



Schools With “Radical Politics” Must Be Tolerated in a Free Society

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There is a lot of concern these days about what type of curriculum is—or is not—being taught to schoolchildren. “Curriculum transparency” has become a key talking point, as parents seek to know what subject matter their children are exposed to during the school day.

Sometimes there are surprises. *The Free Press* published an [article](#) last week entitled, “Kids Get Schooled On Radical Politics,” exposing a coloring book with socialist and collectivist undertones that elementary school students in a Brooklyn, New York public school are apparently using as part of their studies for Black History Month.

Some parents only became aware of this curriculum due to a snow day that brought the material into their homes. According to the article, two parents who emigrated to the US from Communist China and the former Soviet Union, respectively, were particularly alarmed by the similarities they saw to the socialist propaganda they were exposed to as children. Other parents were concerned that their children weren’t actually learning Black history from these materials.

While it’s not surprising that some families would be upset by this curriculum, the main issue here is that this is happening in a government-run school that children are compelled to attend and that taxpayers are forced to fund. It’s the coercive, one-size-fits-all nature of public schooling that inevitably creates conflict. (See the Cato Institute’s [Public Schooling Battle Map](#) for a running list of these conflicts.)

In a private, decentralized K-12 education market, these conflicts would be minimized as families freely choose the educational environment that is most aligned with their distinct values and preferences without imposing their will upon others. If parents [disagreed](#) with a school’s curriculum or politics, they could simply leave and find a different school. If enough parents left, the school would close.

In a free market, schools that focus on socialist ideology and “radical politics” could exist. In fact, I have visited several microschools and homeschool co-ops that have a socialist bent or a proclivity toward “radical politics.” Similarly, I have visited microschools and homeschool co-ops that express other ideologies, such as different religious and cultural worldviews and diverse political persuasions—not to mention a host of different educational philosophies.

Unlike mandatory public school assignments, these are all examples of privately-run schools and spaces that families are voluntarily selecting for their children. As the economic journalist [Henry Hazlitt](#) reminds us: “The ‘private sector’ of the economy is, in fact, the voluntary sector...the ‘public sector’ is, in fact, the coercive sector.”

An assortment of low-cost private schools and innovative learning models with varied ideologies and approaches is appearing across the country. These are being created by entrepreneurial parents and teachers who are building the accessible, personalized, responsive learning communities that families want. You can read about 35 of them in my [case study](#).

I think one of the trickiest tasks ahead for the educational freedom movement generally, and the current school choice movement in particular, will be embracing pluralism. A dynamic free market in education, just as in any other sector, will have oodles of options—including some that we may personally loathe. While we can try to persuade others not to choose certain types of education, just as we can try to persuade them not to eat Lucky Charms and to choose organic oatmeal instead, the choice—and consequences—are ultimately theirs.

In a free market for education, defined by choice and entrepreneurship, some families could indeed choose schools that promote socialism. As libertarians, we should respect their rights to do that. “One difference between libertarianism and socialism is that a socialist society can’t tolerate groups of people practicing freedom, while a libertarian society can comfortably allow people to choose voluntary socialism,” [wrote](#) the Cato Institute’s David Boaz.

Our role as libertarians can be to help convey the importance of pluralism to a free, flourishing, and harmonious society—while championing individualism over collectivism. We can also remind others that a voluntary, decentralized education market will have a variety and abundance of choices, including some that we like and some that we don’t