). Scott (2009) states that, “there appears to be a policy consensus among many of the new philanthropists about the role of school choice— and, within the realm of choice reforms, charter schools—in ameliorating what ails urban schools” (p. 107). Many that participate and shape the education market are foundations and non-profit organizations which leverage capital to conduct and disseminate research and lobby for the increased stability and size of the market. The onus for social and economic transformation of vulnerable urban communities is given to those who have a voice in dominant public arenas – those who have a powerful voice to alter existing city, state, and/or national policies (Lawrence, Sutton, Kubisch, Susi, and Fullbright-Anderson, 2004, p. 39). Democratic action to transform education is viewed as effecting policy change.

In 2006, education received the most philanthropic funding of any other field in all regions of the U.S. except for the western region in which it was a close second to funding for healthcare, according the 2008 Foundation Center Report. Chicago Public Schools was the third highest recipient of donor funds in 2006, with 21.4 million dollars in grants (Foundation Center Report, 2007). The availability of venture philanthropy funding in education is even used as a justification for education budget cuts for some programs (Klonsky, M. and Klonsky, S., 2008, 142). With greater funding and control over education by philanthropists, public accountability decreases.

The over 4 billion dollars donated by philanthropy pales in comparison to the 500 billion dollars or so of taxpayer money used to run public schools across the country (Hess 1). However, most of the taxpayer money goes to the daily operations of the schools and little is left over to fund research and reform projects. Renaissance 2010 was funded in large part by the Commercial Club which raised \$50 million to initiate the plan, as well as the Renaissance Schools Fund, created for the specific purpose of creating high performing charter schools through investing in education entrepreneurs, and many others interested in ‘fixing’ failing urban public school systems. This means research, reform, and change is dominated in large part by venture philanthropy. The Gates Foundation, which donated over \$20 million in recent years, states: “We are funders and shapers – we rely on others to act and implement” (Gates Foundation, 2010). Democratic participation in the creation and control of schooling is afforded to those who have accumulated or pooled enough capital so as to be able to increase and maintain the stability of the education market.

In the current climate of education policy creation, the city’s policy makers, business and charitable leaders, as well as the United States Department of Education, have shaped, in a big way, how Chicago’s public schools operate. With the ongoing support for charter schools and the school choice agenda, the city’s public schools have been increasingly subsumed by neoliberal ideologies in which schools are being made to compete against one another for scarce resources based on the rationale that each will force the other to do better or become more efficient (Apple 2001 , p. 17) The dominant discourse surrounding education in Chicago school politics makes use of corporate

language, including arguments that public schools are inefficient and, therefore, are better off being managed by private organizations.

Fitting with the overall goal for education to serve the success of Chicago as a global city, the Office of New Schools “developed annual goals with the belief that all students should complete school prepared to enter college and the workforce (Office of New Schools, 2009a). Penny Pritzker, a Chicago philanthropist who sits on the board of Chicago Public Education Fund, a fund to promote leadership, business intervention, and charter schools in Chicago, states: “Business has a vested interest in improving our schools. An educated society is the foundation upon which the workforce and successful commerce are built. Business is also keenly aware that leadership must be a top priority for any organization to succeed” (Pritzker, 2010).

Pritzker (2010) also highlights the linkage of schooling to the success of Chicago as a global competitor: “If we are to remain competitive and if our young people are to compete in today's global economy, our schools must become optimal places to learn. Improved leadership is essential” (Pritzker, 2010). Leadership refers to people who are able to exercise the increased power of management positions in education, that of school principal, administrator, and other management positions.

Pritzker states the relevance of the Chicago Public Education Fund: “The Fund was one of the first to identify talent as the critical lever to improving schools, and we are a nationally recognized expert on human capital and school leadership” (Pritzker, 2010). Increasingly, the language of schooling and democracy is subsumed into the rhetoric of business speak, highlighting aspects that are successful to business while neither questioning their impact on the role of schooling to enhance and maintain democracy nor

the ways in which the people realistically benefit from business' vested interest. The interchangeability of human with capital is also worrisome for the prospects of democracy in public education as well as the people's place within the economy in general.

Venture philanthropy, through the 501(c)3 system which rewards wealthy foundations and funds with tax exempt status, is a force that de-democratizes schooling in Chicago and elsewhere. Venture philanthropy works to fund a policy network that "includes individual charter schools, management organizations, charter school real estate development organizations, advocacy groups, alternative leadership and teaching development programs, and research units" (Scott, 2007, p. 108). De-democratization occurs through the exclusionary aspect of school change, and the external and concerted monolithic effort to privatize schooling with little participation from market 'consumers' greatly impacted by the sweeping changes initiated by the policy networks. Through a close relationship to the state, venture philanthropy is part of a neoliberal discourse which recuperates the meaning of democracy in order to increase the gap between classes, concentrating power into the hands of corporations and governing elites (Brown 2006).

#### *Anti-democratic Teachers and Unions*

Teachers have, in large part, shouldered much of the burden in the school privatization discourse. Cooper and Randall (2008) state that,

supporters of privatization [utilize] fearful language, accusing educators of being lazy, socialist, lifetime public employees with few incentives to work harder, do better, or improve. With easy access to job tenure, teachers have a lifetime contract; are presented as sluggards living off the public purse in an overly

bureaucratic, poorly performing system; and have no incentives to improve.

Public education is lost in a bureaucratic 'bog,' according to critics (p. 212).

Teachers have been labeled as the barrier in the way of democratic progress, impinging on the progress through which traditional schooling can be dismantled for a freer, marketized solution.

Teachers unions (or unruly individuals making greedy demands upon the state) have become "anti-democratic" and barriers to the freedom of education entrepreneurs to innovate competitive schools. Mayor Daley states: "It's time for the union to enter 'the real world'. Government has to diet. When people are suffering, you can't live in the abstract. You can't say, everything is great. It's like 20 years ago. It's not going to be that way. People are suffering. You have to be able to cut back and start sharing the loss that people have" (Fox News Chicago, 2010). Unions are set up as unrealistic, parasitic, and selfish against the backdrop of crisis.

This argument has been so successful because the Chicago teachers unions' has a history of top-down, anti-democratic organization and tactics, preventing teachers from reorganizing to reconstitute their schools and their school districts (Bruno 2007). Teachers have had limited and decreasing power in the creation of curriculum, transforming poor working conditions, and in the daily operations of their schools. Bruno (2007) characterizes the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) as a political playground in which internal political struggles impacted the union's ability to situate itself as an involved actor in the reform process. After the Mayor was awarded almost complete control over CPS and over 30,000 teachers lost many essential provisions, CTU has been struggling to deal with the "unilateral march to reshaping the public schools in the free-

market image preached by leading business and political elites” (Bruno 2007, p. 168). At the start of the push for top-down reform over 10 years ago, CTU launched an extensive but short-lived policy and research campaign in response called Voices from the Front (Bruno 2007). However, because of CTU’s internal political issues during the 2001 election of President Debbie Lynch, exacerbated by CPS’s external political tactics, the union leadership’s reaction to Renaissance 2010 and other privatization-gearred reform efforts has been necessarily weakened

The CTU has an interesting and complicated relationship with the city, and its parent organization, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), correspondingly has a complex and intricate relationship with the state and the state’s version of democracy. The CTU is a local affiliate of the AFT, a union that represents over 3,000 local affiliates and 1.4 million people (AFT, 2010). The AFT has an international program which provides teacher training and union building. The program is the largest of any labor union in the U.S. Its program, particularly in the Middle East, is meant to teach teachers “how to organize and operate a union in a democracy” (Sukarieh and Tannock 2010, p. 181). However, Sukarieh and Tannock (2010) find that the AFT’s international program promotes and serves U.S. foreign policy and influence through the justification that it is spreading democracy, and modernized, professional unionism. Although the AFT is working to secure U.S. interests through its mission of global labor solidarity, the demonization of unions has not let up.

The limitation of teachers as participants in the overall structure, creation, and implementation of schooling has become a major target for proponents of school privatization in Chicago. In an editorial for Indystar.com, one woman wrote:

New York, Chicago, New Orleans and Washington, D.C., have eliminated publicly elected school boards. All have seen improvement as a result. New Orleans relegated all union organizing to the individual school level instead of one district-wide contract. As a result, each principal is highly motivated to keep teachers happy as well as achieve academic results. New Orleans has seen test results rise two years in a row, and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan says Hurricane Katrina was ‘the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans.’ (Litwack, 2010)

The release of “A Nation at Risk” in 1983, a comprehensive report on the state of the nation’s education commissioned by the U.S. government, helped to spur an assault on teachers unions as a threat to democracy. It stated 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.” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1). “The demonization of teacher unions reached an outrageous high in 2004 when federal Education Secretary Roderick Paige referred to the National Education Association as a ‘terrorist organization’” (Bruno, 2007, p. 167).

A recent bill introduced in the Illinois state legislature would implement a voucher program allowing Chicago Public School students to opt out of public schools to attend private schools at the expense of the school district. In an opinion article in the Chicago Tribune, Byrne states: “Every Republican and Democrat who voted for the bill in the face of sure retaliation from the Chicago Teachers Union, Illinois Federation of Teachers and Illinois Education Association gets credit for the courage of putting children above politics” (Byrne, 10 May 2010, p. 2). Abowd, a writer for Labor Notes

stated, however, that “the PR sheen of these “labs of innovation” has begun to fade as charter attempts (with more “flexible,” non-union teachers) to improve education—and raise test scores—has returned unconvincing results” (Abowd, 2010, p. 1).

Teachers unions are attacked for participating in the corrupt political system of Chicago, but teachers themselves face blame for failing public schools. A major reform act in 1995 paved a direct path to this attack. The changes that resulted:

gave sweeping authority to a new district management team, headed by a corporate-style board and a chief executive officer (CEO). It located final authority and responsibility for running the schools in the mayor’s office. The new law authorized system officials to identify failing schools; to dismiss, lay off, or reassign their personnel; and to dissolve their elected LSCs. System officials were also empowered to cut costs, privatize operations, and abrogate many collective bargaining agreements in the name of efficiency (Bruno, 2007, p. 169).

In the aftermath of these changes, President Clinton praised CPS as a model of reform for the nation. In his State of the Union speech on January 27, 1998, he proposed “to help other communities follow Chicago’s lead” (Office of the Press Secretary, 1998). Bruno (2007) states: “No Chicago politician or media pundit missed the opportunity to revel in the new image of the “city that works . . . with a school system on the move” (p. 169).

Teachers are facing much of the blame for the social, economic, and political quagmires in impoverished urban areas that public education has failed to solve. In a way that ignores the difficult, under-resourced, and oppressive environments in which teachers often work in Chicago’s public schools, one scholar writes: “Urban districts face a teacher quality gap defined as the disparity between the attributes, competencies, and

credentials of teachers in underperforming, urban classrooms compared to those qualities of teachers in more affluent, suburban school districts” (Bogges 2010, p. 66; Darling-Hammond & Sykes 2003; Useem et. al 2007). The discourse frames teachers as unqualified and teachers unions as greedily appropriating resources and advocating for schooling practices that benefit only teachers, while leaving “the people” out to dry.

### **Conclusion**

The dominant discourse shaping the transformation and privatization of CPS draws upon, to a great extent, the city’s need to maintain its survival as a global economic player. The discourse utilizes universalizing notions of city and state membership in order to transform itself in ways that will ensure its global economic success. The discourse confers choice, at an individual level, and policy change, at the group level enacted by business and government elite, as democratic action and participation. The discourse is shaped, in large part, by the leadership and onus businesspeople and venture philanthropists have awarded themselves to lead the state to its democratic utopia. And the discourse portrays any and all who protest the progress of marketized and privatized education as anti-democratic, selfish, and not attuned to the needs of the greater people. The discursive formation resultant of these aspects works to transform democracy from a concept not transferrable to a form of government or society into a tool to perpetuate neoliberal ideologies for the larger project of capitalism.

Opponents of the privatization and corporatization of public education argue that schools should be preparing students not only to become part of the nation’s productive labor force but to become engaged citizens and active participants in the struggle for a more democratic society (Giroux 2001; Bowles and Gintis 1976). Bowles and Gintis

(1976) state, “An educational system can be egalitarian and liberating only when it prepares youth for fully democratic participation in social life and an equal claim to the fruits of economic activity” (p. 14). Aronowitz (2008) states,

For the bare truth is that in the last decade of neoliberal economic and social ideologies, public postsecondary schools are taking a severe beating in the commonwealth. In the current environment, budget cuts and downsizing are prescribed by policy-makers as the zeitgeist has shifted to the view that only the marketplace represents quality and anything connected to the public goods that does not submit itself to the business environment is a second-rate article (p. 62).

Chicago Public Schools have become an important site in the struggle over the meaning of the word democracy as it slips into a marketized version of itself in the dominant discourse.

Giroux (2003) states: “As the laws of the market take precedence over the laws of the state as guardians of the public good, politics is increasingly removed from power, and the state offers little help in mediating the interface between the advance of capital and its rapacious commercial interests” (p. 8). An important question that has been complicated by this work is: why does the state offer little help in mediating the marketization and destruction of publicly controlled schooling to work towards a more real democratic education to benefit and empower the democratic people which make up its whole? Democracy is struggled over in education because education is the institution in which the survival and success of the state is promulgated. The survival of the state, as well as the city of Chicago, is staked upon their successes in the global economy of wealth and of power.

The neoliberal privatization of public schooling drastically impacts understandings of the term democracy in relationship to education. An important tension arising from this paper is the difficulty in visioning a real democratic and public education managed by the state as a state apparatus when the state's survival is dependent upon the very capitalistic and neoliberal practices which destroy public space and democracy. While neoliberalism is not a completely totalizing narrative, and contains within it partialities, fractures and contingencies, it is powerful and Chicago's push to survive as a global city out of the mires of de-industrialization relies heavily on its logic.

The notion of public participation in democratic society as socially transformative is used often to defend the possibilities for change that might arise from the utilization of public spaces. Public education is linked to the state, and according to Fraser's understanding of public arenas as a separate usage of the term 'public sphere' than the state. This must be accounted for and worked through in the effort to comprehend the possibilities for public education and to understand how public education should be linked with the development of strong counterpublic spheres among subjugated urban communities in Chicago.

Giroux quotes Pierre Bordieu, stating that "democracies cannot exist 'without genuine opposing powers'" (2001, p. 26). The quest to understand how dissent can function to curb the conforming nature of mass society and the impact of neoliberal ideology on the social and cultural aspects of everyday life is a motivating factor for this analysis. The roots of public education within the nature of interpublic relations might help us to understand how dissent can become a welcome and natural part of democracy instead of feared and loathed by dominant groups in society.

The understanding that the broader system of public education plays an important role in the perpetuation of class and race inequalities drives this continuing search to comprehend how alternative understandings of the ways in which people as democratic subjects can build oppositional logic and strategies of resistance to dominance through or connected to public education. This work adds to an oppositional logic against the push for privatized education and marketized school choice (Lipman and Haines 2007; Giroux 2003; Saltman 2007; Wells et. al 2002). Often the rhetoric used to push for charter school proliferation, the hierarchization of schooling, and the marketization of schooling does not, by any means, sufficiently address how these types of change would democratize public education in ways that would lead to sets of egalitarian relations, and democratic action against the forces of the state which seek to constantly shape and delimit public spheres.

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