

**Teachers' perceptions of their role in educational marketing:
Insights from the case of Edmonton, Alberta¹**

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Abstract

Based on semi-structured interviews with high school teachers in Edmonton, Alberta, the reported study examined teachers' attitudes towards their roles and responsibilities in marketing their school, and the perceived impact of educational markets upon teachers' well-being. The teachers define marketing negatively and narrowly, resist any involvement of teachers in marketing their schools, and feel that working in a market-like environment leads to high levels of stress and uncertainty in their work. Yet many of them provided evidence of their contribution to prospective students' recruitment by promoting their subject matter in the open house. Theoretical and practical implications are suggested.

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The emergence of market forces in educational systems of Western countries throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Cookson, 1994; Oplatka, 2002; Teelken, 1999), including Canada (Levin, 1995, 2001; Taylor, A.2001), has led to more competitive environments for schools (Foskett, 2002). Educational policies and legislature, originated usually by economically left-wing governments worldwide, have introduced a wide range of ideas designed to hasten market processes within education by, for example, encouraging competition among schools through the introduction of new types of schools or by increasing the ability of parents to make choices among schools (e.g., voucher plans, open enrolment, charter schools). Key elements in this marketisation process include open enrolment, choice, diversity of school provision, competition among educational providers and demand-driven funding (Woods, Bagley & Glatter, 1998). Such marketisation has focused on making schools accountable and consumer responsive, providing parents with information on which to make judgments about the relative performance of schools and ensuring that funding follows pupils.

With the market comes marketisation, a process that is largely characterised by increased priority being given by school principals to the marketing of their schools, i.e., to school's image-building, intake recruitment and current students' retention (see page 4 for a systematic definition of this term) (Foskett, 2002; Hanson, 1996). The survival of many schools depends, by and large, on their capacity to retain current students and recruit new ones, mobilisation of resources, student achievements and on their success in making their programs attractive to the external environment (Davis & Ellison, 1997; Grace, 1995; Kotler & Fox, 1995). Indeed, it is evident that schools working in competitive environments tend to incorporate varied forms of marketing into their strategy in order to successfully recruit prospective students (Foskett, 2002; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004).

Given the extension of the teacher's role subsequent to the large-scale reforms in the 1990s (e.g., working collegially, implementing changes at work, being responsive to the community, comparing his or her own work with that of others) (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Helsby, 1999; Murphy, 1995), the understanding of the teacher's role and involvement in the marketing of his or her school is warranted. With the exception of a very few (e.g., James & Philips, 1995; Oplatka, Hemsley-Brown & Foskett, 2002), most investigations have tended to

ignore the personal perspectives of teachers towards their role and responsibility in marketing and promoting their schools, emphasising rather the essentials of the marketing perspective.

Based on reports of teachers working in the competitive educational environment of Edmonton, Alberta, one of the purposes of this qualitative study that explored the marketing behaviours of schools in this Canadian city was to examine high school teachers' perceptions of and, particularly, their attitudes towards teachers' roles and responsibilities in a school that needs to recruit students and market its programs to the external community. Likewise, the study aimed at obtaining greater evidence about teachers' actual patterns of involvement in the marketing of their schools, and of the impact of educational markets upon their well-being. This article reports the results of this inquiry.

An examination of the teacher's role in marketing the school is beneficial both on theoretical and practical levels. First, the study provides insights into the manner by which teachers interpret various aspects of school marketing as well as their own day-to-day practical activities in relation to these aspects, and the overall impact of marketing on their role as teachers. In doing so, the current study increases our theoretical knowledge of the extended role of teachers, their career perceptions, and recent alterations in their role perception and professional identity.

Second, understanding teachers' perspectives towards their roles and responsibilities over the domain of school marketing may help policy makers and school governors in planning the involvement of teachers in the policies of parental choice and educational marketing. Note that any policy that ignores teachers' perceptions of the impact of educational policy upon their roles and behaviours may fail, for teachers seem to be the performers of any educational reform (Hargreaves, 1994).

Market ideology and school marketing

Since the late 1980s, advocates of markets and choice in education have been highly influential in restructuring public education in many Western countries (Levin, 2001). For example, in the U.K., the introduction of open enrolment and per-capita funding established quasi-markets within the educational system (Maguire, Ball & McRae, 2001), and similar developments have occurred in Canada (Taylor A, 2001). Inevitably, the extension of market forces into education has not been without criticism, and there has been considerable debate

about the effect and desirability of this reform (Cookson, 1994; Lauder et al., 1999; Taylor, C., 2001).

One overt consequence of marketisation has been the increased priority given to the marketing of educational organisations. The literature on educational marketing first appeared in the U.S. and U.K. in the early 1990s. However, at that point it used to be theoretical in nature, including mainly books and papers which gave recommendations and guidelines for marketing the school (e.g., Gray, 1991). Only in the mid-1990s did an empirical knowledge base in marketing aspects of school life emerge in the literature of education and educational administration (e.g., Bell, 1999; Foskett, 1998; James & Philips, 1995).

Marketing was defined by Kotler and Fox (1995: 6) as "the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with a target market to achieve organisational objectives". It is considered to be an indispensable managerial function without which the school cannot survive in its new competitive environment, on the grounds that it is not enough for a school to be effective, but it also needs an effective image for parents and stakeholders. In particular, in its new market, the school is encouraged to carefully examine the needs of its clients and customers in order to meet those needs more precisely (Hanson, 1996). The marketing orientation seems to meet these expectations because of its emphasis on satisfying the clients' requirements (e.g., parents, students, stakeholders) by providing desired goods, services or experiences from which they can choose.

Nonetheless, studies conducted to explore the practice of marketing in schools, mostly in the U.K., have revealed that most school principals and staff neither hold a coherent marketing ideology and practice, nor do they employ a marketing research, strategy or plan (Foskett, 2002). Moreover, the concept of marketing was for most principals alien. Foskett (1998) has shown that there is a wide range of interpretations of marketing among principals in high schools and confusion about its relationship to public relations, promotions, advertising, and external relations' management.

In contrast, despite the lack of coherent marketing ideology and practice, studies have shown

that many managerial as well as organisational school activities may be regarded, to a large extent, as part of a marketing practice (James & Philips, 1995; Oplatka, 2002; Woods et al., 1998). It follows that many so-called marketing activities take place in schools in the form of open days, day visits, physical appearance improvement, prospectus formulation, brochures, service development and public relations (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004).

As noted above, a review of educational marketing literature revealed scant reference to the role of teachers in so-called 'marketing activities' in schools. Yet, what we do know is that in most schools the principal is responsible for the marketing, and teachers' explicit commitment to market their school is low (James & Philips, 1995). Most teachers are not aware of the parents' views and preferences and may even ignore these views in practice (Smyth, 1998). English teachers hold inchoate opinions concerning their role in school marketing: They expressed negative attitudes towards the concept of marketing, while at the same time they were aware of its importance to the school's success (Oplatka et al., 2002). Only in those schools that Foskett (1998) labelled 'fully motivated' did the staff express high levels of commitment towards issues of school marketing.

The reform of school choice in Alberta

Market forces, especially in the form of school choice, have been introduced in Canada over the past two decades (Bosetti, 2002; Levin, 2001; Taylor A., 2001), where several provinces have enabled parents to choose the school their children attend (Taylor G., 2002). Within Alberta, the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) has been a leader in the area of choice (Taylor & Woollard, 2003). For the previous superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools, the Charter legislation meant, by and large, competition between public, charter and private schools for student enrolment and funding (Doddall, 2001).

Since 1976, Edmonton Public Schools has been a district of choice in Alberta, with alternative programming and open boundaries that mean that parents of public school children are provided with an alternative to the regular program (Wagner, 1999). They are allowed to choose alternative programs different in terms of content (e.g., religion, language, culture) or in teaching philosophy within the public school system (Taylor & Woollard, 2003). In recent years following the Charter School Act and the long years of tradition of choice in Edmonton, the EPSB has actively precluded the outflow of students to charter schools by responding to requests for alternatives from parents (Taylor, A., 2001). It

developed 29 alternative programs, including Aboriginal studies, language programs, sports, science and technology, Christian-based programs, arts, Canadian studies and online learning. Some programs are offered in almost every high school in the district, while others are dispersed across the city.

Prospective students and parents are free to select the educational program and learning environment (including those in their designated school, i.e., the school to which they are entitled to register without meeting any standard) that will best meet their needs out of the 208 schools in this district. Interestingly, 45 percent of the elementary students, 50 percent of the junior high and 60 percent of high school students attended schools other than their designated school in 2001 (Taylor, G., 2002). In the materials produced by EPSB, there are guidelines for choosing a school. Students and parents are called upon to be involved in the process by making a list of interests and school features that are important to them. Then, they are advised to compare the information provided about the various schools that interest them by reading of school handbooks and visiting schools' open house, the Canadian term for open evening (Edmonton Public Schools Board, 2003).

Edmonton appears to be well suited for exploring teachers' views of their role in the marketing of their school because the emergence of competition between public, Catholic, private and charter schools and the emphasis being given by EPSB to a customer-oriented perspective (Doddall, 2001) may have induced schools to adopt marketing management procedures. Ouchi's (2003) comment, that a school that cannot recruit new students will simply close, and all the staff will be moved to a more successful school, although this has not been common in Edmonton, seems to support this conjecture. Under these conditions, schools are assumed to establish marketing mechanisms and techniques to attract students and parents to apply to their programs, and teachers might be expected to be involved in their school's promotional activities.

Method

The study described in this paper represents one part of a wider study of the marketing strategies and behaviours of secondary schools in Edmonton (for further information see Oplatka, in press), using a qualitative paradigm.

Participants

Six schoolteachers (two males and four females) from Edmonton were chosen to participate

in open-structured interviews. The teachers worked in public schools solely. All teachers had academic degrees, and their teaching experience ranged from 4 to 21 years. All but one were married with children. Their subject matters were Spanish, Art, History, Music, Math and Social Sciences. The participants came from the public rather than charter schools because the latter are found to be over-subscribed, with a number even having lengthy waiting lists (Bosetti, 2002). That implies that they are less likely to need marketing and promotional activities as a means to attract prospective students, as was indicated by researchers in England (e.g., Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995). In total, the six teachers interviewed worked in three different public high schools.

The participants were sampled in two ways: The author contacted the EPSB to receive the formal permission necessary for interviewing teachers from the Edmonton Public Schools District. Following its requirement to indicate the names of the schools in which the teachers work, the author chose three high schools randomly, making sure that they were located in different parts of the city. Six teachers volunteered to participate in an interview session conducted by the author.

Procedures

Open, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the author in order to expose the personal perspectives of the interviewees. The interviews were managed face to face in the school buildings or Alberta University, and may seem to be, as Paton (2002) noted, purposeful conversations where their contents and evolution were not defined a priori, so that there was some variation among the interviews. The contents of the interviews included the respondent's subjective conceptualisations of marketing, marketing messages produced by the schools, their promotional activities, and the teacher's responsibilities for school marketing. The potential implications of inter-school competition and marketing for the teachers were also considered.

The analysis of the transcribed interview data followed Marshall and Rossman's (1995) four stages: 'organising the data', 'generating categories, themes and patterns', 'testing emergent hypotheses' and 'searching for alternative explanations'. The analysis aimed at identifying central themes in the data and searching for recurrent experiences, feelings and attitudes, so as to be able to code, reduce and connect different categories into central themes. The coding

was guided by the principles of 'comparative analysis' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It included the comparison of any coded element in terms of emergent categories and sub-categories. Then, all the interview data were compared, leading to the identification of central patterns. The analysis was conducted by one person and the data were validated by peer review and structured analysis. The results of this analysis are presented in the next section.

Findings

Generally speaking, most of the teachers expressed negative feelings and attitudes towards the concept of marketing, concurrently marginalising its contribution to the school's competitive advantage (in terms of prospective student recruitment or image-building). Yet most of them asserted emphatically that teachers should not be part of the marketing activities held in schools, but rather increase the school image and number of intake students by teaching effectively or promoting their own subject teaching in the open house or in related events.

Attitudes towards marketing education

For most of these teachers marketing was synonymous with selling, creating a facade and immorality. While some provided a value-neutral definition of marketing, others lamented its incorporation in schools, and decisively attached little significance to its contribution to the recruitment of new students into their school. A female Art teacher supported an 'objective' definition of marketing:

Basically, it's getting your product out there, getting people to know what it is, getting them interested in it, and wanting it. So, it's kind of, you've got to get the information out there, you've got to get them to come and see it, and you've got to get them to buy it.

A female Music teacher gave a slightly different view of marketing, one that helped her compromise between her negative construction of marketing and her engagement in her school's promotional activities:

For me, marketing is almost synonymous with advocating my subject area.

Interviewer: Is it positive?

Teacher: Probably the word is negative. Advocating is a positive word. But if you were to say what do I do in my program to market, and what do I do to advocate my program, the answers are mostly the same. You know, I have boxes of research about why music is good for a student. I use this research to advocate, but my marketing is recruitment, my marketing is public

awareness...It just feels better to say 'advocating' for music.

The concept of marketing was grudgingly claimed to be indistinguishable from poaching, selling and even deception. A male History teacher drew a connection between marketing and potential slander of another school, indicating that 'often it can become "we have this, but oh, that building down the road doesn't" so now that building down the road will potentially be viewed by the community as lesser, and I don't think that's fair'. No doubt, for the teachers, marketing is embedded with immoral aspects and behaviours. Along the same lines, a female Math teacher ardently considered marketing to be in stark contrast with education, mainly due to her negative, narrow definition of the former concept:

...Education isn't a business. We don't 'output' money. I mean there's no way to make money. We are giving... we're facilitating points of view really, we're facilitating ways of thinking, and ways to extrapolate information from the world around us, not making money. So it's difficult for me to put marketing and education together, because marketing is about making money...If you have a child who is interested in this, if you have a child who is interested in an overall arts viewpoint – yes, come find us. But I don't particularly want to steal you away from the next guy, because it's still in my district, and they're still getting an education.

Clearly, marketing is subjectively aligned with selling, or in her own words, marketing is 'getting people to buy, or purchase, or buy into, whatever, service I'm offering', while education 'is about teaching whoever you have in the seat, at the time, no matter how much money they have, how smart, or what learning disabilities they have, no matter their background, their race, or anything'. This may illustrate the contradiction held by the teachers between marketing (as they understand it) and education.

Given the negative perception of marketing, it is hardly surprising that most teachers felt that new students will enrol in a school even if it less likely to market itself. With the exception of one teacher who was aware of the considerable competition with other high schools in the neighbourhood in which his school needed to participate, the interviewees were less confident about the potential contribution of marketing to recruitment. This is echoed in the interview with a female Music teacher. When asked whether students come to a school that does not market itself, she hesitantly replied:

I don't know, and we keep asking ourselves that. Should we test it? Should we test it? If next year we have this conversation all the time as staff members, let's say this year, well, we had it

last year because two years previously we didn't have those things because of the strike, and the argument was we still have students this year. Do you still have students? Yes we do.

Other teachers were keener to highlight the marginalised role of marketing in the school's image-building and its recruitment of new students. This is evident in the following quotes:

Interviewer: Do children come to a school that doesn't market itself?

Teacher: Absolutely, if there's a convenience factor there. The percentage of parents who send their kids outside their boundary is much lower...It's not that every single parent in Edmonton is running around shopping for schools... (female Art teacher)

I have a philosophy that if somebody does a good job, and the word gets out itself, like if you're an excellent person, and you've done a good job, you don't need to market yourself, the word gets out, and it might be that it comes from students who are here. Those are your best promoters for the school...We don't need to promote. I don't need to say I'm the greatest in the world...parents will send the kids here, because the kids will say we heard great things are happening there. (female Spanish teacher)

Despite the negative attitudes and feelings towards marketing and school marketing, it is worth noting that the teachers could specify the measures taken in their school to promote its image and attractiveness in the community. Among the major factors affecting a pupil's school choice decision, in their view, are the product (e.g., an attractive curriculum, academic achievements, unique educational programs, teaching quality), reputation ('they have some gang issue there', 'these are fabulous teachers', 'we have a famous football team'), student background (e.g., ethnic, racial composition, the community image), proximity to home, effective transportation, school climate (e.g., low levels of school violence, good atmosphere), and schools' promotional activities (e.g., 'road shows', open house).

Marketing is not part of the teacher's role, but...

The dominant voice among the teachers in this study was anti-marketing, in general, and against the involvement of teachers in school marketing, in particular. The teachers recurrently thought the school administrators to be responsible for the explicit, direct marketing of the school (e.g., public relations, advertising, promotional events), while indirect forms of attracting students, such as high student achievements or good school image, were perceived to pertain to teachers' performance and activities. Yet most reported having participated in the open house, a sort of marketing event in school, and a few had been

involved in direct marketing of their own subject (e.g., presenting their class in the open house, displaying their subject matter in road shows organised by elementary schools).

In this sense, a common belief among the interviewees is the denial or lack of declaration of responsibility or involvement of teachers in the direct marketing and promotion of their school to students and parents. When asked about the role of the teacher in marketing their school or in attracting prospective students, the six teachers persistently asserted that the teacher's role is to teach, not to market. This stance is evident in the following quotes:

I don't think [teachers] should market the school. I don't think that's their job. I don't think that's their role. I think that if you bring people into the building to talk to a teacher, and if I'm passionate about what I do, I'll talk about it and I'll sell it. Should I be going outside of the building to sell it? No, that's not my job, I'm too busy...if I've got 30 kids in my class I'll look after those 30 kids. That's my top priority, to look after the kids I have now, and to look after the parents of the kids I have now. I actually feel very strongly that the teachers should not be involved in the marketing. It's not part of teacher responsibility to recruit students, and we're not pressured in any way to feel that we need to. (female Art teacher)

I'm definitely against that. I'm definitely against that! My role shouldn't be marketing the school, my role should be to be a good teacher, the best teacher that I can be, no matter what school I'm at. Because I work for Edmonton Public, but I don't work for a particular school, and in whichever school I enter I want to be the best at what I do, and represent the school that I'm in, but I shouldn't be out there, trying to get people to come here. (female Spanish teacher)

While educational marketing is not understood as part of the teacher's role expectations, it is assumed to be the direct responsibility of school administrators or professionals in marketing. For a male History teacher, 'a broad group whose ideas are shared...if we are talking about open houses, it should be the head of department who is involved'. Similarly, a female Spanish teacher thought that educational marketing should be the responsibility of the principal or the vice principal. In contrast, a female Music teacher felt that school marketing should not be in the hands of educators, but rather be the responsibility of professional educational marketers. She loudly mulled over this issue and said:

...I'm almost wishing that nobody's role was marketing in education. You know, if not me as a teacher, then I'm not sure whose role it should be; should it be the administration's job? Well, their job is really more to ensure the running of the school people-wise...Then they have

discipline, which is a major function in itself. So if they're taking care of administration and discipline issues, you know, should their job be marketing as well? I'm not sure. I think we've gotten to the point where there should be a public relations person on staff.

Effective teaching as a means to attract students. In light of the above- indicated views, the teacher's role in the recruitment of new students was constructed not in terms of promotion or public relations, but rather in terms of effective instruction, strong commitment to the school program, or teacher's entrepreneurship. The interviewees attached great importance to teachers' contribution to high student achievement, new educational initiatives and the effective accomplishment of school programs and activities, which, in turn, increase school image in the community. Two female teachers illustrated this stance:

I think I'm more actively involved in recruiting. I don't think as a Math teacher you're as physically involved in going out and attracting students to the school. But I think it's still part of the job, in less direct ways, like one of the marketing strategies is to release achievement results. I don't think we're supposed to say that it's a marketing strategy, but it is. They publish it in the paper...So as a Math teacher, I would think that part of my job as a marketer would be to make sure that everything is in place so that we score the highest. (Music teacher)

A similar stance is provided by the Math teacher, whom the interviewer asked to detail the means that teachers could use so as to attract prospective students to their schools. She constructed a link between effective instruction and recruitment and attraction of intake:

Be excellent in the classroom. I think that doesn't change. Know the curriculum. Be passionate about the students. Be passionate about achievement and self-esteem. Know the curriculum and the program and learning and books.

Having said that, she added:

...I think that working with the current students attracts prospective students. I think that the work that I do now in the classroom, right now with the students, will attract more business in the future, based on word-of-mouth if those students are having a good experience, if they succeed at [school]. If they succeed in the subjects that we're studying, I think that will attract more students...

A slightly different view is given by a male History teacher who constructed an implicit connection between teachers' involvement in the development of new educational programs and the recruitment of prospective students:

...I know for example that at our school we are now running a local program that one of our teachers took the initiative to start...so a lot of times those types of small initiatives tend to attract students for whatever reason, and I think those things can help, and teachers will do that...

Teachers' involvement in the open house. Interestingly, but hardly surprising given Edmonton public high schools' need to compete for students, most teachers reported taking part in their school's open house, the central marketing event in many schools in Edmonton, despite their negative attitudes towards teachers' participation in school marketing activities. On this occasion, parents and prospective students are invited by schools to come into the institution and sample their offerings, programs and atmosphere.

The teacher's involvement in the organisation and operation of the open house has been subjectively justified by the teacher-parents interaction on this day, and the teacher's opportunity to manifest his or her subject matter and educational philosophy. In some sense, teachers' participation in this event is not related to marketing but rather to sharing instructional practices and subject contents with parents and prospective students. This kind of subjective construction is represented in the following quotes:

Now if we have an open house, and people are coming to see me in my classroom, I'm very happy to talk about what I do. I think what I'm doing is wonderful and I'm very happy to share that. But I won't, I've never been involved in a road show, and I don't believe in being involved in a road show...parents sign up to have a tour and administrators bring them through. So basically they come to our classroom, we welcome them, and once again we tell them what we're doing, and again it's 'let me share with you what's going on' and you'll ask a student to explain to them what we're doing right now...I just like sharing what we do. The teachers are very accustomed to being behind a closed door with our class, and any opportunity you get to brag about your kids and share what you're doing and talk about it, it's just fun, great. 'Hey, come on in and see what we're doing'. (female Art teacher)

... [The open house] is marketing-like, but it's more a kind of relationship with the parents. Like we're looking forward to meeting the parents and so they know who we are, and letting them know that they can come any time, and that kind of invitation, it's more like an invitation...and

it's a time to see what parents are supportive and he tells you 'you can phone me any time if my son is misbehaving', or if he hasn't done his homework or that sort of thing. It's that sort of connection, I feel, more so than prospective students coming, and being up there and trying to market [my school], I do not want that. (female Spanish teacher)

Note that the teacher expressed positive feelings towards her participation in the open house provided that she could demonstrate her own work without regard for other aspects of the schooling process. But, as long as their perception of marketing is embedded with poaching, aggressive competition and glossing, the teachers are not interested in taking part in this event, as the Spanish teacher commented:

But if it is 'marketing' for the purpose of 'marketing' I don't agree, I don't agree that we should play a role in that – I don't agree. We should play a role that in a way is tied together because if the parents feel that the teachers all have the best interest of their child, then of course it will bring more students here. But we shouldn't be trying, over there in the corners or whatever. But that's what it's coming to.

The interviewees were divided about the importance of their involvement in the open house. Some felt it was of great value for the generation of good school-parents and school-students relations, while others strongly felt that it was not something that teachers had been trained to perform. The next citations illustrate this contradiction:

As a teacher in this school my responsibility is to promote, and again, I'm repeating this, our academic standard, our educational focus, and the issue of safety; we're a very safe school. So when I'm speaking to students when they come to register, as I'm very involved with that, I stress that. To assure the parents and the students that we have a good academic standing, an educational focus and safety, and that they have made the right choice...we stress that if they do have a concern educationally, personally or career-wise, then our doors are open ... (male Social Science teacher)

In contrast, the Art teacher expressed an entirely different approach:

...If I had the choice would I choose to not have to do it, of course, it's not what I was trained to do. I was trained to be a schoolteacher. And so I approach open houses and tours that come through as just another part of my job, just another 'OK, I'm going to show off my kids'. I don't

think that if I don't bring in my quota, if I don't get this person convinced, that it affects me in the least.

A similar feeling is shared by the Music teacher, who was fully involved in the marketing of her subject matter, yet openly indicated that she would give up her involvement in this kind of activity if she could. Her story highlights the role of some teachers in recruiting new students to their subject, lest they become unemployed due to the small number of students who choose to study their area of interest.

I personally find it quite degrading, as a teacher, my job especially as a music educator now is more as a marketer, most days, than as an educator or as a musician.

Interviewer: What do you have to do?

Teacher: Well, almost everything I do is focused on marketing...my marketing job [is] to convince the students already coming in that they would like to take music as one of their subjects, because we are what people call 'optional' subjects, so you have your course subjects, and then you get to pick three more. So my job as a marketer was to say 'it's better to choose mine', right...we went out to the junior high school and we brought the jazz band along, because it was stirring and it was loud and it was peppy. We brought school pencils. We had stickers made up that were in bright, neon colors...If I see the stickers now I just cringe, it was a horrible thing, we had a whole recruitment plan, as a junior high teacher...

And in another place in the interview she added:

In a perfect world, what would I like it to be? I wish that my role in that was just to be a really effective teacher. I wish that that was my part of that. That if I do what I am supposed to do, if I am enthusiastic about what I'm supposed to do – if I've taken the time to have the knowledge, the background, that will attract the students. That's what I would like my world to be. To do my job as effectively as I can and that would be the end of it. I don't see that happening in my career as a teacher. I think, first of all, I'm almost wishing that nobody's role was marketing in education.

In sum, the teachers hold solid attitudes against the involvement of teachers in the marketing of their schools, but concurrently find their participation in the open house to be compatible with their commitments to interact with parents and students and to demonstrate their subject area. However, many of them would have chosen not to take part

in any of marketing-like events if their schools were located in a non-competitive, market-like environment.

It is likely that, in spite of their awareness of the competitive environment in which schools in Edmonton work, the teachers felt conflicted between their perception of being district employees and their need to compete with other schools and colleagues within the district. A hint of this stance appeared indirectly in some quotes.

The perceived influences of marketing and market upon teachers

A question stemming from the discussion of the role of teachers in marketing their schools refers to the perceived influences of their marketing-like tasks and activities as well as of working in a competitive environment upon their self and well-being. While only one teacher thought there was no influence of this new atmosphere and these tasks on teachers, all others subjectively constructed a link between their involvement in marketing, working in a market-like educational environment and teachers' high levels of stress. When asked a general question about the life and work of teachers in an era of competition, the Music teacher, who was very much involved in the marketing of her subject area, replied unequivocally:

I think it's very, very stressful, and I think it has many people questioning their career choice, and I've noticed through the whole spectrum, I definitely know that new teachers are seriously questioning what they're doing because I don't think that it matches what their goal was 5, 6, 7 years ago when they were going into education.

A similar feeling is further developed by the Art teacher who dramatically depicted the first encounter of beginning teachers with the open house. Taking an observer's stance, she said:

When teachers come to our school, and they go through the first open house experience, they're very uncomfortable with it. If they came from a neighbourhood school, chances are they didn't do an open house – or at least, not what we do. The first open house, they're very uncomfortable, because the parents grill them. It's almost like they're being interviewed. I'm used to it so it doesn't bother me. Some teachers find it very uncomfortable and they feel like they're being attacked.

Note that in both quotes the interviewees referred to other teachers in general. Yet, when they were asked how they are personally affected by the need to attract prospective students, those teachers from schools with low rates of enrolment were keen to show the negative impact of school marketing upon teachers' well-being and work. Two teachers from less-popular schools explained:

Well, I think at our school because of the declining enrolment situation there is an urgent need in cases, because we don't want to become a white-elephant school that the kids won't go to. We don't want that to happen. We don't want that stigma because it's very difficult to change that. And yes, there is that pressure, and yes, I do whatever I possibly can. But ultimately my priority is achievement, and I believe that plays a big role. (History teacher)

I think [that the need to market the school] is very stressful. It brings up another level of stress for us, when we have to worry about if we don't have enough students, my job is on the line, and that is a very stressful situation. For a lot of the teachers, especially for the ones who are focusing on one subject, I don't have that problem because I teach a lot of stuff, ok, but it is a lot of stress for the teachers and I feel that they put more and more responsibility on us, as if it is our responsibility to make sure that the numbers are up, and it's coming, make sure that they stay in the school, make sure the numbers don't drop... (Spanish teacher)

An entirely different outcome is given by the Music teacher who is relatively much more involved in marketing than the other participants in this study. She felt she focused too much on clients' tastes and desires rather than on 'pure' educational considerations, indicating that 'everything I decide to do, my second question to myself is "how will this look out [in a promotional event], what will the effect be?"' She continues and explains:

There are some obscure, odd sounding little pieces of music which, educationally, would be great for the students – but if I try to picture my group in the gym with thousands of teenagers, to whom I'm trying to say 'Isn't this cool? Wouldn't you like to do this?' If I play some strange, artsy-sounding piece of music and they don't like it, OK, so I'm going to change, probably going to play a big, loud march, it's got to have drums in it, because they'll love it then...

In contrast, the Art teacher who works in an over-capacity school consistently claimed that she, and teachers in general, did not feel influenced by market forces or school marketing, because 'anyone who wants to register can come in, so it doesn't seem that different to me really'. Yet, she is fully aware of the possible influence of market-like forces on teachers in

under-capacity schools, saying 'it's quite crucial because they could close if they don't have sufficient population'.

In sum, the interviewees expressed discomfort with the need to market their school. Yet, their perception seems to be strongly related to the position of their school in the market-like environment: teachers who work in high-capacity schools felt little influence upon their work, while their counterparts in under-capacity schools reported feeling high levels of personal stress and altering their role structure and subject content. This distinction needs elucidation in further inquiry.

Concluding comments

From an analysis of the teachers' accounts, a number of insights can be gained. Firstly, congruent with teachers in England (Oplatka et al., 2002), the six Edmonton public school teachers tended to reject marketing within the narrow definition with which they had been provided, especially where this definition was based on aspects of selling, poaching, persuasion and glossing. For them, marketing with its business-like definition is entirely incompatible with the values of teaching and education and must not be included in the educational institution, even in a competitive environment.

Secondly, while the six teachers' explicit commitment to market their school is low, a finding that aligns with previous research (Foskett, 2002; James & Philips, 1995), they attempted to demonstrate their organisational commitment through an adoption of a broader definition of marketing, which includes "relationship marketing" approaches. Put differently, the teachers identify their role in marketing activities as emerging through their obligation to promote effective teaching, a role that has been suggested by some authors (Gray, 1991; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997). This goes hand-in-hand with one fundamental, essential factor underlying the marketing philosophy: improved performance. It is assumed that educational markets will drive up school performance through competition for students and the quality of teaching will be raised (Foskett, 1998).

It is likely that a business model of school marketing is inappropriate and needs to be replaced with a more educational approach that is based on service sector or non-profit enterprises which are more similar to schools. In that instance, marketing might still occur, but with the school viewed as a public service rather than a private business, the student

seen as a child and citizen rather than as a customer, and marketing not so much as competition to possess "market share" and exploit "resources" as a sharing of information to match educational resources to student needs.

What has also come to light is the teachers' strong commitment to promote their own subject area in the open house, despite their personal aversion to having this kind of event in the educational system of Edmonton. Absurdly, this finding supports the view of Lortie (1975) and others that teaching is a low-organisational commitment occupation stemming, partially, from the loosely coupled system of the school organisation (Firestone, 1991). Thus, marketing is considered to be legitimate as long as it is 'harnessed' to promoting the subject area, and, even then, teachers refrain from attributing their activities in the open house to marketing. This is not to say, however, that their involvement in the school's promotional activities does not lead to high levels of stress and frustration. This interpretation and these experiences draw support from previous findings from schoolteachers in England (Helsby, 1999; Oplatka et al., 2002).

Finally, it is likely that the inclusive theoretical and practical message of this study is that in spite of the large-scale reforms of many educational systems in the Western world during the 1990s, and the concomitant extended role of teachers (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Smyth, 1998), Canadian teachers still adhere to the narrow definition of teaching which focuses on instructional and pedagogical tasks as the focus of the teaching occupation (Hoyle, 1980). In other words, whereas more focus is assumed to be given by the teacher to school organisation and to the wider scope of teaching interest rather than merely to the classroom, the Canadian teachers contested this view in relation to marketing and promotion, giving an impression that issues of the school as an organisation are necessarily not part of the teacher's role.

As it is less plausible to suggest broad conclusions from a small number of participants based on self-report findings which might be susceptible to social desirability and biases (e.g., the influence of the interview meeting, subjective analysis), the above-indicated discussion of the research implications needs further investigation. Canadian researchers are encouraged to explore teachers' involvement in the promotion of magnet, charter and mainstream schools in competitive arenas and to appraise the impact of market-like forces upon the teacher's role and well-being. Specifically, researchers may want to consider the

examination of alternative forms of marketing (e.g., relationship marketing, services marketing, service development) in schools, and teachers' readiness to be involved in these forms. Likewise, subsequent research should focus on the influence of competitive educational environments (such as that of Edmonton) on teachers' professional definition, satisfaction, stress or burnout. Special attention needs to be addressed to professional dilemmas, career development and teacher turnover.

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