



6-1-1999

Learning From School Choice, edited by Paul E. Peterson & Bryan C. Hassel

Edwin J. McDermott
University of San Francisco

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Recommended Citation

McDermott, E. J. (1999). Learning From School Choice, edited by Paul E. Peterson & Bryan C. Hassel. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 2 (4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.0204172013>

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The dialogues expanded in the U.S. by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* hold out promise for ongoing structures of collaboration serving the intellectual mission of the Church. Many bishops have had a chance to listen and learn. Many colleges and universities have had a chance to see the Church's mission in a more intense way. This process, building on the struggles of the 1960s-1980s, seems to hold more promise than whatever juridical recommendations might emerge, as this study shows.

It is to be hoped that this volume will stimulate research that will demonstrate the positive contribution of Christian higher education to ecclesial renewal. It will be helpful to signal some models of ecclesial fidelity and leadership in the variety of traditions studied in this volume. Indeed, collaboration is not only possible, but essential for the churches' mission in the intellectual component of American culture for the future impact of the Gospel in our society.

The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by both reaction to the preconciliar Church and resistance to the Council. The 1980s and 1990s have shown reaction to the 60s and 70s. For the future the real question is how the churches together can support their higher education mission and how Christian academic institutions can find appropriate ways of transmitting the intellectual heritage of Christianity and human culture in an environment so much in need of this Christian and intellectual mission.

Jeffrey Gros, FSC, is associate director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

LEARNING FROM SCHOOL CHOICE

PAUL E. PETERSON & BRYAN C. HASSEL, EDITORS. BROOKINGS INSTITUTION PRESS, 1988.

Reviewed by Edwin J. McDermott, S.J.

The title of the book is the message. It discusses what has been gleaned from the last 20 years of debate on school reform; the arguments of both political parties on new policy statements; the countless surveys regarding alternative schooling; and the arguments for and against vouchers, charter schools, and parental choice. This book presents theoretical arguments and empirical evidence on changes in the country's educational system.

The essays in this book were originally presented at the conference "Rethinking School Governance," sponsored in June 1997 by Harvard's Program on Educational Policy and Government.

Learning from School Choice reports the results of surveys and evaluations in 87 tables and 23 figures. The text is divided into 5 sections and 16 essays by 24 scholars. The first section is an overview of all the essays, with emphasis in the first chapter on vouchers and in the second chapter on charter schools. The Church-state question is discussed in the study of vouchers but not in the charter plan.

The second section groups three essays under the title "School Choice and School Reform" to describe the educational theory of competition and communitarian norms. Public schools are envisioned as supporting the "common school" value of equality irrespective of race or socioeconomic status. Private schools are separate institutions, serving families with differing values.

Greene concludes:

The evidence from NELS suggests that there is no reason to fear that school choice programs will undermine democratic education.... There is even good reason to believe that school choice programs may improve democratic education as well as educational achievement. (1998, p. 105)

The third section speaks to the outcome of school reforms that are taking place in public schools using the traditional forms of parental choice, inter-district choice, privately managed schools (Edison Project), and charter schools, as found in four states.

The fourth section describes uses of vouchers in private schools in San Antonio, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and Cleveland.

The last section has two chapters which are most important when dealing with school choice: "Why Parents Should Choose" and "School Choice and State Constitutional Law." Gilles in the first essay writes of distributive justice in the conclusion: "we should rethink our entrenched practice of providing free education only at 1998 state-run 'public' schools" (p. 399).

The legal right of parents to opt for private over public school is...an application of the general principle that the welfare of the children and the best interest of society are best served by giving parents the right to direct and control the education of their children. (p. 405)

Who should read this book? Scholars should monitor the results of the surveys. Federal and state legislators should weigh the positive advantages of vouchers and tax credit programs against possible negative outcomes such as segregation and marginalization of the poor. Parents should study the various types of schools and decide which innovation strengthens their right to choose the type of education they want for their children. Philanthropists might compare their process of granting scholarships with state voucher programs. Boards of education should study the many forms of change so they can respond to the needs of their districts or states.

Learning from School Choice is a challenge to educators and legislators. School reform is not a matter of longer school days or more varied curriculum; rather, reform of education is a system of alternative structures which will involve parents through choice and teachers through a desire for professionalism.

Edwin J. McDermott, S.J., is a faculty member of the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership, School of Education, University of San Francisco.

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