

of the existing generation, in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind (p. 98).

Mill argued that "an education established and controlled by the State should only exist, if it exists at all, as one among many competing experiments" (p. 98). Mill's worries sound very much like the concerns voiced by those who opposed outcomes-based education and America 2000.

A century later, economist Milton Friedman "put Mill's analysis into modern economic dress" in his 1962 book, *Capitalism and Freedom*. Friedman used the schools to show the terrible things that happen when government has a monopoly on a service. The service should be open, in Friedman's opinion, to the forces of the free market. In the preceding chapter we saw how enraptured some analysts are with free-market operations.

In Brief

In brief, you can say the following:

- The results of choice experiments do not provide evidence that choice is an effective way, generally, of improving schools.
- When parents are given the option to choose, they choose on the basis of expediency—usually proximity—rather than on the basis of strong, highly rated programs. Choice works only when the consumer is informed, and as yet, the "consumers" of education don't appear to be very well informed.
- In countries that have implemented choice, private schools have siphoned off the more able students, leaving the public schools with increased problems and decreased resources.
- Where choice has worked, it has worked not because it has unleashed pent-up market forces, but because the much-maligned government and school bureaucrats have struggled hard to make it work.
- Surveys that show large majorities favoring choice are often misleading because of the way the question of choice is put to peo-

ple. If asked, "Do you think you should have the right to send your children to a school other than the neighborhood school to which they are assigned?" most people will answer yes. But if asked, "Do you think that other people should have the right to send their children to your neighborhood school?" most people will answer no. In other words, I want choice, but I don't want it for you.

- Choice is a tool, one among many for improving schools. It is no panacea.
- As yet, no evidence shows that charter schools improve the learning of children in the charter schools, much less in the rest of the district. The jury is out on charter schools.

In Detail

First, we have to elaborate on the fact that "choice," although often presented as a simple alternative to "government schools," is in fact a complicated phenomenon. Long-time choice advocate (and voucher opponent) Mary Anne Raywid (1992) at Hofstra University has made a useful distinction among four kinds of choice or, more accurately, four reasons why people of very different political stripes have favored choice. Raywid distinguishes among education-driven, economics-driven, policy-driven, and governance-driven choice initiatives.

Education-driven choice initiatives base their calls for choice historically in the free-schools and alternative schools movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. These schools, often started with more enthusiasm than expertise, were supposed to free students from the arbitrary narrowness of typical school practice. The movement was given voice and legitimacy by two books of the early 1970s, Mario Fantini's *Public Schools of Choice*, and David Tyack's *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. Fantini argued that different teachers had different ways of teaching, and different students had different ways of learning. Different students also differed in their interests and in the amount of structure they need. It didn't make sense to force them all into a single instructional model. Tyack, in contrast, looked at how the system had become uniform and the

problems that such uniformity brought with it, especially in urban settings. Both authors focused on pupil choice; neither author addressed the issue of parental choice. Raywid herself has addressed both pupil and parental choice:

There is no one best school for everyone. Accordingly, the deliberate diversification of schools is important to accommodating all and enabling each youngster to succeed. Moreover, youngsters will perform better and accomplish more in learning environments they have chosen than in environments which are simply assigned to them.

There are many viable, desirable ways to educate, and no one best program can prove responsive to the diverse preferences a pluralistic, democratic society accepts as legitimate. Hence, the diversification of schools to accord with family value patterns and orientations is desirable (1992, p. 6).

Raywid's contentions assume that parents and students alike have sufficient information and wisdom to make wise choices. Free-market arguments rest on the same assumption. In some experiments, neither of these assumptions has been valid.

Education-driven choice is also the force behind a number of charter school advocates. People such as Joe Nathan and Ted Kolderie, both out of the alternative schools tradition, are charter school proponents who would ascribe to the rationales listed above.

The economics-driven initiatives for choice derive directly from free-market considerations. Currently, parents don't have the option of choosing alternative providers of education because of mandatory attendance regulations. The only alternatives available are private schools, which usually come with high tuitions and fees, rendering them effectively unavailable to most people. Like private monopolies, a public monopoly such as the school has no incentive to keep quality high and prices low. Indeed, it can use its monopolistic status to keep salaries high and working conditions undemanding while providing low-quality service. If a market-driven system were installed, good schools would thrive and bad schools would go out of business. That, anyway, is the theory. Reality is a bit more complicated.

Many people question whether the market analysis applies to schools. As Alex Molnar (1996) has observed in connection with charter schools, the underlying assumption of many free market advocates is that every human interaction can be reduced to a commercial transaction. Peter Cookson (1994) has written in a similar vein of the "commodification" of American life in general. In evaluating economics-driven choice, Cookson contrasts two metaphors:

The first is that of democracy. At the heart of the democratic relationship is the implicit or explicit covenant: important human interactions are essentially communal. Democratic metaphors lead to a belief in the primacy and efficacy of citizenship as a way of life. The second metaphor is that of the market. At the heart of the market relationship is the implicit or explicit contract: human interactions are essentially exchanges. Market metaphors lead to a belief in the primacy and efficacy of consumerism as a way of life.

Schools may not transform society, but schools can transform the lives of children. For too long we have viewed education as a contractual relationship. The nature of this relationship is made most explicit by market advocates who speak of "educational products" as though education were something that could be manufactured and consumed. Learning is not something we can buy; it is something we must experience. (p. 99)

Thus, one response to economics-driven choice is to observe that it is profoundly antidemocratic. There is nothing democratic about capitalism. It is an economic system that coexists with democracy but does not inform it. Indeed, the fundamental drive of capitalism is totalitarian: capitalists at heart wish to establish a monopoly for their products.

Raywid calls the third type of choice "policy-driven." For instance, choice has been linked to the policy issues of equity. Rich people already have choice, the argument goes. They can choose where their children go to school by choosing where they live. Vouchers would give poor people the ability to choose as well. In addition to equity, choice is often linked to excellence. This link is most clear in the magnet schools movement, which attempts to establish excellent schools

in poor areas to lure middle-class students. An assistant secretary of education, Mary Berry, once told reporters that magnet schools were a civil rights issue, not a school improvement issue. But advocates such as Ted Kolderie have seen choice more generally as a tool to create "the essential leverage for almost everything sought in the way of change and improvement in the schools" (Raywid 1992, p. 10). Raywid notes that this link is not always seen in real life.

Finally, Raywid describes "governance-driven" choice. Calls for choice coming from governance concerns reflect the worries of Mill noted at the beginning of this chapter. Schools under the control of individuals are preferable to those under the control of government because such schools are less likely to inculcate "official knowledge" in students. Stephen Arons, perhaps the foremost spokesman against this kind of orthodoxy, has noted that

by requiring that the majority decided how all children should be socialized, we in effect require that people contest the most intractable issues of individual conscience. . . . The current structure of education in the United States is broadly inconsistent with the values advanced by the First Amendment (1982, p. 30).

The problem was captured in a *Time* magazine cover headline: "Whose Values?"

From these multiple considerations and drives have arisen a plethora of different kinds of choice: intradistrict, interdistrict, intra-sectional (public schools only), inter-sectional (public and private), controlled choice (choice restricted by racial or socioeconomic considerations), magnet schools, postsecondary options (students can enroll at colleges at the expense of the schools), second-chance schools (alternatives for dropouts), charter schools, and workplace training. All of the above can be linked to voucher or tuition tax credit plans for financing them.

The above discussion summarizes the types of choice and the rationales behind each and shows clearly that the single word *choice* covers a multitude of activities. Choice also supposedly produces a plethora of benefits and evils, depending on one's position, and

before proceeding to examine evidence, we need a good summary of what choice is supposed to do and what its opponents fear it will do. //

Prochoice arguments include the following:

1. Bureaucracy will be reduced and those at the building level will have more autonomy.
2. Staff morale and motivation will improve.
3. Parents will be more involved because they are actively choosing a school, not being told where to send their children.
4. Schools will become more diverse, creative, imaginative.
5. Student achievement will rise as good schools thrive and poor ones disappear.
6. Making the schools subject to market forces will reduce costs and increase efficiency.

The first four of these arguments also undergird the charter schools movement.

Antichoice arguments include the following:

1. As schools are now stratified by residence, they will become stratified by achievement. A school can't grow like a business, and those that are favored by parents will be able to select the students they want. This will increase, not decrease, inequalities among schools.
2. The current distributions of students by race and class will produce inequitable choices and increase segregation.
3. Students served by existing special education programs will be less well served.
4. Accountability will be diminished. Standards might fall, too. Private schools will keep their methods secret and not divulge proper data about accomplishments or lack thereof.
5. Good information about the schools will be hard to come by. Schools will hype their programs and cook the numbers.
6. The common school tradition will be lost.

There is no way to really evaluate the choice or antichoice arguments in this country because most choice programs have been so