

MY VIEW ON CHOICE

I became interested in alternative schools in the mid Seventies, as a solution to the question of how to introduce durable change and improvement in education, particularly through the restructuring and debureaucratizing of schools. As I began to observe and study such schools, I became fascinated with them as institutions -- finding many to possess a bit of 'magic' which later studies of effective schools, private schools, and school climate and culture have subsequently helped to explain.

*No specific
student
involvement*

I see myself as a scholar/advocate of schools of choice because I am convinced that the arrangement is good for children -- for all kinds of children, and in multiple ways; it is good for teachers, in terms of their commitment, accomplishment, and satisfaction levels; and it is good for schools, in providing a mechanism for rendering them responsive and responsible to their constituencies.

I want to emphasize, however, that I am not in favor of a system in which parents can find and choose virtually any sort of education, with the types available limited only by the discipline of the market. Two major considerations render that sort of arrangement fundamentally unacceptable to me.

The first is associated with education's purpose and function. It is not only parents but the entire society which has a stake in the sort of person each child becomes. While the most immediate claims obviously rest with the family, these certainly are not the only claims deserving of consideration. Thus, I believe a child's education should represent some sort of real accommodation between the desires of the family and the desires of society -- some compromise, that is, between majority and

minority fights principles, instead of the unrelieved majoritarianism which has (at least in principle) prevailed in governing education. I see no reason why such a compromise cannot be reached through decisions by publicly named and responsible bodies as to the parameters of choice -- i.e., the types of schools that will be acceptable -- and within these parameters, the design and selection of individual schools by those who will be most closely associated with them.

My second objection to the largely unrestricted market-controlled choice arrangement identified above is that it strikes me as ill-conceived. The market analogy yields a root metaphor foreign to the problem to be faced and one which is problematic in many ways. We ought to have choice in education because it seems perhaps our best hope for (1) meeting the diverse needs of students; (2) responding to the diverse legitimate preferences of parents; and (3) bringing about durable educational improvement. We do not need choice to identify the best schools for us, force schools and teachers to compete, drive incompetent educators out of business, or impose the discipline of the market place on education.

I am convinced that a carefully designed and implemented system of public schools of choice is the best way: to serve the nation's children; to render a pivotal public institution appropriately responsible to the public; to render a public institution appropriately responsive to those with whom it deals; and to preserve public education.

Grounds for and elaboration of these views is found in the articles listed on the following page.

- ✓ "Schools of Choice: The Resilient Proposal," SAANYS Journal, Spring, 1985 (for the variety of purposes which choice serves)
- ✓ "The Choice Concept Takes Hold," Equity & Excellence, Fall , 1985 (for a comparison of Excellence and Choice Movement tendencies)
- ✓ "Alternative Schools As A Model for Public Education," Theory Into Practice, Summer, 1983 (how schools of choice might be used to improve education)
- ✓ "Schools of Choice: Their Current Nature and Prospects," Phi Delta Kappan, June, 1983 (report of national survey and of how other research illuminates schools of choice)
- ✓ "Restoring School Efficacy by Giving Parents a Choice," Educational Leadership, November, 1980 (case for choice)
- "In Pursuit of Confident Education," Principal, November, 1980 (general requisites for reacquiring public confidence in public schools)
- ✓ "Synthesis of Research on Schools of Choice," Educational Leadership, April, 1984 (literature review)
- "Family Choice Arrangements in Public Schools," Review of Educational Research, Winter, 1985 (literature review)