

ABSTRACT

Talking the Talk: Evidence of the Adoption of a Consumer Identity?

Beverley Hill, Bristol Business School, University of the West of England

This paper critically appraises the discourse of choice and what it means to be a consumer within the context of the marketisation of education. It questions whether a familiarity with such discourse and with the language of the market necessarily indicates the adoption of a consumer identity. The data is drawn from transcriptions of interviews conducted with parents choosing schools, schools having been subject to the process of marketisation in the UK since the 1980's. The analysis aimed to identify and explore the metaphorical and figurative language used by respondents in talking about their experiences. The findings suggest that respondents were indeed familiar with the discourse of choice in education promulgated by the UK government at the time and with their re- conceptualisation of parents as consumers. This was evidenced by the respondent's own use of the language of the market. Despite the adoption of such talk, the metaphors of choice used by respondents only partially accord with existing representations of consumption. The paper concludes that the language of the market and the validity of conventional metaphors needs to be further questioned as it has consequences for individual and social identity.