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Oakeshott, Schumacher, and an examination of the tension between the "college and career readiness" consensus and school choice in American education policy

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Abstract

American education policy at the elite level has coalesced around a consensus valuing "college and career readiness" as the primary metric and value for American schools. This "readiness" is often defined by economic outcomes or by standardized test measures (which serve as predictors for economic outcomes). Policy actors at the local, state, and national levels are pursuing more centralized methods to reach goals based on these value assumptions. At the same time, more individualized programs and more forms of school choice are being implemented across the nation. This theoretical paper explores criticisms of this approach from both the political left and right, as well as the inherent tension between the desire for centralized standardization and outcomes measured by economic outcomes on one hand, and the growing desire among families for individualized, varied, and self-directed schooling experiences on the other.

Keywords

School choice, charter schools, homeschooling, education policy, higher education common core

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Introduction

A solid consensus has emerged among American educational institutions in support of "college and career readiness" as the main purpose of education. According to Bakhurst and Fairfield (2016):

> Recent decades have witnessed a growing trend in educational thinking toward the empirical and the technological, the vocational and the managerial. Policymakers, administrators, and a great many educators themselves increasingly subscribe to a conception of education in which the core mission of educational institutions is to equip students to succeed in the workplace, now understood not in terms of an array of familiar vocations, but as a fluid, rapidly evolving and global "knowledge economy." (p. 1)

These goals are valued at various institutional levels—American state departments of education, school systems, and local schools regularly promote "college and career readiness" as their main motivating outcome (Mass.gov, 2015). Some organizations have also emerged to promote higher education's involvement in these standards (Higher Ed for Higher Standards, 2015). Colleges and universities also sell themselves on their career/employment aspect of their offerings (Carnevale et al., 2011). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative explicitly holds, as part of its purpose that the CCSS are meant to, "…prepare all students for success in our global economy and society" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). While all of this work—a focus on common curriculum designed for employment purposes, and analyses of college outcomes based on salaries—may be helpful for informing students and parents about opportunities and career paths, they assume a very particular value—economic security—as the measure of success and quality of life. A consensus has clearly emerged among elites and policymakers that "college and career readiness" as a method of reaching or maintaining personal and societal economic security, is the best definition of measuring institutional successes of schools and colleges, and is the best measure of well-being for the population.

This consensus has come about via a coalition of left-leaning and right-leaning allies who share a belief in the power and efficacy of technocratic solutions to solve policy and performance issues in K-12 education. The former CBO Director and economic advisor to President George W Bush called the CCSS a "pocketbook issue for American families" (Holtz-Eakin, 2016). Former US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan under President Obama spoke frequently about the relationship between "college and career readiness" as an economic issue (Duncan, 2010). Independent left-leaning organizations (such as Teach for America, an alternative teacher training program), and right-leaning organizations (such as the Fordham Institute) and others like them look to large-scale policy solutions at the federal and state levels to drive improvement in student, school, and school system outcomes. TFA, for example, has historically been extremely focused on raising test scores and getting disadvantaged students into college. The Fordham Institute, long a supporter of school choice, is also a supporter of large-scale standardized tests as the gold standard of program accountability (Emerson, 2014). These groups, and like-minded individuals who share their belief in the strength of technocratic solutions, hold significant power in today's education policy environment, and policy proposals and outcomes tend to reflect their values. Those values fall along a continuum, but generally include, in short, some allowance for a tightly regulated market in schooling (although many members of this group would

abandon this plank if good outcomes could be achieved through standardized practices), a belief in the need for strong accountability measures (either through input-based measures such as certification and accreditation, or outcome-based measures such as standardized testing), and a belief that the end goal for all students should be economically driven: either students must acquire a skilled trade or, more often, must acquire admission to and success in a four-year college degree program.

Yet, there is evidence that a substantial number of American parents do not share this priority. At the same time as this consensus was taking shape, American states have greatly expanded the number of school choice programs available to parents. In addition, a growing number of families are choosing to homeschool their children. This paper explores the tension between this concept of standardization and college and career readiness as a measure and goal of American schools' well-being, alongside the growth of choice in American education policy. Although still somewhat inchoate (although its constituent parts have existed for some time), and decidedly less remarked-upon, a right–left coalition is also finding its voice *against* this conception of schooling and against the college and career readiness mantra.

Oakeshott and Schumacher

If the college and career readiness right/left consensus can be said to focus on large-scale, technocratic solutions, designed to push students into pre-determined college or career paths, another right/left consensus is focused on smaller scale, locally organized solutions. Although technology has produced more data than ever for policymakers, which could lead to a strengthening of the elite consensus' hand, some authors have proposed that this technocratic approach may be nearing its end (Tesar, 2016a). Challenges to the elite consensus exist from both the political right and left, and this paper uses two examples: Michael Oakeshott's description of education as a "conversation," and EF Schumacher's theory of "smallness" and "conviction."

Oakeshott and Education as "conversation"

From the right, Michael Oakeshott (1975) argues that human culture is "voices. . .joined, in a conversation – an endless unrehearsed intellectual adventure in which, in imagination, we enter into a variety of modes of understanding the world and ourselves and are not disconcerted by the differences or dismayed by the inconclusiveness of it all," (p. 30) and that education was supposed to be an introduction into this conversation. He argues that learning is in some ways inherently impractical: that "it is a somewhat unexpected invitation to disentangle oneself from the here and now of current happenings and engagements, to detach oneself from the urgencies of the local and the contemporary. . ." (p. 31). Oakeshott's anti-rationalist writing on education is very far from the goal-oriented, utilitarian college and career readiness theory of education. Sypnowich (2016) suggests that "Oakeshott might seem a strange bedfellow for these largely left-wing critics, as he was an avowed conservative. . .," and then adds that "There is much that divides the two political perspectives, but there are also some strong points of affinity" (p. 77).

Schumacher and education as "conviction"

From the left, Schumacher (1973) argues against education as the means simply toward "know-how" of the world. He writes, "Education cannot help us as long as it accords no place to metaphysics. Whether the subjects taught are subjects of science or of the humanities, if the teaching does not lead to a clarification of metaphysics, that is to say, of our fundamental convictions, it cannot educate a man and, consequently, cannot be of real value to society." Schumacher goes on to acidly describe the concept of education with a solely economic purpose:

> I shall give an example...It is significant because it comes from one of the most influential men of our time, the late Lord Keynes. "For at least another hundred years," he wrote, "we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still."
>
> When great and brilliant men talk like this we cannot be surprised if there arises a certain confusion between fair and foul...That avarice, usury, and precaution (i.e. economic security) should be our gods was merely a bright idea for Keynes: he surely had nobler gods. But ideas are the most powerful things on earth, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that by now the gods he recommended have been enthroned.

This complaint that education is not about "know-how," or practical or economic ends, but about individual people learning about the world and their societies for their own sake is very similar to Oakeshott's view. Just as large-scale technocracy has appeal to the right and the left in various ways, these concepts of education "conversation" or as "conviction" are not clearly inspired by the right or the left—they apply to both right and left. Oakeshott and Schumacher here serve as representatives of an alternative left–right coalition that respects individual students and families more than the current elite consensus does.

Smaller scale institutions could, in theory, also have technocratic aspects, although their emergence in practice has tended to question the elite consensus' "...cult of depersonalized objectivity" and its "objective knowledge amassed and (technologically) exploited into the form of policy" (Tesar, 2016a). Having introduced this alternative minority coalition, this paper will go on to document in more depth the elite consensus and describe how the goal of college and career readiness has been "enthroned" in American education policy. This paper will then go on to give more explicit examples of this other right/left coalition in education policy and their values, including a discussion of parents' desires for schools, an exploration of parent reactions to the current consensus, and their desires for new schooling methods and opportunities.

Review of "college and career readiness" consensus versus school choice opportunities

Nationally respected nonprofit organizations, for-profit companies (mainly assessment and curriculum publishers), and government agencies together form the elite coalition that pushes "college and career readiness." These entities define the direction of education policy in the USA at a high level, and most state education agencies and local school systems

follow their lead, either through required policy implementation or as fellow philosophical travelers.

The policy consensus on "college and career readiness"

The College Board is a major organization focused on education in the USA. As the administrator of the SAT of the Advanced Placement (AP) program, it has substantial and growing power to affect the K-12 curriculum across the nation. The College Board has defined eight "Components of College and Career Readiness" (College Board, 2010). This document suggests schools begin working on these components as early as elementary school.

1. College Aspirations

Goal: Build a college-going culture based on early college awareness by nurturing in students the confidence to aspire to college and the resilience to overcome challenges along the way. Maintain high expectations by providing adequate supports, building social capital and conveying the conviction that all students can succeed in college.

2. Academic Planning for College and Career Readiness

Goal: Advance students' planning, preparation, participation and performance in a rigorous academic program that connects to their college and career aspirations and goals.

3. Enrichment and Extracurricular Engagement

Goal: Ensure equitable exposure to a wide range of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities that build leadership, nurture talents and interests, and increase engagement with school.

4. College and Career Exploration and Selection Processes

Goal: Provide early and ongoing exposure to experiences and information necessary to make informed decisions when selecting a college or career that connects to academic preparation and future aspirations.

5. College and Career Assessments

Goal: Promote preparation, participation and performance in college and career assessments by all students.

6. College Affordability Planning

Goal: Provide students and families with comprehensive information about college costs, options for paying for college, and the financial aid and scholarship processes and eligibility requirements, so they are able to plan for and afford a college education.

7. College and Career Admission Processes

> Goal: Ensure that students and families have an early and ongoing understanding of the college and career application and admission processes so they can find the postsecondary options that are the best fit with their aspirations and interests.
>
> 8. Transition from High School Graduation to College Enrollment
>
> Goal: Connect students to school and community resources to help the students overcome barriers and ensure the successful transition from high school to college.

Research and nonprofit organizations who work on a national level, and/or who work to shape policy in Washington, D.C., and in the states share this common set of assumptions about the goals of American schooling, and describe these goals in similar ways. A typical statement in this vein is Achieve, Inc.'s definition of "college and career readiness":

> With the growing complexity of the world and the increasing demands of the 21st-century workforce, there is little question that all students should graduate from high school fully prepared for college AND careers.
>
> From an academic perspective, college and career readiness means that a high school graduate has the knowledge and skills in English and mathematics necessary to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing postsecondary coursework without the need for remediation – or put another way, a high school graduate has the English and math knowledge and skills needed to qualify for and succeed in the postsecondary job training and/or education necessary for their chosen career (i.e. community college, university, technical/vocational program, apprenticeship, or significant on-the-job training)...
>
> Simply put, "college and career readiness" is the umbrella under which many education and workforce policies, programs and initiatives thrive. From high-quality early education and strong, foundational standards in elementary school to rigorous career and technical education programs and college completion goals, college and career readiness is the unifying agenda across the P-20 education pipeline. (Achieve, Inc., 2015a)

This idea of "college and career readiness" is also now well established among many political institutions governing education policy in the USA. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education, in its "Blueprint for Reform," argued that the federal government should encourage states to focus on "college and career readiness" because "four of every 10 new college students, including half of those at two-year institutions, take remedial courses, and many employers comment on the inadequate preparation of high school graduates" (USDOE, 2010). State governments, which handle the bulk of education policy-making in the USA, are also in alignment with this philosophical goal. The state of New York promotes Achieve Inc.'s definition of "college and career readiness" on its website (Achieve, Inc., 2015b). In 2012, the state of Georgia reconstituted its statewide school accountability system, and dubbed it the "College and Career Ready Performance Index." According to the Georgia Department of Education, "CCRPI is a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that will promote college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students" (Georgia Department of Education, 2015).

The practical culmination of this "college and career readiness" concept has been the CCSS initiative. The mission is explicitly "Preparing America's Students for College and Career," the CCSS's website argues that,

> Today's students are preparing to enter a world in which colleges and businesses are demanding more than ever before. To ensure all students are ready for success after high school, the Common Core State Standards establish clear, consistent guidelines for what every student should know and be able to do in math and English language arts from kindergarten through 12th grade.
>
> The standards were drafted by experts and teachers from across the country and are designed to ensure students are prepared for today's entry-level careers, freshman-level college courses, and workforce training programs. (Common Core State Standards Initative, 2015)

Two multistate consortia have been funded by the US federal government to build new assessment systems to measure student outcomes on the CCSS initiative. One, the "Smarter balanced Assessment Consortium" (SBAC) currently consists of 18 states, and argues that

> To achieve the goal that all students leave high school ready for college and career, Smarter Balanced is committed to ensuring that assessment and instruction embody the CCSS and that all students, regardless of disability, language or subgroup status, have the opportunity to learn this valued content and to show what they know and can do. (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2015)

The other consortium, the "Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers" (PARCC) currently includes 11 states and the District of Columbia, and **"a consortium of states working together to develop a set of assessments that measure whether students are on track to be successful in college and their careers"** (PARCC, 2017).

National nonprofit organizations are in agreement with "college and career" readiness as a guiding philosophy for American schools, the federal government has adopted that stance and those words as guiding principles for its role in American education policy, and states have for several years been working to implement and assess the CCSS initiative, either through SBAC, PARCC, or their own tests, and training teachers to implement these standards for the purpose of "college and career readiness" in their classrooms. It is worth noting here that even states choosing to leave the CCSS project are not abandoning the concept of college and career readiness, but only the formal CCSS project. American institutions seem very well-aligned on the purposes and goals of American schools.

The growth of school choice and the desire for smaller scale institutions

At the same time as this consensus has been building, American families have also been able to take advantage of more school choice options, mostly through new state-level programs (Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, 2017). Two particular challenges to the "college and career readiness" philosophy seem to be emerging in the USA. Firstly, there is a growing challenge to the level of institution dictating education policymaking, which is

leading to a more varied landscape in the educational philosophies and approaches of schools, even if many of these entrepreneurial ventures still broadly accept "college and career readiness" as goals. Parents in America simply have (and want) more school choice options than they have had for decades. Secondly, the elite consensus simply ignores a substantial number of families who disagree with "college and career readiness" as the ultimate goal of education. Thirdly, some direct attacks are being made on the "college and career" mantra itself.

School choice options

Firstly, Americans have been more willing and able to choose schools for their children in recent years, rather than accepting standardized schools, and that trend is increasing. Enrollment in "Assigned Public Schools" has been declining. From 1999 to 2007, the share of students attending their assigned public school in the USA declined from 74.1 percent in 1999 to 70.6 percent in 2007 (NCES, 2015b).

Private school enrollment increased from 10.0 percent in 1999 to 11.4 percent in 2007. The number of private school choice programs has increased from four in 1987 to 51 in 2014. Nationwide enrollment in voucher, tax-credit scholarship, or education savings account programs has increased from 36,000 students in 2000 to over 400,000 in 2017 (Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, 2017). Many private schools, especially the larger or more established schools, are in alignment with the dominant "college and career readiness" philosophy. Parents in some places have objected to their private schools adopted the CCSS initiative, but often these are for reasons of content, not necessarily for reasons of disagreement with the "college and career readiness" philosophy (Bidwell, 2014).

Charter school enrollment is growing across the USA. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES):

> From school year 1999–2000 to 2012–13, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools increased from 0.3 million to 2.3 million. During this period, the percentage of public school students who attended charter schools increased from 0.7 to 4.6 percent. (NCES, 2015a)

These schools, which operate as public schools but are run by independent nonprofit boards, do often align with the "college and career readiness" philosophy in their curriculum and values. In fact, many charter schools fully endorse this philosophy more strongly than do neighboring, traditional public schools. Although not necessarily smaller in size than traditional schools, charter schools often are physically smaller, and so may be considered a step toward a smaller scale institution in that they have sought independence from the larger traditional public school systems in which they are located.

Finally, according to the NCES, homeschooling has grown in recent years, from 1.7 percent of the US student population in 1999 to 2.9 percent in 2007 (NCES, 2015b). Murphy (2012) has extensively documented the growth of homeschooling in the USA, showing that actually more students are homeschooled across the country than are enrolled in charter schools. It is possible that even if a family chooses to homeschool, they could still agree with the "college and career readiness" philosophy, and some seem to. Murphy discusses various reasons for parents choosing to homeschool. He argues that, while religion is still an important motivating factor, religion is actually becoming less prevalent as a motivation for homeschooling and that the movement is less polarized than it may have been

in the past. Murphy defines four motivational frameworks for parents' reasons for choosing homeschooling, and categorizes them as follows: religion; academic deficiencies in the assigned public school; social/environmental problems in the assigned public school; and other family-based motivations (such as a desire to be with one's children, or for special needs or other special circumstances).

What do parents value in educational institutions?

As noted above, school choice programs are growing in the USA. Hill (2005), Wearne (2006), and Greene et al. (2014, 2015) have asked whether proponents of these programs are too focused on simply increasing the number of programs and on plainly academic outcomes—specifically math and reading test scores—to the exclusion of other values parents and society, broadly, might see in them. When asked, parents seem not to value academic, "college and career" outcomes quite as much as the ubiquity of this ethos might predict. Kelly and Scafidi (2013) surveyed parents enrolled in a large student scholarship program in the state of Georgia. Allowed to list as many options as they wished from a menu, 63.9 percent of parents listed "Better preparation for college" as a reason they chose to send their children to private school; 34.6 percent listed "Higher standardized test scores" (p. 10). In fact, according to Kelly and Scafidi:

> The top five reasons why parents chose a private school for their children are all related to school climate and classroom management, including "better student discipline" (50.9 percent), "better learning environment" (50.8 percent), "smaller class sizes" (48.9 percent), "improved student safety" (46.8 percent), and "more individual attention for my child" (39.3 percent).

Those top reasons, it could be argued, might also be related to preparation for "college and career readiness." When asked to rank their "most important" motivations, however, only 4.2 percent of parents chose "Better preparation for college" as their most important reason; 0.0 percent chose "Higher standardized test scores."

A nationwide survey conducted in 2013 asked parents about what they valued in schools, and the authors placed parents into one of several types:

> Pragmatists (36 percent of K–12 parents) assign high value to schools that, "offer vocational classes or job-related programs." Compared to the total parent population, Pragmatists have lower household incomes, are less likely themselves to have graduated from college, and are more likely to be parents of boys.
>
> Jeffersonians (24 percent) prefer a school that "emphasizes instruction in citizenship, democracy, and leadership," although they are no more likely than other parents to be active in their communities or schools.
>
> Test-Score Hawks (23 percent) look for a school that "has high test scores." Such parents are more likely to have academically gifted children who put more effort into school. They are also more likely to set high expectations for their children, push them to excel, and expect them to earn graduate degrees. Test-Score Hawks are also more apt to report that their child has changed schools because, as parents, they were dissatisfied with the school or its teachers.

> Multiculturalists (22 percent) laud the student goal: "learns how to work with people from diverse backgrounds." They are more likely to be African American, to self-identify as liberal, and to live in an urban area.
>
> Expressionists (15 percent) want a school that "emphasizes arts and music instruction." They are more likely to be parents of girls and to identify as liberal; they are less likely to be Christian. (In fact, they are three times more likely to self-identify as atheists.)
>
> Strivers (12 percent) assign importance to their child being "accepted at a top-tier college." Strivers are far more likely to be African American and Hispanic. They are also more apt to be Catholic. But they do not differ from the total population in terms of their own educational attainment. (Zeehandelaar and Winkler, 2013)

Both Oakeshott and Schumacher would likely fall into the "Jeffersonian" or perhaps "Expressionist" categories. However, in summary, the study classifies approximately 71 percent of parents ("Pragmatists," "Test-Score Hawks," and "Strivers") as mainly favoring some form of "college and career readiness" as their primary value. This is a somewhat higher number than Kelly and Scafidi found of parents placing a priority on "college and career ready" outcomes. In terms of parents' views on institutions, Zeehandelaar and Winkler assume some school choice; the purpose of the study is framed explicitly in terms of providing "demand side" and "supply side" information for parents, policymakers, and school leaders. To the extent parents do value "college and career readiness" as a major goal, they seem willing to seek out schools of that philosophy from various institutional providers. However, somewhere around one third of respondents in both studies placed something other than "college and career readiness" as their highest value. The ubiquity of the "college and career readiness" philosophy, and its practical implementation through the CCSS initiative, leave this third with fewer venues in which to educate their children.

Direct challenges: Classical education and "opting-out"

A challenge ostensibly for the CCSS initiative, but in reality for the whole "college and career readiness" philosophy came from school leader Terence O Moore (2013). Moore has helped to open multiple schools around the country that follow a classical education curriculum. During his critique of the CCSS initiative, Moore argues that the purpose of the Common Core

> . . .was never to read complete works of literature written in beautiful language that speak straight to the soul. That is, the reason for serving up a smattering of *The Odyssey* was not to give young people a view of the heroic and of the passions of men, but rather to introduce students to an epic. The reason for having them read *Romeo and Juliet* was not to unveil to hormonal adolescents the heights and dangers of love and passion and invite them to sympathize with the star-cross'd lovers but to get them to recognize a tragedy.

Moore goes on to ask a question both Oakeshott and Schumacher might ask: "What the Common Core promises is getting students into college and into a career. Assuming that the Common Core could actually accomplish that successfully, we are still left with the question, then what?"

Some schools combine both a challenge to existing institutions and at the same time critique the "college and career" philosophy. The growing number of specifically classical schools around the country, while acknowledging that students should be prepared for their futures, does not speak of "college and career readiness" in the way the members of the elite consensus do. The Association of Classical and Christian Schools, for example, counted 235 member schools in 2014, up from 10 members in 1994 (Association of Classical and Christian Schools, 2015). While the Association of Classical and Christian Schools (ACCS) and other classical sources will cite tests scores and college enrollments as proof of their quality, they tend to focus less on those outcomes than on their own curriculum content and methods. A typical summary of the state of the field is Christopher Perrin's "An Introduction to Classical Education" (2004), which includes the word "career" only once, and that in the context of discussing the potential careers of ancient Greeks and Romans. Out of a belief that this trend is going to grow, several colleges have begun to offer programs or entire degrees in classical education in order to prepare future teachers for classical schools and programs (Burger, 2016; Flott, 2016).

Another potent challenge to the consensus may come from the standardized testing "opt-out" movement, in which parents refuse to allow their children to attend school on days state standardized tests are administered. This is more potent because the number of parents in public schools still dwarfs the number in private or homeschools, and because they are more directly affected by the policy decisions of the "college and career readiness" consensus elite. Some parents hope to "force a conversation" over standardized testing, which has been implemented to measure the CCSS initiative standards for readiness. In at least one school system in New York, 80 percent of children were kept out of testing by their families in 2015 (Paulson, 2015).

Conclusion

Elite actors (both of the left and of the right) agree on framing the goals of education in America as "college and career readiness," but critics from both the left and the right challenge the necessary large-scale, standardized policies required to advance this agenda. Simply put, a growing tension exists between competing values in American education policy: standardization for economic well-being versus decentralization for various individualized purposes. A solid consensus exists among American policymakers at the local, state, and national levels, and among the nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education with whom they interact, that "college and career readiness" should be the major goal of American schools, and this goal is defined in expressly economic terms (or in academic terms such as test scores, which are intended to predict eventual economic outcomes). This goal has taken root over the past decade, and is substantially shared among American elite decision makers, as well as among many parents. However, a substantial number of parents—many of whom continue to send their children to public schools espousing these values—disagree, and place some other value as their first priority in evaluating the success of schools and of their or their children's personal well-being. These parents are inclined to value and seek out schools based on these other needs and desires, rather than give regard to large-scale, statewide policies, programs, test results, and other factors for which schools are typically held accountable. In contrast to the necessarily large-scale policies required for consistent, common standards and quantitatively measurable goals, EF Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* argues against large-scale social interventions and calls for more

"human-scale environments." In his update to that book, *Small is Still Beautiful*, Joseph Pearce writes that:

> Schumacher counteracted the idolatry of gigantism with the beauty of smallness. People, he argued could only feel at home in human-scale environments. If structures – economic, political or social – became too large they became impersonal and unresponsive to human needs and aspirations. Under these conditions individuals felt functionally futile, dispossessed, voiceless, powerless, excluded, alienated. (Pearce, 2006)

If anything, Oakeshott calls for even more "detachment" from the practical as the purpose of education in a liberal society. Oakeshott (1972) sees education as "...the transaction between the generations in which newcomers to the scene are initiated into the world which they are to inhabit" (p. 103). In this way, he resembles another British figure often associated with the right, but also defies simple characterization: GK Chesterton, who argued that, "Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another" (1924).

Schools of choice, whether charter, private, or homeschools, tend to be smaller in size than their standardized counterparts, and they tend to have more individualized and more varied purposes compared to traditional schools. The demands of higher level entities such as school systems, states, the federal government, etc., and the desires of influential non-profit organizations and institutions of higher education, however, combined with the various motives and desires of parents, all moving in different directions, make it very difficult for policymakers to craft programs and statutes to satisfy any other motive than "college and career readiness," measured in terms of test scores or economic indicators, and to impose this evaluative regime with one-size-fits-all approaches. Many, perhaps even most American parents are supportive of the "college and career readiness" goal, but a substantial number are not. A tension over the purpose of American schooling exists, along with a tension over the methods by which and the contexts in which that purpose should be realized on a day-to-day basis. This is a growing tension that will be difficult to reconcile as American education policy proceeds down these two parallel tracks, with greater standardization on one side and greater customization on the other. While some school choice supporters are also in favor of CCSS standardization, likening it to creating a common operating system for smart phones (Tuthill, 2013), others have pointed out this inherent tension between centralized standards and decentralized schooling options (Bedrick, 2013).

Schumacher would argue that such "bigness" for its own sake, and certainly in pursuit of economic purposes, as is represented by the consensus elite, is not only unsustainable, but actually harmful to human flourishing—to the inconclusive conversation in which Oakeshott wished to participate. "College and career readiness" supporters generally favor in practice what Hayek (1978) called rules of organization—detailed rules and regulations, implemented by those in power, to achieve a desired end. Opponents, or simply those who place priority on something other than "college and career readiness" are more likely to wish to follow Hayek's rules of just conduct—basic ground rules with a spontaneous order that allows families to pursue their own individual interests. Arguments have been advanced from both the political right (Forster, 2016) and left (Tesar, 2016b) against this centralization, standardization, and traditional measurement, but in the education arena, as in others, they are the minority voice. American education policy over the past decade has been both more decentralized (through the growth of choice options,

online learning, etc.), and more centralized (through the "college and career readiness" consensus at the level of power elites and the adoption of the CCSS initiative). The rise in school choice programs at the K-12 level (Bedrick, 2015), of homeschooling (Murphy, 2012), and of a growing "opt-out" movement among parents against standardized testing in schools (Strauss, 2015) may, together, put a brake on the ability of the "college and career readiness" consensus to actually implement its aims, and provide more opportunities for families to tailor their children's education to suit their needs.

In discussing Oakeshott's potential appeal to progressive educators, Sypnowich (2016) argues that:

> Beyond some general guidelines, what counts as a source of well-being will of course be subject to lively debate in a democratic society, among fogeys and hipsters, conservatives and progressives. Societies will, however, nonetheless aim to inculcate an appreciation for the worthwhile and the valuable, to forge some kind of common understanding for what constitutes the good, and this will inevitably involve an appreciation for ways of life passed on from the past. However, this also requires that we be pluralists about the good, assigning inherent value to a variety of traits, activities, and practices. (p. 91)

There is room for such sentiments within both Oakeshott's and Schumacher's work. Such conversations, and such a value on pluralism, may be useful in moving discussion on education policy and schooling in America to a more productive place.

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