

Manley-Casimir, Michael (ed.). *Family Choice in Schooling*. Toronto: D.C. Heath & Co., 1982, XIII, 210 pp. \$28.95.

This collection of papers has come out of an international symposium called Family Choice which was co-hosted by the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University and the British Columbia Council for Leadership in Educational Administration in the spring of 1980. The intention of the symposium and hence of the book was to provide a forum for exploring many of the issues currently being debated on private versus public choice in education. Hence the chapters both reflect the philosophical, legal, and political issues that must be addressed and describe several current studies and court cases that exemplify the complexity of the topic. In chapters one through four, the authors provide a historical view of the family choice issue with special emphasis on choice from a freedom of religion perspective. Chapters five and six continue to debate the questions of whether public schools are religiously neutral and what their primary goals should be but these questions are handled primarily from a philosophical rather than historical perspective. In chapters seven and eight, the authors report on empirical studies that demonstrate positive outcomes of free choice within the public system while chapter nine challenges aspects of the free enterprise concept of private schools. Specific tuition tax credit plans are discussed in chapters ten through twelve and commented upon from a broader perspective in chapters thirteen and fourteen.

While the last two chapters bring the reader back to the general debate on family choice, that is, on the pros and cons of public tax support for private as well as public schools, they do not provide an analysis or review of the theoretical and empirical information provided in the fourteen chapters. This is unfortunate since the reader is left with many interesting bits of information but no framework within which to draw conclusions or to make predictions of future events. And while this comment is often true of books that are written by many authors as opposed to one author, the lack of an overall structure makes the chapters less useful to the reader than their potential would suggest.

In spite of the above comment, I enjoyed this book on several levels. It is quite readable. The arguments are carefully constructed, the examples are clearly described and the authors own concerns and biases are easily identified. Many topics present a challenge to the reader's own opinions. For example, is secular humanism a religious philosophy and does it pervade our public school system as Elmer Thiessen states? If so, is it to be seen as indoctrinating children into a belief system that may limit their freedom to learn and explore or may it be viewed as incorporating fundamental principles of positive human interaction that underly most world religions without getting mired down by the specific content of individual religious beliefs? Should we accept Cornel Hamm's argument for the development of rational autonomy as the primary goal of education and his subsequent conclusion that the public schools are the most competent institution to determine how this goal can be met? Does maintaining a public school system also mean maintaining a highly differentiated class system as Joel Spring suggests or does it offer a means for decreasing the economic gap among North Americans as Donald Fisher argues? These issues are well raised in the text and stimulate the reader to question his/her own attitudes about them.

While the book raises many valuable questions about the topic, there seems to be a muddying of the waters around the essential reasons why some parents want a stronger voice in the choice of schooling for their children. This confusion centers upon whether parental rights are not being respected on religious (i.e., social, spiritual, philosophical) grounds or on academic (i.e., curriculum and instruction) grounds. Many of the individual examples cited stem from the concerns expressed by a single parent or small group of parents about the religious philosophy that should pervade the schools and provide the ambiance or atmosphere within which children are best taught the skills and knowledge that help prepare them for adult living. Arguments for each side are often value-laden and very specific in scope. On the other hand, arguments for the use of public money to support private schools generally may speak to the establishment of schools based on religious principles but also speak to more traditional academic issues such as what form of instruction will be used (e.g., graded versus nongraded; open versus traditional classrooms; multi-age grouping) and what content will be emphasized (e.g., basic skills, vocational and technical training, aesthetics). Separating out the number of cases, legal implications, economic issues, and social issues that pertain to the rights of parents to choose on religious versus educational grounds would have helped the reader understand the extent of the problem.

Other issues not well addressed in this book include the generalizability of input from groups who have a vested interest in an issue to the entire population, the need for public schools to re-examine their mandate, and a consideration of how parental choice can be better accommodated within the public school system. Much of the concern being raised about parents' rights to determine their children's education comes from middle class professionals who feel strongly about a religious or more often an educational philosophy of schooling and from groups who have very strong religious beliefs that they feel should guide interpretations of academic subjects.

Neither of these data sources reflect the North American population at large. The extent to which they do and the limitations imposed upon our understanding of the importance of the issue because of this lack of representation from all segments of the population is not addressed in this book and yet it is an essential component of any thorough assessment of the importance of the issue. Both the costs and scope of public education have increased in the past decades. In many cases this has resulted in a further eroding of parental influence on children's education. How has this contributed to the growing concern about who chooses what for whom? How well have schools accommodated to individual parent's and student's requests within their present structure? These issues relate specifically to the issue of family choice and should be included in a full discussion if we are to evaluate the question from as complete a knowledge base as possible.

A final concern. While the symposium took place in Canada, very few chapters speak specifically to the Canadian case. And although one can argue that the issues are international in scope, the economic and political realities that impinge upon them are very national and therefore do not allow us to generalize easily from the American to the Canadian perspective.

In summary, I found the book to be a good, albeit incomplete exploration of a thorny issue that we are likely to hear more about in this decade. I would recommend it specifically to anyone concerned about educational administration, especially those concerned with policy and funding issues and more generally to anyone interested in better understanding a difficult issue in public education.

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## BOOKS RECEIVED

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- Weaver, Timothy W., *The Contest for Educational Resources*, Lexington, Massachusetts, and Toronto: 1982, 188 pp., \$28.75.