

EDER 619.06 Discussion Seminar Summary

Hello everyone and thank you to all who participated in our Seminar #3. The Market Approach to Education is certainly an issue that raises many emotions.

I have organized the comments to date (Sunday evening in Canada) into four different categories: the perceived positive nature of the market approach, the perceived negative nature, the stress of change, and some comments made by David's invited guest, Christine.

These are some positive aspects of the market approach to education as discussed by our classmates. As with many things in life, however, the positives may not always be exclusive but impacted by negative overtones.

- Successful market education requires stakeholders to “buy-in” but some stakeholders are regarded more highly than others. On the lower end of regard are teachers and school leaders; on the higher end are government, parents and students. Some teachers are also parents, though, so they have choice in that realm.
- A positive potential of market education is that customers (parents and students) support schools that provide their desired product (and starve those that don't).
- Schools ration success so as to maintain their reason for being (i.e. have someone to educate); competition mitigates this.
- One of the benefits of the market approach to education is the variety of education offered to students as schools specialize. But.... this system must be equitable to all (i.e. by providing transportation to special programs and not limiting the entrance to the programs).
- Schools often fail because they do not have “healthy competition”. But.... will “healthy competition” fail? And if so, will “competition” result in adverse conditions for both parties in the relationship?
- Students should be regarded as “customers” more so than parents.
- A business model for education is acceptable but how many businesses allow their customers to set the agenda for the business or decide what is best for the long-term goals of the business? Why should parents be allowed to do that in education? Others believed that, indeed, parents “should” set the agenda for the schools until the students are able to do so.
- Most successful marketing is word-of-mouth by parents who are happy with their child's education.
- Choice allows parents to choose schools according to lifestyle issues.
- Vouchers are a way to give the poor, educationally powerless a chance out of dependency.
- Choice is positive and teachers must learn from the choices parents make.
- Marketing education can be positive “if” it is “socially responsible marketing”; schools need an ethical approach to marketing that is consistent with the school's values.

The negative comments regarding the market approach to education are summarized as the following:

- There are adverse social and spiritual consequences to market mediated education.
- If people are allowed to “shop” for education, what happens to those who are unable to “shop”? What role do teachers play in creating a fair deal for all students? What about what is best for children of all heritages and economic status?
- Competition may exacerbate poverty and under-achievement resulting in more disadvantaged groups. The costs of competitive education should be confronted before it is defended.
- Parents do not come to the market as equals; social class and ethnicity determine choice. There is a widening gap between the have and have not's.
- Is the market approach to education “buying into” the ideals of a corporate world and if so, will this eventually lead to education for profit?
- Competition is good but not when it comes to children and education. Parents and students may not know what is best for them.
- Marketing education must mean a profit is involved; this could, and most likely would, lead to education corruption.
- Why doesn't everyone choose? Because for some choice is not available. How long before we really know the fall-out from this market approach to education, 5, 10, 50 years?? Let's hope there are more winners than losers.
- Are parents able to determine the best education for their children? When schools compete for profit they can put forth an image very different from what the student will actually encounter.
- A teacher may find him / herself in a classroom in Sept. with no students. One teacher tries to ascertain her enrolment for the following semester so as not fall victim to this problem.

In discussing “change”, some comments were:

- Teachers in BC feel uneasy with the changes that are being forced on them. If a teacher felt more valued and in control they may be less uneasy with the changes.
- However, change is a constant.

David, one of our group members, invited Christine, an assistant principal to comment on the market approach to education.

- She told us how she sees the advantages of giving parents a choice. She feels parents do know what's best for their children.

And, in conclusion, from one classmate, “ The more money, the best equipment...does not guarantee a successful learning environment”.

Thanks again, everyone, and good luck with the remaining responsibilities in the course!
From your seminar 3 group members: Dolores, David, Ken, Alfred, Teresa