education review // reseñas educativas
editors: david j. blacker / gustavo e. fischman / melissa cast-brede / gene v glass

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

March 14, 2013 ISSN 1094-5296

Education Review/Reseñas Educativas is a project of the
College of Education and Human Services of the University of Delaware
the National Education Policy Center, and the
Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University
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Glenn, Charles L. (2012). *The American Model of State and School.* NY: Continuum.

Pp. x + 267. ISBN 978-1-4411-8842-7

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Charles Glenn's *The American Model of State and School* could most profitably be read as a sequel to his earlier *Contrasting Models of State and School* (2011). In the earlier book, Glenn contrasted the education policy histories of four Western European nations: the centralized, state-heavy approach of Austria and Prussia, and the decentralized, choice-allowing approaches of Belgium and The Netherlands. *The American Model of State and School* tells the history of the American approach to education — what Glenn calls "a third way" (iix), with its often uneasy tension between localism and various attempts toward standardization, maintaining

Citation: Currie-Knight, Kevin. (2013 March 14) Review of *The American Model of State and School* by Charles Glenn. *Education Review, 16.* Retrieved [Date] from http://www.edrev.info/reviews/rev1217.pdf

respect for cultural diversity while still (to use E.D. Hirsch's term) making Americans.

In *Contrasting Models*, Glenn took a more detached and neutral approach, while *American Model* finds Glenn not only giving the history of American education policy, but arguing something of a normative case about what should happen next. It might be best to start there. In the book's final chapter ("Concluding Reflections"), Glenn argues thus:

> American public education should be "disestablished," just as state churches were in the decades after the revolution. The resulting emulation and competition among religious groups has played a major role in the continuing dynamism of Christianity in the United States compared with countries retaining church establishments, and there is every reason to believe that education in the United States would similarly flourish if the present "establishment" were dismantled under arrangements that protected the interests of the most vulnerable children (p. 221).

Why does Glenn conclude thus? The story Glenn tells in *American Model* is one of gradual centralization and standardization of a once localized landscape of schools that often gave parents a significant amount of choice over the schools their children would attend. While this centralization may have had some desirable effects in reducing the variability in the quality of schooling between localities, it has also largely removed decision-making power from parents and localities and given rise to ideological conflicts over how things like religion should be handled in public schools.

Glenn starts his history by looking at the varying models used in the American colonies, where educational requirements and provisions not only varied by colony, but by locality. The Southern colonies and localities, save for large cities like Charleston, often left education of children solely to individual families. By contrast, New England colonies were the most concerned with a government role in education. States like Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut passed laws requiring that towns above a

certain size establish a primary schools, though these laws were often not enforced and the quality of schools still varied considerably by locality. In the Mid-Atlantic colonies, schooling was most often provided by individual churches, where parents of means could pay tuition and those who could not would attend "charity schools." The example of colonial Pennsylvania is illustrative:

> No measures were taken... to create a system of schooling in Pennsylvania. Religious groups established their own schools and sometimes subsidized them - or appealed to their "mother churches" in Europe for help - for parents who could not afford the tuition. The various groups of German immigrants, in particular, established and sustained schools, sometimes with the help from the great center of Pietist missionary effort in Halle (Prussia) (p. 29).

Next, Glenn surveys some early efforts By Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush (and the more utopian Robert Owen) to envision statewide systems of education, primarily with an eye toward creating citizens capable of living in the American republic. Jefferson envisioned a meritocratic state-managed system where those who could afford it paid tuition while those who couldn't could attend free for three years, after which continued attendance was reserved only for the meritorious. Benjamin Rush proposed an entirely state-administered system of primary schools and academies for the purpose of homogenizing a (linguistically and religiously) diverse population, that perhaps most closely resembles future efforts by Horace Mann and others to create common schools. Despite the attention these plans received at the time, and from subsequent historians, such "proposals to create a national system were resisted and decisions about the content of schooling were left to local officials with basically conservative and non-theoretical concerns" (p. 55).

It was primarily religious impetus that led Whig reformers like Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, and Calvin Stowe to push for systems of state-administered common schools, where all students — rich, middle class, and poor — could receive non-denominational (in fact, Protestant) instruction in the same setting. First, these reformers were concerned that many poor children were not receiving

religious (and therefore, moral) instruction. Second, reformers were concerned that allowing for parental choice between, or local control over, schools would result in a sectarianism that, exacerbated by a wave of German and Irish immigrants, would threaten state and national unity.

Much of the book focuses on the various battles between Whigs (who supported a more centralized school system overseen by the state) and Democrats (who supported decentralized, locally controlled schools). While Horace Mann and Henry Barnard served as secretaries of the Massachusetts and Connecticut Boards of Education, and had essentially advisory roles with no direct control over education policy, they were able to further the cause of the common school in several ways. First, both surveyed the schools in their states, giving speeches and publishing articles pleading the case for standardization in teacher training, textbook use, and pedagogical approach between localities. Second, they advised their respective legislatures regarding education policy. Lastly, they established state controlled normal schools for teacher training in hopes that "the real content of public education...would be determined by the teachers trained by state normal schools in shared values and perspectives that would counter local particularism" (p. 186). While the Whig reformers' attempts to create a system of common schools did not go unchallenged - in Massachusetts, Democratic governor Marcus Morton and Catholic intellectual Orestes Brownson vocally gave voice to opposition to Whig efforts at educational centralization - "the 1830's and 1840's saw legislation proposed and sometimes adopted in state after state that strengthened considerably the oversight of state government over local schools" (p. 143).

Partly as a result of such centralization of educational decisions, religious tensions over public schooling began to show themselves. By the 1870's, controversies over whether to use the (Protestant translations of) the Bible emerged in several cities. (This tension gained national attention for the city of Cincinnati thanks to an unpopular compromise between the Catholic Church and the public schools, in which the public schools abandoned the practice of starting each day with a Bible reading and the Church could use public school buildings for its own religious teaching on weekend, a concession that angered

the city's, and the nation's, Protestants.) Another issue that arose in the middle and late 1800's was whether to allow sectarian (really, Catholic) schools to receive public funding. Most notably, Catholic Bishop John Hughes unsuccessfully petitioned New York City in the 1940's to allow Catholic schools to receive public funds, on the grounds that the city's public schools were biased toward Protestantism. On the national level, a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution in 1875 ("The Blaine Amendment") proposed to deny states the right to give tax dollars to sectarian schools.

The penultimate chapter (before Glenn's concluding reflections), entitled "The Educators Find Their Prophet," is an exploration of the educational writings of John Dewey and the education profession's positive response to it. Glenn's largely critical reading of Dewey notes that for all of Dewey's invocation of the word *democracy*, Dewey consistently showed a lack of enthusiasm toward the mechanism of political democracy, and even less of local control or parental involvement in educational decisions.

> Dewey's concern was, rather, with the formation, through schools, of a set of habit and attitudes that would lead to the creation of what would more accurately be called "guided democracy," based upon rational deliberation informed by expert judgment. Dewey stated frequently that educators should take the lead in building a new social order - and, beginning in the 1930's, a new economic order - through the schools... (p. 209).

One can imagine, then, why Dewey had such strong appeal among teachers and professors of education; Dewey's philosophy of education (by Glenn's interpretation) vested educators with the power to make educational decisions that could supercede parental or local political authority. Acceptance of Dewey's progressive philosophy among educationists jibes with Glenn's assessment of the gradual professionalization of teachers who, over the decades, have increasingly "tend[ed] to communicate a set of beliefs about education that are unapologetically at variance with those held by most parents and by the general public" (p. 197).

At root, *The American Model of State and School* tells the story of a gradual centralization of many local models of schooling in America into an increasingly uniform system with increasing government involvement. Before the Whig reformers of the 1830's and 1840's succeeded in ushering in common schools, "the state role in schooling - apart from the rhetoric of state constitutions - was long a matter of financial bookkeeping than of determining how education would be provided and for what purposes" (p. 125). Using a wide array of primary and secondary sources, Glenn shows how reformers (with the best of intentions) evolved a school system that became more centralized and standardized and less responsive to American diversity and parental input.

While Glenn readily points out the positives of centralizing education — namely, achieving a consistency of school quality between localities — much of the book is devoted to a historical examination of the conflict that such centralization has caused. As education is, perhaps unavoidably, a culturally sensitive enterprise, centralization and standardization may well occur only at the expense of respecting cultural and ideological variability. In fact, one point Glenn stresses is that ideological conflicts over education — from whether the Bible (or religion in general) should be used in schools to whether "sectarian" schools should be allowed state funding — has occurred in the United States only when education became a more centralized, and less local, affair. Likewise, removing schooling decisions from local, if not parental, control may ensure that curricular and other decisions are made by skilled experts rather than local prejudice, but only at the expense of schools serving, rather than imposing onto, communities.

T*he American Model of State and School* will surely be of interest to anyone interested in the evolution of the American model (really, plethora of models) of education and its (or their) evolution. One need not agree with Glenn's conclusion — that the United States should "disestablish" schooling and adopt policies that give localities, if not parents, freedom to choose the education they see fit — in order to profit from Glenn's impressive history. To this reviewer, he makes a strong historical case for his "pro-choice" conclusion, but even those who

disagree will find here an intriguing historical examination of the "third way" of the American model of education, and its often uneasy tension between a respect for localism and cultural difference and desire to use schools to make Americans.

Reference

Glenn, Charles L. (2011). *Contrasting Models of State and School*. New York, NY: Continuum.

About the Reviewer



Kevin Currie-Knight is a PhD Candidate in the University of Delaware's School of Education. His dissertation, *From Laissez-Faire to Vouchers*, is an intellectual history of pro-market arguments in twentieth Century American education. He has published papers in *Philosophical Studies in Education* and *Bajo Palabra*.

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