spread of aptitudes at the beginning of the instructional period, since doing so improves the learning rate while minimizing instructional targets, therefore lowering instructional error cost, and finally achieving equality of outcomes. When the empirical results are compared across school types, Scott finds that the common school goals are satisfied best in the private school sector. Note, however, that minimization of aptitude spreads is the decisive factor.

The rest of the book is an attempt at addressing other schooling issues which are not of a typical production function nature. Here Scott looks at the politics of schooling using Hirschmann’s famous exit vs voice model (1970), teacher labor markets and choice and vouchers. The database on which this work is founded is HSB and the period 1980 to 1982. Although the data broadly confirm his theory and, on first reading, his discussion of the non-production function aspects of school appears grounded, the exhortation to privatization and to discussing the non-production function nature. Here Scott looks at the politics of schooling using Hirschmann’s famous exit vs voice model (1970), teacher labor markets and choice and vouchers. The database on which this work is founded is HSB and the period 1980 to 1982. Although the data broadly confirm his theory and, on first reading, his discussion of the non-production function aspects of school appears grounded, the exhortation to privatization and to using vouchers appears to this reviewer to be a stretch. Empirical evidence on choice and vouchers does not seem to point unambiguously in the direction Learning Capital goes. And although it is intuitively appealing to see the logic of narrow student aptitudes and their effect on learning gain, given fixed budgets, the reality of public schools as public spaces in the service of democratic education remains appealing and much more persuasive than aptitude tracking which is a core feature of Scott’s work.

In summary, with particular respect to the empirical part of the book, this is potentially an interesting contribution. The book is marred, however, by maintained understandings about aptitudes of minorities vis-à-vis whites, with the former displaying much lower levels than the latter. Scott must surely know that this reflects most unmistakeably the effects of rigid exclusionary and racist practices of dominant groups against so-called minorities. There is nothing innate or foundational in the spread of aptitudes and where groups locate on the aptitude distribution. Scott needs to rectify this clear disservice.

Additionally, the book could use some good editing. It has the feel of dissertation research without the polish of subsequent cleaning-up and reflection. Also, although the argument is developed using the standard techniques of constrained optimization, there is a feel from early on that one knows where the book is leading, and that this direction is unambiguously to the superiority of private school provision of education. This is particularly true of the central concept of instructional error with its implied result for narrowing aptitude spreads in school and hence student homogeneity vs diversity, so clearly expressed in the third hypothesis. Space limitation does not allow full discussion of this, but it is clear that this book leads in the opposite direction to seeing school as a public space for the development of common social and citizenship understandings. The theory of learning capital leads inexorably to student bodies of “similar and homogeneous aptitudes rather than relatively high mean aptitudes” (p. 60). And, “high achievement growth is caused by a low dispersion of aptitudes in a school” (p. 60). Third, even where the author becomes self-critical, the issues identified as needing further study appear often outside the research of the theoretical framework outlined in the book. Other issues appear to have motivated this work, while exceedingly rich and meaty issues well within the reach of concern for identifying and explicating the deep and complex topic of education production function study are left unaddressed. Scott’s work could potentially be useful if he were to shed his preconceptions about aptitude identification, and to employ his considerable analytic skill at the more micro aspects of the teaching/learning enterprise. I remain unconvinced that thoroughgoing marketization of public education will do the desired trick.

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References


Market Approaches to Education: Vouchers and School Choice; Elchanan Cohn (Ed.); Pergamon Press, New York, 1997, vi + 531 pages, cloth, $96.00.

The preface to this book states that its impetus came from Professor Henry Levin’s attempt to assemble rigorous studies on school choice for a special issue of the Economics of Education Review. All who have attempted to review such evidence know how difficult his task must have been. And yet it is so important. As states are debating and adopting voucher programs it is critical that we understand what we “know” about school choice and what we do not “know”. This edited volume, therefore, is a welcome addition to the literature. It provides an excellent overview of the issues surrounding school...
choice and vouchers. The breadth of issues covered is comprehensive and the views represented wide-ranging.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part considers both theoretical and general empirical effects of vouchers on student achievement, social mobility, and school efficiency, as well as an introduction to charter schools. Part II contains papers on whether private schools are better than public schools, and Part III contains studies from actual school choice proposals or programs in the U.S., or from Europe and Japan where private school tuition is (at least) partially subsidized. The book includes contributions by many of the luminaries in the economics of education. Unlike many edited volumes, the quality of these papers is generally above average, and they complement one another nicely.

In Part I several chapters consider the theoretical effects of vouchers. The essay by Levin is a classic that serves well as an introduction to the subject. Manski’s paper reviews theoretical arguments and also includes a simulation which suggests that not only can some of the theoretical results be ambiguous a priori, but so, too, do the empirical results depend on the details of the particular voucher program. The essay by West contains an important point often missed in the voucher debate: full-blown privatization of education (in which education is privately, not publically, funded) is efficient because it avoids imposing taxes to raise money for education and therefore does not generate a deadweight loss to society. He notes that because the voucher programs currently under discussion are publically funded, they suffer from the same welfare loss. However, he argues that at least these programs also increase choice and likely introduce more competition into the market for education and are therefore more efficient than the current system. Finally, Part I recognizes that competition and school choice can take many forms, one of the most popular of which are charter schools. The paper by Geske et al. provides a valuable introduction to these new and rapidly growing schools. Not only is the institutional discussion useful, the authors also present thought-provoking concerns that future research would do well to examine. As the authors point out, charter schools attempt to strike a balance between offering choice and autonomy while remaining within the public sphere which may be a difficult balance to maintain.

The essays in Part II focus on whether private schools are “better” than public schools. The authors and papers that are featured in this section are well-known and yet any review would be incomplete without them. Hoffer, Greeley and Coleman, and Chubb and Moe argue for the superiority of private schools. Murnane, Newstead, and Olsen, and Witte argue that given the quality of the data and the difficulty of correcting for individual self-selection, the results of studies comparing public and private schools should be cautiously interpreted. This section also includes papers that present evidence from Colombia, Tanzania, and Thailand. Although the collection represents some of the best work to date, it omits one of the more recent and convincing papers, “Finishing High School and Starting College: Do Catholic Schools Make a Difference” by William Evans and Robert Schwab (Quarterly Journal of Economics, November 1995).

Finally, one of the best contributions of this volume is the relatively large number of studies that present evidence from actual choice proposals and programs, both in the U.S. and abroad. Most of the papers focus on who chooses to attend a private school and whether it appears that increased school choice increases or decreases stratification. Unfortunately, the authors rarely have a control group, or a good measure of stratification before choice was increased, such that it is difficult to ascertain the counterfactual. Nevertheless, the papers provide useful pieces to the overall puzzle.

The goal of the volume is to provide a handy reference on some of the best work regarding school choice and school vouchers. The volume certainly meets this goal and will be a welcome addition to the libraries of all interested in the economics of education, in general, and in school choice, in particular.

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This edited volume consists of six country case studies and an introductory chapter by William Savedoff. Its intent is to redirect the debate on social service delivery in Latin America towards issues of incentives and accountability in organizations. Ultimately, it seeks to “[demonstrate] the ways that differences in organization affect performance, creating incentives and accountability mechanisms that impact on education and health conditions” (p. 4). A less ambitious goal might have been to simply acquaint readers with the many innovative approaches to education and health reform in Latin America, and perhaps spur empirical research in this neglected area. In this it succeeds admirably. There are three chapters on education in Chile, Brazil, and Venezuela, and three on the health systems of the Dominican