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Author(s): Stephen D. Sugarman

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1980), pp. 31-40

Published by: [Taylor & Francis, Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1050295>

Accessed: 10/02/2012 15:19

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Family Choice in Education

STEPHEN D. SUGARMAN

Should individual families have far greater control over the education of their children than they do at present? Should Britain's primary and secondary school system be bottomed on the principle of family choice? From both Labour and Conservative the traditional response has been decidedly in the negative. It is just possible, however, that the idea of family choice in education could capture the support of the vast majority of ordinary parents. It is that slim, but real, possibility that prompts me, an American, to put forward both the case for choice and a scheme that would implement the idea in Britain in a just manner.

THE CASE FOR CHOICE

The truth is that 'choiceniks' are a diverse lot. Some say they support choice because they favour parent's rights. That is insufficient for me. I am primarily interested in what is best for children, and thus a natural law claim for parent choice is at best a starting point. Others say choice will bring about competition, efficiency and thus excellency—or at least the most for the money. I think there is some truth to this. But efficiency to what end? The economists making this argument too often seem to think that everybody agrees upon what is wanted from schools and the trick is only to figure out a way to harness the relevant forces that will bring that about; and for that they turn to a market solution. Put differently, they conclusively presume that the parents' and the child's interests are identical. But what they assume is the crucial thing over which I feel one must struggle.

What then is the case for family choice? It has a number of steps, but in a nutshell it goes like this. It rests on the belief that there is no social consensus over what are the proper goals and means of education. I am confident that this is the case in America. Surveying the educational scene in my country, one finds that some would teach children to work, others to loaf; many exalt education for 'life', others for the after-life. Some say education is for responsibility and self-control, others for fun. Some hope to abolish schools altogether, others only state or only private schools. Some propose career education, others classical.

While perhaps Britain is a somewhat more united society, I see no clear consensus here either as to what the goal of schools should be. Of course, everyone wants children to learn the basic skills, but education is surely about far more than that. Besides even as to the basic skills I see, for example, from the 1978 Inspectors' report on primary schooling, that there is no more agreement here than there is in the United States on how to impart them. Should we have mixed ability classrooms or should we stream or should we set?

Should we use team teaching, or open classrooms, or small classes, or computer-assisted instruction—or not? Who can say with confidence? There are plenty of experts around who know what is best for children—but which one of them is right?

But if both the goals and the means of education are uncertain (or, as I prefer to say, indeterminate) what is one to do? The answer, I submit, is to turn away from the issue of *what is best* and to ask instead *who* should be given the power to decide what education is best for children. The answer to that, I suggest, is that in general parents, with professional advice, are the best deciders we (both Britain and America) have. Thus, I come to family choice only by concluding that, in order best to serve children, the parents, and not educational bureaucrats or individual teachers, should have the ultimate power to decide upon the kind of education to which the child will be exposed.

Why do I favour the family? Why do I think it is the better decider? Put simply, I think that typical families listen to the child, care about the child, and know intimate aspects of the child's personality better than do the other possible choosers. Let me explain this further. In the average family, the child's *voice* counts. Parents are usually the child's ultimate confidants and can usually sense the child's emotions whether the child intends this or not. They are accustomed to responding to the range of his or her desires. Besides there are typically two parents and but a few children to listen to, while the classroom teacher, by contrast, has two to three dozen. Thus, were families empowered to take decisive action on their children's schools, we could anticipate that the child's wishes would be given substantial weight.

The family also has detailed *knowledge* about the child that comes from prolonged domestic intimacy. Parents know what pleases their child, their child's aspirations, and so on. They may be inexpert in scientific diagnosis, yet classroom teachers too are not especially trained in even crude diagnostic techniques. While the teacher can concentrate, say, on the slow and confused and perhaps get to know them in the ways parents do, then the successful pupils are left to be known only by their objective skills. And, alas, the teacher's focus is more likely to be on the other group.

Parents also *care* about their children in ways that professionals do not. After all, objectivity, not love, is the professionally valued posture. In any event individual classroom teachers are often unable to turn their caring into action. In the usual case the teacher and child are simply assigned to each other. If the teacher thinks the child should have a different educational experience this is not only typically difficult to arrange, but also efforts to do so may jeopardise the teacher's relationship with other staff; and it is hard to see how this can change in a bureaucratic model of school selection.

To be sure, teachers or other professionals may have access to specialised educational information now not available to families. But this merely emphasises the importance of a thorough and efficient counselling and disclosure system in a choice plan.

Finally, let us not forget that in Britain as in America, families decide first whether to have children at all, then how to feed and shelter them—indeed, how to rear them generally. In fact, in the early years the family is likely to have the child all to itself. If it is so entrusted in those respects, why not with the child's schooling as well? Surely making decisions about the child's nutrition is no easier than making choices about the child's education. Since the *rich* are trusted today to send their children to the schools of their choice, why not extend this power to the caring non-rich as well? The rich, after all, have no monopoly on wise parenting.

Of course, in a scheme of choice, some families will make serious mistakes; but obviously professionals today do as well. Besides in a choice plan the state could play a back-up role, overriding the family's choice when its decision is demonstrably bad for the child. This is the way the child neglect laws work generally today.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHOICE

If this is the case for the *principle* of choice, how should it be applied? The simple answer is that the state should not fund schools at all, but rather should give all families scholarships (or vouchers) to be used by the family to pay for the school it prefers. At that level of generality the basic mechanics of the proposal are self-explanatory—the popular ‘luncheon vouchers’, which allow one a range of eating places from which to choose, are but one obvious analogy. But the broad invocation of ‘choice’ is not, I am afraid, nearly specific enough, for it papers over crucial differences among choice plans and choice supporters—which differences could lead in practice to wildly differing educational systems. Thus, while ‘choice’ is a banner that I have long flown, I am keenly aware that it can be used to cloak arrangements that I would very much oppose. For example the recent Kent study of vouchers did not examine the kind of choice scheme that I would prefer.

Let me turn then to some of the crucial issues that any choice planner would have to face and indicate how I think they should be resolved.

a Which schools?

Under a choice plan, among what schools should families be able to choose? A family should not be restricted to selecting among state-run schools; it should be allowed to use its scholarships at one that is privately run. This is necessary in order to provide both models for and refuge from government-owned schools and to make clear which government schools are failing. Nearly as important, there should be substantial choice within the state-run sector. This choice should not be limited to the schools now under one’s local educational authority; rather one’s child should be able to cross authority lines if the family thinks this desirable. Fortunately, there does seem to be a tradition of individual local school governors in English state schools, something that is quite rare in America. A choice plan could build on this tradition. But for choice to provide expanded alternatives within the government system, local governors will have to be given the power to respond to their customers. Under the open enrolment schemes that do exist today in London and Manchester etc. those running individual schools have too little authority to expand or contract, to change direction or goals and so on. Thus, over time, state schools should become autonomous bodies, freed from control by local educational authorities in a block and instead constituted like independent public non-profit entities with their own boards of governors, much like charities of various sorts now have.

b School fees

Should schools be permitted to charge fees in excess of the value of the scholarship? No. Participating schools should be required to accept the scholarship in full payment of their charges. The reason for this is *not* to prevent the rich from spending more on the education of their children than do the poor, for that cannot be stopped. So long as childrearing goes on in the family, private after-school lessons, summer travel, books in the home, and the like are but some examples of the extra-cost educational things that the rich simply can and thus will, on average, better provide for their children than will the poor. Rather, the point of the no fee add-on rule is to prevent the wealthier who participate in the plan from using their personal resources to purchase isolation from the poor in the formal school setting. Put differently, I see little to be gained by giving state grants to the wealthy in order to help them to buy schooling that the poor cannot afford. This rule may keep some families, and indeed many existing independent schools, outside the scheme altogether. But note that there would be pressures on both to participate. Users of existing independent schools would find for the first time that their alternative would not simply be the

local state school but rather, one hopes, many schools, including privately run schools, for which the state would pay in full. And in order to cater to families who find the financial differences appealing, independent schools that now cost somewhat more than would be the value of the scholarship, might well drop their price and join the plan. I should add that if one did want schools to be able to charge different fees, this in fact could be permitted within my 'wealth neutrality' principle so long as supplementary scholarships that would be used to pay the higher fees were made available to families for a price that reflected their ability to pay. I have elsewhere termed this sort of plan 'family power equalising' because it means that any family willing to make the necessary extra financial sacrifice, given its income, will have the power, because of the extra state subsidy, to effectuate its choice. The Kent study, unfortunately, assumed that attendance at private schools would involve the full payment from the family's pocket book of the difference, if any, between the value of the basic scholarship and the school's fees. Hence it did not investigate whether new, cheaper, private schools might be founded or whether, if forced to choose, existing independent schools would lower costs or stay outside the scheme. Neither did the Kent questionnaire squarely face families with the option of private schools at no extra cost (although it did inquire as to how much extra money they would be willing to pay).

c Enrolment rules

Should participating schools be able to control their enrolment? No. I would allow a school only the right to determine its maximum size. In short, 'choice' would be consumer choice and providers, like public utilities would, in general, have to serve allcomers. Plainly to favour the principle of inclusion over the right of exclusion means that while some will get in who otherwise would not, others will not have their choices satisfied in full; their child's classmates will be other than those who would get in were the school able to be selective. But it is to avoid having a child labelled undesirable, and to prevent schools (and groups of families) from deliberately excluding children from poor and minority homes that I would insist upon the consumer choice model. If there were too many applicants for the available places, admission should be by lot (with the exception of those who attended the prior year and perhaps siblings).

Unfortunately, the Kent questionnaire sent to independent schools did not directly ask whether the school would participate in the plan were it to have to abide by enrolment roles of the sort I propose. This is surprising because the author of the Kent report seems to support a consumer power model. Nonetheless, many of the schools responding volunteered that they very much wished to control their admission; this is hardly surprising. However, this desire in the abstract should not be counted so heavily. For how they would actually behave will depend upon parental willingness to forego the subsidy in order to attend an 'exclusive' school, and that is difficult to predict. The Kent study does suggest, however, that one cannot count on existing and successful independent schools to support the kind of choice plan I propose—for indeed they may be threatened by it. Although I would not allow selection on the basis of talent, there would be a role for counselling and schools would have the right to make their programmes as tough or easy as they wished. A word about each of these.

As for counselling, the idea is to have the family take advice but in the end have for itself the power to decide whether the school in question is one that suits its child (and thus, for example, whether its child is bright enough for the school). In order to help families make this decision, I also advocate the provision of a small grant which could be used by the family to obtain independent professional advice about schools.

It must be recognised that under a consumer power rule schools will, since they can set their own work standards, get pupils whom they would prefer to exchange for others on their waiting list. Therefore I believe that some protection within the school would be needed so as generally to afford the child fair treatment. I would, however, permit a school to require a child who was failing to repeat a year and, in extreme cases, where the child was simply unable to benefit from the programme, to exclude him altogether (after a hearing, and such hearings would also be required before permanent disciplinary exclusions).

d Regulation of participating schools

While many important regulatory issues would have to be resolved, perhaps it is enough here to say that I would impose very little curricular control on schools, that I would permit schools to have widely differing environments, teaching styles, hours, calendars and the like, and, perhaps most important, that I would allow teachers to be anyone the school chose to hire—in short, no licence or credential would be required. On the other hand, I would impose substantial disclosure obligations on participating schools, such as the school's programme and objectives, how well the children did (especially as compared with what might be expected of them given their abilities), on what the school spent its money, what are the qualifications of its teachers and so on. While there would probably have to be penalties for false or misleading advertising, I would not preclude profit-making enterprises from entering the plan as a safeguard against the risk.

e New school providers

Who might start new schools under a choice plan of the sort I have described? As noted above, conventional private enterprises would be allowed to participate in the plan, and perhaps a number of them would pursue the opportunity. Groups of parents seeking a distinctive ambience or governance style for the school their children attend—e.g. a 'free' school—might become providers. Groups of teachers are likely to be leaders in starting new schools under the plan. For example, if a group of teachers develops some new pedagogical idea and can find families who like the sound of it, the group would be able to start its own school with public funding and not have to go through the political and bureaucratic processes required today. Surely the growing number of trained but unemployed teachers forms an especially promising pool from which promoters of new schools are likely to emerge. Thus, in the end, family choice might benefit professionals greatly—if only the members of teachers' organisations could see that.

Another possible source of new schools is the 'minority' ideological group. Plainly there are cultural, religious and political organisations in Britain whose members feel that their values are not part of the social mainstream. These could be groups of feminists, socialists, blacks, Muslims, fascists and so on. For many, their children today go to schools in which the values taught clash with the values of the home. Some people laud this—the most frequent defence being, as we say in America, that common schools help stir the melting pot: education, in short is designed for socialisation into mainstream values. Those with other values, of course, can be quite embittered by this unwanted indoctrination, and choice would give them the power to make home and school re-enforcing experiences. There is, quite obviously, a danger here—but a danger worth running. I believe that the best hope for a pluralist society is to use the power of government to encourage its members peacefully to pursue their 'differentness'. The theory, of course, is that when minorities are given support by the society to pursue their own values, they will reward the society with their ultimate loyalty. Britain seems not to fear this diversity at present when

it comes to Roman Catholic schools; why then not schools run by those of other minority views? Michael Young, the consumer champion, has supported this principle—urging that the state finance schools that are far more diverse than those now existing

IMPACT

What might be the effect of the adoption of a choice plan of this sort? Choice would be most consequential, of course, where the parents felt deeply that the education needed was of a sort quite different from what was being handed out at the state school closest to home. The recent Kent study of the feasibility of educational choice suggested that about 1 in 7 children would soon be moved to schools other than the ones they currently attend. Whether this fraction would grow or decline over time is by no means certain. In Alum Rock, California, where a sort of voucher plan was tried out for some years, the percentage of children shipped out of the previously assigned neighbourhood school grew over time—to more than 20%. The proportion changing schools should not be used to measure the plan's success, however. For one of the important aspects of a regime of schools of choice is that current providers should become more willing to respond to the wishes of their clientele in order to retain their patronage. In practice this should mean, for example, that before the professionals try out something like mixed ability teaching or special classes for the gifted they will have to sell the idea to families rather than merely to the bureaucracy. The point is that we are wiser to let parents, rather than bureaucrats, decide whether their children are to be the subjects of experimentation or of traditionalism.

As for academic achievement, the greatest promise lies in doing more for those now turned out uneducated. Indeed, one main hope for choice is to provide schools that care about and cater to those rather dull, bored youngsters whom the state system is failing; in short, school leavers who now gain little from their education might finally find someone who stimulates and teaches them.

As schools are likely in general to be far more diverse than now, they also might be more academically differentiated than today; but this is not to be feared. First, it is important to emphasise that many families will want their children to attend mixed ability schools and classes (and so will choose them); secondly, any school that did set itself up to offer a course that was especially demanding (or easy) would have to welcome to it any child whose family believed he or she would benefit from the experience.

I suspect that rather few parents want to concern themselves intimately in the governance, let alone the day-to-day operation, of school. Hence, choice can help teachers to become true professionals with more control over what they do with their working lives; for, under choice, power will surely shift from bureaucracy and administrators to teachers.

On the whole public satisfaction with schools should increase as families that are quite displeased with what they have could finally go elsewhere without excessive costs. In many cases a change will not be made because of some grand educational or ideological principle, but rather simply because the particular child is profoundly unhappy in his or her current school as a result of the fortuity of personal relationship; this is something with which the bureaucracy cannot cope but for which the family is ideally suited.

POLITICS

a Labour

The main point to be made about the current policies of both major parties is that they reflect no clear counter-principle to family choice. To be sure, during Mr Callaghan's term as Prime Minister, the Labour government stood squarely for 'comprehensive education'.

But what does this really mean? As I see it, comprehensive education means that state financed schools (although not classrooms within schools) are to contain pupils who reflect the social class and ability patterns (although not religious backgrounds) of the area in which the school is located (although not the country as a whole). Along with this goes a general downplaying of highly consequential examinations—at least of the traditional exams—a de-emphasis of ability grouping (setting—ability grouping by subject rather than broad streaming—is the current favourite), and much handwringing about, but a toleration of, the independent sector. In short, the comprehensive principle represents a series of practical compromises which amount to little more than the idea that children should be encouraged to attend an American-style (i.e. all-purpose) neighbourhood school.

Might Labour be diverted from its preoccupation with schools that purport to offer everything to schools designed to offer what their patrons want? There are, I am afraid, a number of rather different hurdles to be overcome.

First, there is the reality of power politics. The Labour mainstream is very much tied into the 'let government and big unions do it' (or at least run it) mode. Thus, it is understandable that the party would shy away from something that the NUT so strongly opposes. The reasons for union opposition to choice, as revealed in the Kent study, decidedly include the traditional union objective of job security for teachers who are now in the workforce. Although unions cannot be blamed for trying to keep their current members happy, it is depressing to think that educational policies seem increasingly dominated by the best interests of teachers and not necessarily those of children.

Sensitive to this concern, Labour leaders are likely to assert a point of principle, saying that choice will lead to 'excessive' separation by ability and that this is *educationally* bad for the less bright. While this has a superficial plausibility about it, this argument ought not to carry the day: on the one hand, there is no good evidence that mixed ability grouping improves the academic attainment of the less able; and on the other it must be conceded that current comprehensive school policy already allows a great deal of ability grouping—because of both geographical-based school assignments and the reality of widespread streaming.

A more serious point of principle, I think, is the claim that it is *socially* better for children of all kinds of backgrounds and abilities to be schooled together and that choice will not do this. Of course, as I have indicated, comprehensive education as currently practised does not achieve all that much mixing either. Still, at least here the rhetoric of the more radical sector of the Labour party does present a challenging picture representing a clear contrast to choice. Rather than allowing families to sort themselves out among schools of different types according to the way the family feels the child gains most—producing, I surmise, some homogeneous and some heterogeneous student bodies—the vision is that government should take affirmative steps to throw all children with their differences in together in order that they may see what others are like, learn from each other, become more like each other, share similar values and the like. Simply put, the goal is that all children should share common educational experiences with a true cross-section of British society.

The implementation of this vision, I think, would require these *changes* in the current system of British education; (1) independent schools would be abolished, presumably by making attendance compulsory at state maintained schools; (2) religious schools, large numbers of which are now funded by the state, would cease to be maintained; (3) all forms would be taught, at least in substantial respects, in mixed ability groups; and (4) to the extent feasible, for the purpose of increasing heterogeneous student bodies, pupils would be bussed in and out of communities that are similar in terms of the social class or

ethnic background of the families residing therein. In sum, educational authorities would have to be charged with the duty of making all school experiences truly common.

In this view of things, family choice, quite obviously, has little place. Indeed, it should be emphasised that one social objective of those who would advocate such changes is to use the schools in order to eliminate many of the differences in children attributable to the differences in their family background. It is, in short, a commitment to a homogeneous society. I find it frightening. If one wants, say, a more equal distribution of wealth, as I do, let us do it with progressive taxes and better social security benefits. Let us please not try to achieve so much of that through the school—especially when it is so likely to fail.

From education what we need is diversity. With the growth of both television and the pop style in music, dress and behaviour, youths throughout Britain are now well exposed to the common culture. What is missing, I believe, is the opportunity to be exposed to organised experiences that re-enforce aspects of one's family background or values. Schools of choice might just provide this possibility. By contrast, if society uses schools to provide common experiences how can they but trample on minority culture and views, suggesting to those whose homes are atypical that their families are inferior? Moreover, in the end, without further drastic change, the hope of using state schools to turn rough-edged young stones into uniform and smooth gems is doomed to be disappointed. What would be required next is mandatory attendance at state nursery schools and then compulsory state child-minding. In a society with a clear consensus as to the role of its citizens, this is not an outlandish scenario. But in Britain today this is, I hope, unthinkable. Here the variety that comes from individually chosen lifestyle is something that is still valued and it is to an enrichment of that variety that an experiment with education by choice would be committed.

If Labour could only come to accept this argument, then its support for experimentation with choice might just be won. For once one believes that educational diversity is healthy both for society generally and for children, then one is prepared to try using enrolment and fee regulation so as to prevent an educational choice system from being exploited by the upper classes. No longer would Labour have to resort to meaningless jargon of the following sort that has been used in past debates: choice is only acceptable if it is choice for all and not just choice for some. Plainly not everyone can have his first choice under any scheme. The question is always whose choices will prevail. Under my plan, individual family preferences are given more weight than those of either school operators or groups of other families wishing to exclude them. Therein, I think, lies the social justice of the proposal.

b Conservatives

The Conservative's 1979 election manifesto prominently featured educational reform and in the last months of Labour's term in office much was made of the Tory belief in parental choice. Indeed, in the early months of her leadership, Mrs Thatcher's government has already moved forward with a three-pronged plan said to further choice.

One, local authorities have been given more power to structure their educational systems as they please—including, most importantly, the right to resist, even revoke, comprehensivisation. Two, in assigning children to local state schools, and especially in deciding how to deal with the increasingly thorny problem of declining enrolment, local authorities will have to give substantial weight to the preferences of families. Three, an assisted places scheme is being established whereby the state will pay the fees of some very bright children of modest and low income families so as to allow them to attend independent schools.

While some supporters of parental choice in education find this an attractive package, the Conservative perspective, as revealed by this programme, is very depressing to me.

The government does not seem to recognise that the logical extension of their efforts to decentralise power to local authorities—many of which run huge bureaucracies—is to liberate individual state schools by empowering school governors to make the important decisions for the enterprise under their command. This would lay the groundwork for real choice within the state sector.

For all the talk of respecting parental wishes, nothing has been done to make it easy for children to attend state schools outside the boundaries of the local authority. This is an important right for children. After all, what respect is being paid to an individual family's desire to enrol its child in a comprehensive school when its local authority decides to provide only secondary modern and grammar schools?

Perhaps most importantly, the assisted places scheme—arising as it does out of the 'direct grant' tradition—involves private schools with the state system in altogether the wrong way. It seems to assume that only the very bright can benefit from choice and that only independent schools provide superior education. I reject both notions. Moreover, as it will entice only bright children from the state sector, it thereby risks that state schools will become thought of as dumping grounds. I worry about that. The assisted places plan furthermore leaves enrolment control in the hands of the school—something I oppose. And finally private education will, in reality, remain essentially the province of the rich—an unnecessary and undesirable situation.

The only consolation is that the new government is presumably only at the start of its term and thus has time to realise that these halfway measures amount to but a caricature of a programme based on family choice. Increased Conservative responsiveness to family interests might be helped along by developments on three fronts.

In Kent the local council seems determined to go ahead—in stages—with some kind of educational choice or school voucher experiment. Favourable experience there may give the idea a strong boost.

Tory dismay about union and bureaucratic power generally just might be galvanised around public frustration with today's educational scene so as to make it politically attractive to take on teacher unions and school administrators over proposals that are seen to turn the provision of schooling over to the market principle.

Finally, there is now something interesting going on in California in America that could breathe a great deal of life into the educational choice movement in both countries. I will devote the final paragraphs to a description of it.

c California

In 1979 a group of American parents organised a political campaign in California that is designed to revolutionise their state's educational scheme. If the effort is successful, education in California would no longer be provided in accordance with the 'bureaucratic' model that largely characterises schooling in America and Britain today; instead, education would be based on the 'consumer' model I have described. What is most noteworthy is that this proposal is being taken directly to the citizens of California through the device of the people's *initiative*.

In America (as in Britain) the usual rule is that legislation is enacted by elected legislators. At the national level this is really the only rule; people elect Members of Congress who adopt the laws. At the state and local level, however (at least in a number of American states) there are two other mechanisms available. One is the referendum by which the state

or local legislative body submits a matter to the voters directly. This happens quite frequently in a state like California where many tax levies and bond issues (including those intended to finance the buildings of new schools) must be approved by the voters, and where the state and many cities are continually seeking changes in their basic organic documents, the state constitution and city charters respectively. It is the second device that is of more interest here—the people's initiative.

In California if a sufficient number of registered voters (now about 600,000 in a state with more than 20 million people) validly sign the proper petitions, nearly any kind of proposition must be put to a vote at the next general election. If the proposition is approved by a majority of those voting, it becomes part of the California constitution and as such cannot be changed except by a further public vote. Although used elsewhere in America, the initiative process is most clearly associated with California where its use for controversial matters has been most conspicuous. The taxpayers' revolt by initiative in 1978—which cut rates by two-thirds—is but one recent example.

The group pushing California's family choice initiative is comprised of persons of quite different perspectives. The chairman of the group, called Education by Choice, is a black professional man. Its intellectual leader is a law professor who is committed to policies which give the family renewed opportunities to have power over and to take responsibility for its children. Others in the group represent libertarian, feminist, and cost efficiency viewpoints. Some members have given up on the state schools; others see choice and competition as the route to their salvation. While religious school users are supporting the group, church leaders seem divided.

Gathering 600,000 valid signatures takes free labour and money. The combination employed usually depends upon how much of the latter is available and what sort of impact the type of signature gathering campaign that is used is predicted to have on the eventual vote. For example, there are professional petition circulating organisations that work on the basis of something like 50p per valid signature. Thus, for something like £300,000 a small group could plausibly buy its way on the ballot. However, not only is this approach likely to be harmful in the eventual campaign on the proposition, but also it would mean that the supporters would have no grass roots structure built up for the campaign. Therefore, they would probably have to pour enormous additional sums into TV and other expensive advertising if they hoped to win. Thus, in general, it seems desirable to attract into the signature drive as many interested citizens as possible. This is usually attempted through the formation of a coalition of both specially created and standing organisations that draw on volunteer labour, and this is the pattern that the choice movement has sought to follow.

Initiative sponsors must also attend to the sources of money and labour they receive. As such things are public, a proposition's image can be affected this way. Thus, since the leaders of Education by Choice consider themselves either moderates or on the Left, they have not wanted to be dependent on money from the Right. Similarly, as the group does not see itself as leading a religious movement, it has had to be concerned about how large a role Catholic school users play in the signature drive. Although it is too early to predict the group's chances of success at the time of this writing, it hopes to force the measure to a vote in June of 1980.

And that, after all, will probably still be early in Mrs Thatcher's term. Therefore if the California proposal does go on the ballot and gains substantial support from the voters, then perhaps it will stimulate the Conservative government here not only to discuss the idea and to take public soundings, but also to try a number of British experiments with a fair choice scheme. That is all that I, as a supporter of choice, am really proposing be done.