# Abstract

**Students as Consumers? A Critical Evaluation of Metaphors of Marketisation and Consumption**

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Marketisation has been a feature of UK political discourse for some time, with government education reforms since the 1980's involving a move towards market approaches (Williams 1997). In response to government pressures universities have increasingly adopted the principles of the market to attract students. One dimension of such marketisation is a change in language use, where the language usually associated with one context, the market, crosses over into other contexts (Fairclough 1996). Marketisation has led to the renaming of students as consumers and institutions as suppliers or providers.

Many have argued that the language of the market does not translate well to the work of universities (Sharrock 2000) and that market-place metaphors can harm the educational process (Eagle and Brennan 2007). The use of marketing metaphors has been deemed indiscriminate and inappropriate in the context of student-university relationships and the concept of consumerism has been criticised for limiting the lexicon used to refer to the benefits of education (Bottery 2005). Linguists note that the adoption of the language of the market implies an acceptance of the social values it carries (Goodman 2007) and that metaphor is often used to convey political argument and ideology (Charteris-Black 2006). As such, metaphors of marketisation require a more critical evaluation.

Svensson and Wood (2007, 21) have suggested that students start to view themselves as consumers as a consequence of being told that they are such on entering university. Sassatelli (2007) crucially notes however that we rarely ask whether people actually conceive of themselves as consumers. This paper therefore critically evaluates the underlying structures of the student as consumer metaphor and, drawing on discourse between students, examines student language for evidence that students themselves have adopted the consumer identity.