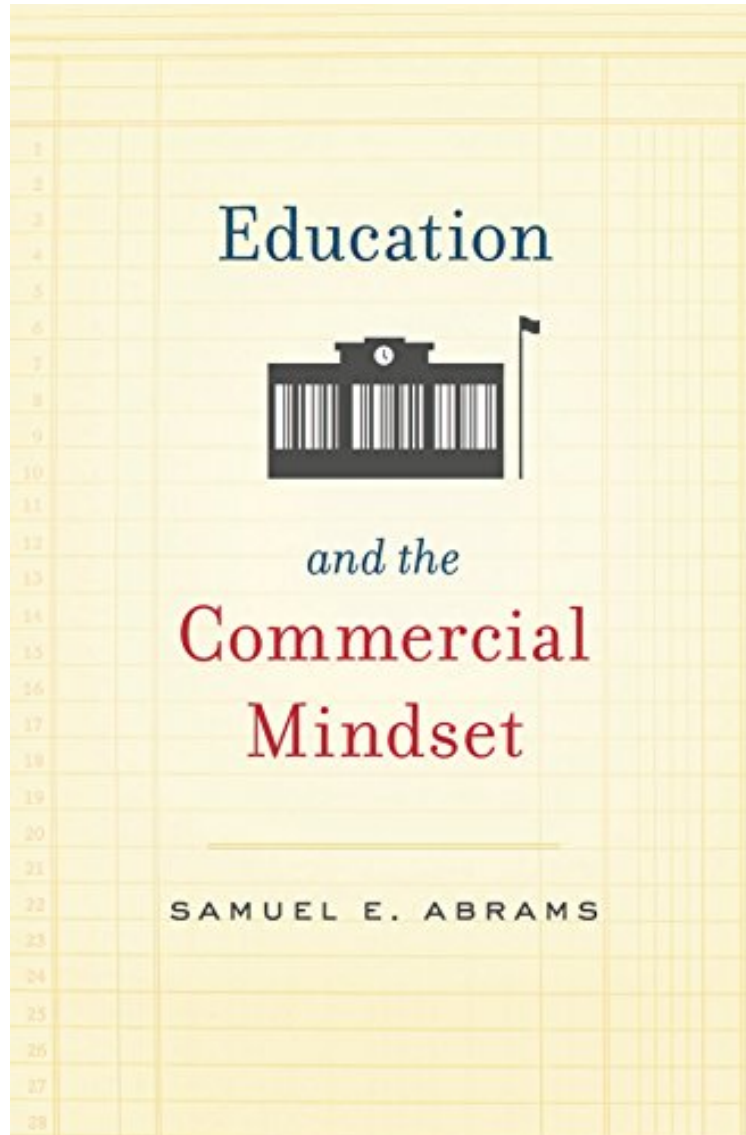


Education and the Commercial Mindset

Samuel E. Abrams

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Samuel E. Abrams : Education and the Commercial Mindset before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Education and the Commercial Mindset:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Papadad The best book on our current educational reform crisis. 13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Excellent. Eye-popping investigative reporting on the non-profit and for-profit ... By HyperZeuxis Excellent. Eye-popping investigative reporting on the non-profit and for-profit education initiatives of the past generation complements a rigorous academic apparatus of statistics, theory and international comparative analysis. Abrams begins in the early 1990's, when the former president of Yale (and president of Edison Schools)---as good a representative as any of the educational, cultural, economic and political elite

of this country---stated that for-profit K-12 education "offers the best hope, perhaps the only hope" for education reform (p. 17). Abrams tests the hopes of "market-based" school reformers against the fresh data of outcomes and provides the hard data, narrative, and prescriptions that will, one hopes, reshape education policy in the US and overseas. Highest recommendation. For policymakers, philanthropists, politicians, educators and laypersons grappling with the costs, benefits and pitfalls of government policies that are presented as "market-based." 2 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Somewhat Helpful By Loyd Eskildson Charter schools have grown from 2 in 1992 Minnesota to 6,440 in 42 states and DC by 2013. New Orleans became a predominantly charter school district in the wake of Katrina, the Los Angeles Board of Education decided in 2009 to turn over 250 of its 750 schools to outside operators, and Mayor Bloomberg vowed in 2009 to double the number of New York's charter schools from 100 to 200 during his third term. By 2014, 93% of public school students in New Orleans attended charter schools, 52% in Detroit, 44% in D.C., 33% in Philadelphia, 30% in San Antonio, 23% in L.A., 14% in Chicago, and 8% in New York. The U.S. is not alone in applying business principles to education. In 1981, Chile adopted a full-fledged voucher system. By 1990, 18% of the nation's 2.7 million schoolchildren used vouchers to attend 1,592 schools operated by for-profit entities, and by 2008 this had risen to 31% of its 3.5 million schoolchildren attending 3,118 such schools. Meanwhile, thousands of low-fee commercially run primary and secondary schools have opened over the past decade without government support across sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. As of 2013, 13% of Sweden's 1.3 million schoolchildren used vouchers to attend 942 schools operated by for-profit organizations, and Norway proposed doing similarly in 2013. Finland has rejected privatization, standardized testing, and data-driven management, yet also employed a mix of business strategies. With his Open Market Transfer Plan, Joel Klein sealed a deal with the UFT in 2005 to abolish the right of senior teachers to vacancies in choice schools and thus both empowered principals to make their own staffing decisions and shielded competent junior teachers from sudden displacement. In 1999-2000, NYC teachers taught four periods in a seven period day. There is nothing inherently wrong about employing a commercial mindset in making education policy. The Finns do, adhering to one of Deming's core principles: "The consumer is the most important part of the production line. Quality should be aimed at the needs of the consumer, present and future." Bottom-Line: There is some interesting material in this book, but far too much effort is devoted to covering the rise and fall of Edison Education, none to successful techniques of today's charter 'super-leaders' such as BASIS. His antipathy towards pupil testing is inexplicable - I suspect author Abrams would be the first to demand very frequent testing in airplane manufacturing facilities; further, he exhibits no understanding of industry testing practices - either by manufacturing quality leader Toyota or Dr. Deming, responsible for the 1970s quality revolution that even hospitals in America (but not schools) are emulating. In addition, Abrams fails to address educators' tiresome excuses for not learning from business practices - the most common being 'Pupils are not widgets.' Worst of all, author Abrams ignores educators' frequent deliberate and blatant efforts to maximize self-servingness and avoid accountability. Public schools' allotment of funds is made with little/no care for pupils - violating every recent research finding (eg. the very low value of reduced class size, additional teacher experience beyond the first 2-3 years, additional teacher classroom time/degrees, certification, professional education, advanced certification), while avoiding accountability like the plague. In my state, Arizona educators have manipulated the state's accountability efforts through pushing criterion-referenced testing (provides no comparability to other states or nations), and frequent 'updates' to those tests (precludes or at least hampers even year-to-year comparisons. As for my local school district (Scottsdale Unified), its last two superintendents withheld from both the public and internal awareness any awareness of its 11 years' worth of declining pupil achievement scores - until I forced the data into the public via a FOIA action. Further, they've deliberately minimized the impact of legislative prodding to reduce the dominant role of seniority in layoff decisions, as well as using value-added individual teacher assessments. (Thomas Kane, Harvard Graduate School of Education, has shown that pupils assigned to the bottom 5% of L.A. teachers learned only 25% as much ELA as those assigned average teachers, and 9% as much math. Similar results were found across the nation.)

The movement to privatize K-12 education is stronger than ever. Samuel Abrams examines the rise of market forces in public education and reveals how a commercial mindset that sidesteps fundamental challenges has taken over. Nevertheless, public schools should adopt lessons from the business world, such as raising teacher salaries to attract talent.

Given the near-complete absence of public information and debate about the stealth effort to privatize public schools, this is the right time for the appearance of [this book]. Samuel E. Abrams, a veteran teacher and administrator, has written an elegant analysis of the workings of market forces in education in his book *Education and the Commercial Mindset*. (Diane Ravitch, *New York Times*, 2016-12-08) In 1962, Raymond Callahan's classic text *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* argued that the goal of efficient operations had become a first-order priority in public education. Callahan's work is now joined by a new definitive account, the brilliant book *Education and the Commercial Mindset* by Samuel E. Abrams.... Abrams has provided a thoughtful, critical, and rigorous explanation of crucially important distinctions that will be invaluable to scholars,

policymakers, administrators, and teachers alike. (Megan Tompkins-Stange, *Teachers College Record*; 2016-10-18) *Education and the Commercial Mindset*, Abrams provides a detailed, informative and insightful account of the rise and fall of the Edison Project as a case study of for-profit schools.... Abrams demonstrates that for-profit schools have no incentives to consider long-term educational or social goals. Obsessed with achievement metrics that might persuade consumers to purchase their product, they often exclude students with cognitive, emotional or behavioral problems. Or with failing grades.... Running schools like businesses won't solve the problem, Abrams makes clear. (Glenn C. Altschuler, *Huffington Post*; 2016-06-02) [An] outstanding book. (Carol Burris, *Washington Post*; 2016-05-23) Grounded in meticulous research in Finland and Sweden as well as the United States, *Education and the Commercial Mindset* is a bracing assessment of contemporary education reform and its consequences. (Pasi Sahlberg, author of *Finnish Lessons*) Lucid, thorough, and balanced, *Education and the Commercial Mindset* is a riveting analysis of current education policy and how we got here. It will serve as an invaluable resource for policymakers involved in urban school reform. (David Rogers, author of *110 Livingston Street*) Abrams's book is the best, most insightful and comprehensive analysis of the modern-day efforts to manage schools like businesses. It is beautifully written and documented with careful research. (Diane Ravitch, author of *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*) Abrams describes eloquently the disconnect between the optimism underlying for-profit companies' efforts to improve urban education and the realities that their schools faced. He also describes the history of KIPP charters, their accomplishments, and the limits of the KIPP model as a strategy for improving the life chances of urban children growing up in low-income families. (Richard J. Murnane, co-author of *Restoring Opportunity*) Abrams provides a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the private sector's foray into public education. His analysis of Edison Schools, an educational management organization, demonstrates why private sector practices may easily be applied to purchasing scheduling software or contracting bus service, but why they cannot be easily applied to the management of schools where the purpose and process of education is much more complex and opaque. He also examines charter school organizations, the use of publicly funded vouchers for students to attend private schools in Chile and Sweden, and the application of business practices to schools in Finland. Altogether, Abrams makes a compelling case on the limits of private sector practices in public education. (Russell W. Rumberger, author of *Dropping Out*)

About the Author Samuel E. Abrams is Director, National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.