

Perspectives *versus* preferences: a sociological model of school choice

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Research study

- Interviews with 137 families in the Parisian region + 23 families in London
- A majority of upper-class and middle-class families + a small group of working-class and immigrant families
- Study of 4 communities, 2 “mixed” and 2 predominantly middle and upper-class
- Provision of state and private schools with limited choice possibilities in the state sector but some “entrepreneurial” state local schools in each area

Four types of choices

- Choice of a private school
- Choice of an out-of-sector public school
- Residential choices
- “Colonization” of the local school

Sociological Foundations

- A common theoretical perspective: Weberian social closure theory
 - Parkin, Murphy
 - Collins, Bourdieu
- Drawing on various sociological approaches
 - 'Weberian' rational choice
 - Neo-institutionalism
 - Approaches focusing on trust
 - Approaches focusing on social capital
- And using literature from different sociological domains
 - Social class
 - Education
 - Family
 - Urban sociology
 - Organisational and economic sociology
 - Policy sociology

A global sociological model of school choice

- Socially-situated individual perspectives
 - Interests
 - Aims
 - Values
 - Beliefs
 - Resources
- Local mediations of judgments and actions
 - Networks
 - Markets
 - Hierarchies

Class-based interests

- Upper-class status groups
 - Stability: Reproduction of *status quo*
 - Change and crisis: usurpatory strategies towards other upper-class groups + exclusionary strategies towards middle-class, if necessary working-class groups
- Middle-class status groups
 - Stability and expansion: Focus on usurpatory strategies towards upper-class groups
 - Change and crisis: Reproduction of *status quo* + focus on exclusionary strategies towards other middle-class and working-class groups

Individual aims

- Reflexive = maintain or increase the intrinsic and extrinsic value of the educational encounter for individual and social critical citizenship
- Utilitarian = maintain or increase the exchange value of educational goods in further educational markets and in the labour market
- Expressive = maintain or increase the intrinsic value of the educational experience for personal well-being and happiness

Collective values

- Integration

- As integration into socially closed status groups
- Implying some degree of social or ethnic mix

- Equality

- Equality of opportunity based on academic merit
- Including some degree of attention to “adverse social circumstances”

Beliefs on schools and children

- Schools

- Almost exclusive impact of social mix
- Some room for “school effects”

- Children

- Strongly influenced by school environments
- Capable of resisting to school environments

Resources

- Economic
 - High/low
- Cultural
 - High/low
 - Technical effectiveness/autonomy of ideas
 - Time to activate them/little time to activate them
- Social
 - Individual
 - Collective
 - Exclusive
 - Inclusive

Findings and interpretations

- Three categories
- Using different choice strategies
- With different perspectives

1. Upper-class « technocrats »

- Residential choice and choice of private schools
- Reproduction but usurpatory strategies on an international level
- Utilitarian and expressive aims (emphasis on intellectual capital + distinctiveness)
- Integration into status groups + equality of opportunity
- Strong belief on social mix and its bad influence on children in the public sector + belief in positive effects and school mix and effects in the private sector
- Growing importance of transformation of economic capital allied into cultural capital + some influence of individual social capital

2. Upper and middle-class « intellectuals »

- Choice of out-of-sector public schools and « colonization » of local public schools
- Reproduction strategies + exclusionary strategies towards other middle-class and towards working-class groups
- Less emphasis on reflexive and more on instrumental or expressive aims
- Less tolerance towards social and ethnic mix + acceptance of positive discrimination if based on merit and on an individual basis
- Loss of faith in « school effects » in the public sector but belief in their children's intellectual autonomy
- Use of « intensive cultural mothering » + exclusive and sometimes inclusive social capital

3. Declining private sector middle-class employees

- Some residential and private school choices
- Exclusionary strategies towards working-class groups
- Instrumental and expressive aims (good instruction + « protected » schools)
- Less tolerance towards social and ethnic mix + ambiguous attitude towards positive discrimination
- Loss of faith in « school effects » in the public sector and strong belief on environmental influences on children
- Limited use of economic and cultural capital