Urban Rev (2008) 40:227–246
DOI 10.1007/s11256-008-0084-z

Ecology in Educational Theory: Thoughts on Stratification, Social Mobility & Proximal Capital

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Published online: 13 February 2008

Abstract This article examines how variation in educational outcomes according to "place," or one's geographic environment, has been explained in educational theory. In a critical review of functional, conflict, cultural and institutional theory in education, the author describes the disciplinary perspectives and research that leave the mechanisms of student differentiation according to place largely undeveloped. By introducing two related concepts of endogenous capital, the author articulates macro- and micro-level systems of social mobility between and within schools according to place. The author contends the social organization and functioning of schools mirror and support the larger structure of place-based stratification in that they sort and allocate students into places within school that differentiate one's ability to convert the resources of the environment into social mobility.

Keywords Place · Ecology · Stratification · Theory · Capital

Introduction

The importance of place as an axis of social differentiation in our society increases as the distribution of capital among places becomes more inequitable. The number of areas of concentrated poverty more than doubled in recent decades as demand-side changes in the economic structure of our large cities altered the landscape of opportunity (Acs and Danziger 1993; Blank 1996). Economic segregation in our country is on the rise (Benabou 1996; Massey and Fischer 2003) with corresponding increases in the inequitable distribution of human capital and educational credentials. For example, the largest achievement gap documented by the National

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Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is not according to race, or family socioeconomic status, but along the dimension of place. Large test-score disparities exist between children of the urban fringe and the relatively disadvantaged inner-city for all age groups (Mullis et al. 1991). These rather dramatic differences in the provision of opportunity across places make the subject of ecological stratification essential to an understanding of social life.

Constructing a theory of place in education that accounts for the aforementioned social phenomena presupposes a few points of departure from established educational theory. First, I suggest we consider and then revise our thinking concerning the nature of the educational system, from where it receives its direction to fulfill its social purpose, and finally its axis of differentiation or its primary means of achieving and reproducing social stratification. Second, there has to be a diminishment of the field's preoccupation with the individual and individualistic conceptualizations of social class, extending from an emphasis placed on a set of hierarchical relations, namely individuals within opportunity structures and individuals within institutions, and an indifference to the lateral associations that construct additional structures through which social mobility is negotiated. Hence the association, rather than the individual, is the impetus of social organization of importance to a theory of place. Third and subsequently, there is a need for a conceptualization of capital that represents the social mobility one experiences beyond the measure of that which is secured by individual level capital and explains differences in the social mobility of those of a similar social class but wholly different social class associations. Finally, the misnomer that ecology is a social force having relevance only outside of school must be supplanted with an understanding of schools as agents entrusted to finish the allocation of individuals into associations consistent with the prevailing demography of capital and reliant on ecological stratification as a means of its achievement.

Revisiting Educational Theories

Functional & Conflict Theories

A consideration and revision of educational theory begins with the earlier theories, functional theories. Functionalists argued the occupational structure's need for skilled labor provided a mandate for educational institutions to test, sort and allocate individuals into occupations according to ability (Sorokin 1959) and achievement (Parson 1959). Though the efficiency of schools in accomplishing this goal was doubted by other scholars (Clark 1960), what remains clear is that functional theories placed greater emphasis on the contribution of school outputs to the occupational structure and less on the contribution of social inputs, such as environmental resources, to school-based systems of student differentiation. The natural endowments of the learner and the family seemed to be the only source of educational "materials" on which schools and their processes of differentiation relied (Sorokin 1959; Parson 1959).

A common feature of the top-down functional perspective was a somewhat simplified conceptualization of the opportunity structure, often appearing static with little variability in its occupational structure across contexts. Decades prior to the emergence of educational stratification theory, Park (1925) argued the technical organization of the city uniquely demanded "exceptional skill" requiring "special preparation" and "called into existence the trade and professional schools, and finally bureaus for vocational guidance" (p. 13). If the demands of the occupational structure in fact shaped city schools to perform a complementary social function as Park suggests, then rural schools were likely formed to comply with vastly different structural needs than city schools. These realities however did not compel early educational theorists to acknowledge the contextual nature of educational opportunity and social mobility in relation to occupations that varied across contexts in their economic, cultural and symbolic sanctions.

The functionalists' intrigue with the demands of the macroeconomic system becomes especially puzzling given the obvious "bottom-up" features of school organization and governance. Schools within neighborhoods often were an extension of their neighborhoods—in composition and quality—that according to the earliest ecological studies (DuBois 1899) varied significantly in socioeconomic status, race, and according to the structure of economic opportunity. For example, recall the segregated and crowded black belt of Chicago in the 1930s had equally segregated and crowded schools. Of the fifteen Chicago schools having multiple shifts, thirteen were located in the black belt (Drake and Cayton 1945). Obvious differences in the demography of educational opportunity across communities persisted into contemporary times (Orfield 1992) as the Chicago leadership elected to extend segregation into the sky through the construction of immense high-rise housing projects in black communities (Venkatesh 2000).

Such observations underscore the importance of bottom-up processes such as the demographic organization of neighborhood schools, whether de jure or de facto in nature, to the efficiency of institutional processes. With the influence of place unacknowledged in early educational theories, schools are bequeathed the task of sorting children from families whose neighboring has no social explanation, as if families have been organized into residential groups randomly. Functional theory appropriately identified the family as a source of variation in society's distributive processes, yet it did not fully consider how and why families are situated and subsequently how the sorting function of families is preceded by ecological processes that increased the more homogenous grouping of families according to social class and in doing so, also the efficiency of the processes of differentiation within schools.

The functional conception of schooling became less persuasive as the social unrest of the 1960s compelled the field to take notice of educational disparities according to ascriptive traits. Hence, a new contending and largely bottom-up view of educational systems emerged that identified ascriptive traits rather than ability as fuels for social mobility and relied on the aggregation of individual level outcomes according to those traits to substantiate claims about the mechanisms of differentiation within the educational system. Hence social mobility was not a "natural" outcome of a meritocratic system but rather a product of struggles among

Weberian status groups that were organized according to their ascriptive traits and vying for advancement within the educational system. Collins (1977) argued "the power of 'ascribed' groups may be the *prime* [italics his] basis of selection in all organizations" making the top-down demands of the macroeconomic structure for technical skills a secondary criterion dependent on the balance of power among contending status groups (p. 125).

Of course there were other competing perspectives within conflict theory. Bowles and Gintis (1976) had advanced a more functional yet Neo-Marxist understanding of schooling that relied heavily on the socializing influence of social class on children through the functioning of families and schools. Capitalists socialized their employees in a fashion that ensured workers' dedication to a life of labor, and in doing so guaranteed profit generation and the maintenance of the stratified class structure in the interests of the elite. Workers in turn rather unconsciously socialized youth through child rearing practices and education to meet the demands of the occupational structure for appropriately socialized workers. Despite the presumption of conflict between the lower socioeconomic strata and the elite, the agency of the former did little to change the inevitability of their children growing up to fill working class occupations.

The work of Bowles and Gintis (1976) received much attention and soon came to represent the vanguard of conflict theory. Its support of a theory of place was nonetheless limited by its essentialized opportunity structure that like earlier functional theory and the Weberian conflict perspective, did not attend to variation in the economic forces that organize areas, including their mobility structures and to a degree the behaviors of their inhabitants. However, the potential creation of a niche for the consideration of place is more tenable in the Neo-Weberian perspective in that its acknowledgement of status groups and their ability to reflect social characteristics apart from class avoids the obstinate preoccupation of some Neo-Marxists with the individual and her purely economic precursors of social mobility. Weber enumerated multiple sources giving rise to status groups including differences in life situations extending from geographic origin.[1] Though alternative sources of status group formation were acknowledged by Collins (1977), the heavy investment of the field in the Neo-Marxist class perspective left a Neo-Weberian theory of place undeveloped.

Cultural Capital & its Demography

Along with the domains of ability and achievement identified by the functionalists and ascriptive traits offered by the conflict theorists another perspective identified culture as the social phenomena responsible for social mobility (Karabel and Halsey 1977). In his account of social mobility through schooling, Bourdieu (1977a) argued educational institutions are entrusted with the intergenerational transmission of

[1] Sociologists of education were not the only ones to overlook the applicability of Weber. Blau and Duncan (1967) contend sociologists in community and urban studies also overlooked the applicability of Weberian status group theory in explanations of differentiation within communities (pp. 5–6).

cultural knowledge which reflects society's greatest cultural products or "high culture." Those born into economically advantaged families receive through rearing the instruments needed to appropriate the knowledge transmitted in schools and those lacking capital and the cultivation of the requisite cultural tools unfortunately depend on schools to cultivate these dispositions, which according to Bourdieu (1977a) only transmit culture not the instruments for its appropriation. One's inculcated cultural disposition or cultural capital then was the primary agent responsible for social mobility.

Bourdieu's writing moved the field closer to the consideration of place in that unlike early sociological theory, which tended to simplify or avoid detailed conceptualizations of the opportunity structure, it suggested types of knowledge that differ in their reflection of dominant culture correspond to certain occupations within the stratified economic structure. The least dominant form of cultural capital reflected knowledge commensurate with agriculture, craftsmanship and small trades—categories that Bourdieu (1977a) claimed were "excluded from participation in high culture" (p. 488). Within a top-down understanding of educational production it would follow that schools within areas dominated by occupations of a similar cultural quality might, given the local economic structure's need of workers with a similar knowledge and skill for labor production, also reflect a complementary level of cultural capital in its content. This plausibility positions Bourdieu's thesis to figure prominently in explanations of differentiation between schools according to the needs of local markets. Bourdieu's (1977a) claim that schools transmit high or "dominant culture" presents an obstacle to this line of reasoning. Schools simply transmit dominant cultural knowledge and student differentiation occurs according to the distribution of predispositions among them that do or do not allow students to learn. Subsequently there appears to be little correspondence between the demands of local markets for workers predisposed to aid the reproduction of the culture of the occupational structure on one hand, and on the other the culture of the educational institutions responsible for developing those workers.

The idea that institutions are indifferent to top-down demands is not entirely without merit, policy makers and business leaders have leveled the same charge repeatedly (National Commission on Excellence 1983) while educational actors often lament, school outcomes appear inconsistent with local occupational demands because students, especially those in disadvantaged areas, are not coming to school with the cultural and cognitive tools essential for learning. Therefore the distribution of dispositions is an important element of the bottom-up perspective that locates the origins of between-school variability and educational inequality in our landscape's cultural demography.

That said, as the importance of cultural demography to variability in educational performance increases, Bourdieu's (1977a) process of differentiation within schools becomes one of the more inefficient processes depicted within educational theory. Despite the mechanisms of social discernment that precede sorting in schools, Bourdieu's view of educational institutions requires each to be equipped with the necessary resources to transmit only dominant culture, a high standard schools presumably do not adjust (as argued in Bourdieu's notion of "non-existent

pedagogic action") though the populations they serve have already been sorted in some instances quite decisively according to their ability to appropriate such transmissions. Secondly but more importantly, the question arises of how schools—being nested between local occupational structures that vary in cultural capital and a non-random allocation of families into places according to the amount of capital they posses, who in turn collectively determine school demography and assume control of local schools—are able to withstand the top-down and bottom-up forces that would have the cultural capital of educational practice covary with that of local structures?

Cultural Studies & Associations

Cultural studies next turned its attention to the content of people—their dispositions, identities and ideologies—and their role in the negotiation of status attainment. These micro-social interests would seemingly move the field further away from explaining variability according to place; serendipity however would have their exploration highlight the importance of *associations* or lateral processes, especially peer and racial/ethnic group membership, in explanations of social mobility. For example, Ogbu's cultural ecological model emphasizes the contributions of racial and ethnic identity and group association to school outcomes via the cultural frame of reference youth learn while maturing. Ogbu (1987) explains these dispositions often conflict with the behavior that is required of them by whites and individuals not of their social origin. Thus Ogbu's rendition of ecology relies on a populations' historical "social place" within processes of marginalization, not so much their *physical place* in the social environment, while traditional ecological models emphasize the "spatial and temporal relations of individuals affected by the selective, distributive and accommodative forces of the environment" (McKenzie 1925, pp. 63–64). The dissonance between the two perspectives is considerable; in contrast to the latter definition the former implies no matter where marginalized populations may physically be, they are subject to similar "ecological" forces and develop orientations toward schooling that result in similar levels of academic performance. One's affiliation with other involuntary minorities appears to fuel one's social immobility; a perspective congruent to conflict theory's emphasis on ascriptive traits and bottom-up systemic functions.

This assumption would pervade Ogbu's research, including his most recent investigation of African American achievement in Shaker Heights, Ohio. Ogbu (2003) argued African American youth in Shaker Heights developed dispositions toward achievement, primarily through family life that did not support academic excellence relative to whites, contributing to an entrenched black-white test-score gap. What complicates the cultural ecological model in this case is that the average test performance of these "disengaged" African Americans exceeded the test performance of the average white student within the state of Ohio (CNN Presents 2004). One could find common ground in these observations in noting the presence of variability in the performance of racial and ethnic groups across places does not prove the absence of cultural ecological forces. After all, the performance of

African Americans within advantaged areas could have been greater if it were not for the social dynamics that accompany their involuntary minority group status. The less sympathetic interpretation however would question the application of the cultural ecological model if variability in African American performance across contexts is so great that what is identified as disengagement within one context could indicate excellence in another and in relation to white populations in other contexts that, according to the cultural ecological model, are not subject to similar socio-cultural determinants. Ogbu's analysis however does not explore the apparent theoretical dissonance. Such dissonance alludes to the unspecified mechanisms through which a cultural frame of reference is learned, which might emerge from problems of a general and inferior social status as Ogbu claims, but nonetheless must have micro-social processes through which marginalization is brought to bear on the identity formation and subsequent behaviors of youth. Is it a primarily top-down affair as Liebow (1967) argued, where black Americans go out to experience *individually* their defeats within the oppressive opportunity structure and end up with a similar social status and cultural frame of reference? Or is there a classic ecological explanation that finds black Americans develop oppositional culture by experiencing the cultural proclivities and social outcomes of other black Americans? If both explanations are important to the cultural ecological model, the balance of the two within a theory of place is a non-trivial one because the first explanation requires a consideration of the variability in the opportunity structure of minorities across contexts, as in the difference between Shaker Heights and East St. Louis, while the latter compels us to consider the quality of the lateral associations youth are assisted and constrained to develop given the larger demography of capital, cultural and otherwise, among African Americans.

Other works have made more explicit the emphasis on lateral associations. While describing the development of a counter school culture among working class boys, the Lads, and how their peer relations were defined in contrast to those who conformed to the achievement ideology and schooling, Willis' (1977) analysis also reveals how vital the associations among youth are in reinforcing dispositions that are inconsistent with mobility. In an effort similar to Willis', MacLeod (1987) exposes similar collective processes leading to the development of limited aspirations within a group of adolescent boys, the Hallway Hangers, from a low income housing project, Clarendon Heights. While Bourdieu's early work did not make explicit ties between peer associations, the role of place and the habitus, MacLeod (1987) did, arguing student dispositions also reflect the experiences and attitudes of individuals in close "proximity" (p. 15). So in contrast to traditional educational theories that argue (im)mobility arises from hierarchically arranged relationships between those with power and those with less, and institutions and their subjects, MacLeod and Willis illustrate mobility as a mechanism reflecting interactions between institutions of power and individuals, as well as between the marginalized within institutions.[2] Analyses like these that construct structure through the description of observable lateral interactions (peer groups, gangs and

[2] Coleman (1988) would provide a more formal articulation of the connection between lateral relationships and social mobility in his theory of social capital.

even classrooms) acknowledge that such processes not only establish group specific norms and ideologies—in short, a discernable peer or male culture for the group—but those interactions commission other capitals of the whole that pose consequences for the social mobility of the individual.

Neo-Institutionalism, Associational Redistributive Policy & The Demography of the Capitals

In a sense, neo-institutionalism bears a resemblance to early functional theory in that it regards policy making, the manipulation of external incentives and disincentives for institutional performance, and the equalization of resources and educational standards, as an effort to first establish schools as unabridged providers of equal educational opportunity rather than discriminating ones and second to ensure that social mobility results from ability and effort or in sum, merit, rather than one's status group membership. Consistent with Bourdieu's depiction of seemingly resilient and unwavering arbiters of high culture, neo-institutionalists insist that educational institutions can be driven by the top-down edicts of policy-making institutions and organizations rather than the market or demography. In regards to ecological stratification in particular, Arum (2000), an advocate of the emergent neo-institutional perspective declares, neo-institutional educational research "offers an explicit challenge to traditional ecological educational research, which has conceptualized schools as being embedded primarily in localized community settings. Schools are organizations, and as such their communities are by definition largely institutional in character" (Arum 2000, p. 396).

Despite Arum's stance, governing bodies and interest groups have for the last half century found reason to attempt to alter the correspondence between the demography of capital and school quality by redistributing individuals, not just school resources and incentive structures. HUD for example initiated new policies including mobility demonstrations, the development of mixed income housing, and various assisted housing programs. *Brown v. Board* led to the redistribution of children to achieve the cultural and economic integration of many schools (Fuller et al. 1996).

Yet it is on the success and scope of these efforts that Arum's presumptions rely. It is far from unequivocal that associational redistributive policy has been as successful in increasing ecological heterogeneity as it was in increasing homogeneity prior to the civil rights movement. Despite Arum's (2000) appeal to desegregation efforts (p. 403), schools desegregated little according to race in the North in the wake of *Brown v Board*, less so according to social class and today are becoming increasingly racially segregated (Orfield and Eaton 1996). Court remedies enacted with little fidelity after *Brown* have long since lost their judicial appeal in an age of heightened individualism and higher minority enrollments in public schools. In many cases magnet programs have worked to gather students able to meet higher admission requirements from across the metropolis to attend programs that concentrate students of a higher social class within a few schools. Research has found higher income groups are more likely than lower income and minority groups

to take advantage of school choice, using such policies to obtain educational environments of advantage (Lee et al. 1996). Instead of increasing economic and cultural diversity, these policies have the effect of merely increasing a school's residential heterogeneity and the measure of dissimilarity within the students' demography of capital.

Of course, we would rely less on the efforts of educational policy to alter the demographic composition of schools if urban policy increased the number of heterogeneous neighborhoods. Today, access to areas of capital requires more than an antidiscrimination mandate; unfortunately social class remains the key to unlock gated communities. In general, HUD's efforts at dispersing the poor, which in most instances require the support of suburbanites, have been impaired by their opposition (Goetz 2003). Mobility programs such as the Special Mobility Program (Fischer 1991), Moving to Opportunity (Ladd and Ludwig 1997) and Gautreaux program (Rosenbaum 1995) have had fairly positive results, but are too small to have a noticeable effect on our demographic landscape.[3] Moreover, organizational policies have worked benignly to redistribute individuals and have left the problem of the inequitable demographic distribution of capital largely intact. Such policies were pursued because school demography is important to the learning of the individual and remains so. In the absence of research that finds variation in achievement and school quality according to context has diminished significantly, and as a result of organizational actions, there will remain room for ecology and demography to assume a prominent role in educational stratification.

Toward a Theory of Place: Proximity and Proximal Capital

The Formation and Distribution of Social Class Associations

A theory of place requires the identification of the social laws, individual behavior and accompanying social machinery that distribute individuals into positions within stratified structures, the one of most concern here being the grouping or "association" of individuals inhabiting social classes.[4] First we must acknowledge there is a tendency among individuals to desire and seek association with individuals that are relatively prosperous. This preference should be viewed as moreover universal being expressed among financially advantaged and poor populations alike, within racial and ethnic groups as well as between them. This then is the initial mode of distributing individuals into the associations that form places.

Some may rightfully question what are these qualities so sought after within the associations we establish? The most apparent qualities are the economic ones that serve as markers of individual socioeconomic status. Most poor and affluent

[3] The MTO reassigned approximately 4,600 families since 1994 (Goering and Fines 2003) while the Gautreaux demonstration reassigned 6,000 individuals during its 20-year implementation (Goetz 2003).

[4] The conceptualization of association follows from the law of proximity, a Gestalt principle of organization that holds events or objects that are near to one another in space and time are perceived as forming a unit.

individuals alike recognize the favorable economic standing reflected in ones' residency in gated communities, ownership of houses with white picket fences next to similar or better houses; and access to middle class, suburban or private schools instead of high poverty schools. Such a view of social behavior is consistent with ecological theory. Duncan (1928) hypothesized membership groups formed as persons united with groups which promised to satisfy "some wish" or desire while other membership groups were avoided "offering no element of satisfaction" (p. 426). So among the earliest ecological theory we find an interest in how individual preferences lead to the formation of distinctive groupings of individuals.

It would be erroneous to recognize only individual economic status among the criteria used by individuals to assess the attractiveness and benefits of the associations they seek to establish. Prosperity in this case may not always and directly indicate economic standing but in all instances symbolically represents capital, including cultural, social, and human capital. Qualitative data such as those collected by Wilson (1996) in Chicago for example suggest low income populations may not desire larger homes, gated communities or wish to leave their neighborhoods as much as they desire a certain type of neighbor that demonstrates mutually promotive behaviors. Their desires for less crime in the vicinity also communicate a preference for neighbors with dispositions that reduce the likelihood that violence will occur. Local concerns for the development of children translate into preferences for appropriate adult role models that are at least marginally successful having achieved high school diplomas, possibly degrees, and in short, some effective measure of human capital. Implicit within Chicago residents' complaints of rampant truancy and disaffection from local schools is a want for children with aspirations and other cultural dispositions consistent with social mobility and the acquisition of human capital. Cultural, social and human capital then are desirous and inspire one to build beneficial associations with individuals in much the same way one may be so inspired by the appeal of other individuals' economic capital.

These decisions to associate are negotiated nonetheless by other concerns. A decision to form associations with others due to similarities in one's involuntary minority status for example as opposed to an interest in the more dominant social, cultural and symbolic capital, leaves its maker associating with others that may have also decided not to maximize the value of their associations. Inasmuch as one's racial affiliation (as opposed to classification) is a choice, it may be the most important economic decision one can make (Akerlof and Kranton 2000). Whether emanating from one's cultural ecological positioning or habitus, socio-cultural histories and dispositions moderate one's decision making. Being susceptible to those influences however does not necessarily indicate gross imperfections in the appraisal of the objective relations supporting the quality of associations. Even the troublesome Hallway Hangers, the same teenagers whose group formation was defined by drug use, bigotry and violence, recognized the hazards of Clarendon Heights and desired better living environments for their families (MacLeod 1987, p. 35).

Being located in the Clarendon Heights, MacLeod's respondents were somewhat bound in reaping, through their associations, the benefits typically implied in more normative understandings of social mobility. Inasmuch as individuals are motivated by the prospects of capital in entering associations that form neighborhoods, schools,

and peer groups, capital also constrains their choice and ability to achieve access to the most exclusive and rewarding associations. Hence market forces, consisting of a more explicit appraisal of the quality of associations that produces a purely economic standard for access, is another mechanism through which individuals are distributed into associations. It is through this distributive mechanism that economic capital rewards economic capital—those that have the most capital gain access to places with the most profitable associations while the less advantaged, being discouraged by the markets' high valuation of good neighborhoods and good schools, are relegated to membership in less profitable associations.

While associations develop according to a balance of costs and capital, the resulting demography of capital is not totally a product of bottom up economic organization and nor are market influences limited to a sort of rational selection of affordable associations among individuals. Added to the effects of the individual's wager of associational preferences is the occupational structure of the labor market which draws from and acts to reinforce the larger demography of capital. As seen in the recent simultaneous growth of higher-wage suburban jobs and deindustrialization in central cities changes in the occupational structure have increased disparities in the connectedness of area residents to the labor market and subsequently the areas' economic homogeneity. To this we add changes in the occupational structure which have worked to ensure the exercise of residential choice favors the affluent who, through the growth of the global market and increasing technology, are not as frequently required to be onsite for work, thus freeing them to establish residential enclaves according to their capital rather than the need to reside close to their place of employment. Top-down macroeconomic forces then set the parameters in which the bottom-up or demographic organization of capital occurs, namely in its distribution of the individual capital that may or may not be sufficient to support one's associational preferences.

Once these associations are formed and come to reflect the capital of their constituent members, competition among them for advancement within the social mobility system ensues in a fashion consistent with Weberian status group theory. However, unlike Neo-Marxist conceptualizations of social mobility systems in education, the presumption of conflict between status groups is not always due to their observance of the objective differences in social class among them but rather because the prevailing demography of capital suggests differences can and possibly should exist. For that reason we see conflict between associational groups of a similar social class within proximity, the Lads and the Ear'oles, and the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers for example, as they compete for various social goods. These contests provide the context of an ecological stratification system as they play out at all units of spatial aggregation between groups of similar and different social classes.

Lateral Processes, "Effects," and Endogenous Capital

DuBois (1899) writing over a century ago surmised the environment had an "immense effect,"—perhaps of greatest magnitude—on the thought, life, work, crime, wealth and pauperism of African Americans living in the seventh ward of

Philadelphia (p. 44). Many decades later, sociologists of education motivated by the integration movement began producing school composition studies that appear to represent some of the earliest quantitative analyses of environmental effects in social science (Crain 1971; Crain and Mahard 1978; Alexander et al. 1979). These studies were followed in the 1980s by studies that investigated the relationship between the uneven distribution of capital among neighborhoods and varied social outcomes (Fernandez and Kulik 1981).

According to neighborhood effects research, the concentration of social class brings about "effects" of various types within neighborhoods that are net of individual characteristics. Consider for example the possibility that neighborhoods, through the attractiveness of affordable access, gather individuals who are predisposed to a certain achievement level and corresponding social status. Under these circumstances observations of variation in status attainment according to place become mere statements of aggregated exogenous behavior. The mode of mobility might not correspond to place in this situation because these individuals might experience the same (im)mobility if they were located within a much different socioeconomic environment. So defined, the demography of the capitals may merely serve as a moniker of place stratification but not a *means* of stratification, lacking the nature that explains its contribution to processes of differentiation. A discernable mode of place-based mobility emanating from the demographic arrangement of capital is therefore established through the observation of endogenous effects arising in places that vary in quality according to the social class of the associating individuals, and inspiring complementary dispositions among its constituent members who receive sanctions from schools fashioned by places specifically for that purpose. These effects, "concentration effects" (Wilson 1987; Jencks and Mayer 1990) or threshold effects (Quercia and Galster 2000) are hypothesized to provide the basis for peer effects, role modeling, and compositional differences in institutions.

As these effects enable social advancement they come to represent a form of endogenous capital among associations of varying definitions. Unlike traditional conceptualizations that assume one's socioeconomic status is an exogenous individual level attribute, endogenous capital recognizes the economic returns to individual capital depend on the social class of the associations in which it is situated. We might find then the benefits accruing to middle class families residing in affluent communities are greater than those accruing to families of comparable income living among the less advantaged, not only because the synergistic outcome in processes of capitalization is dependent on the individual capital of its group members, but also due to the inequitable conferral of social awards. Those who collectively have more, create more, and also are given more while those who have more found associating with those that have less, end up with less and outcomes that are at times not indicative of their individual social class. Thus this capital having properties that are specific to context can be considered a "capital of the associations" or "proximity capital."

In just the past decade we have witnessed the formulation of theories of endogenous capital that are useful in illustrating the role capital plays in creating variability in social outcomes across neighborhoods. Putnam (2000) describes community social capital as the prevailing "norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" arising from relationships among individuals (p. 19). Putnam's (1995) remarks

regarding the interconnectedness of community type, HUD policies and feelings of residential connectedness to social capital imply his version of community social capital may at times pertain to neighborhoods, rather than or in addition to, communities. The appropriateness of social capital as a community or neighborhood capital has been the subject of many academic exchanges.[5] The issue of whether social capital should be used as a community characteristic aside, there are other important characteristics of the theory that warrant consideration; primary among them is its suggestion that the benefits of being situated in close proximity to capital are rather limited to the externalities arising from social interaction. In understanding the influence of role models within Wilson's (1987) work, it is obvious that collective socialization processes not only arise when adults actively monitor the behavior of youth, but also as adults exhibit behavior, that unbeknownst to them is observed by youth. Durlauf (2001) would identify these contextual effects as "feedbacks" from characteristics of a group to its individual behaviors. In this example, there are active and seemingly passive agents of child socialization, the former directly impacting the next generation through social interaction (or social capital), while the latter through mere presence. Comparable processes exist in the creation of peer effects as youth establish friendship networks, associates and even undesirable relationships that impact them directly, while other peers with whom they have no social interaction offer competing models of behavior. Hence Putnam's (2000) concept of social capital should not be viewed as a comprehensive explanation of community/neighborhood capital but rather as a co-star among a cast of capitals whose demographic representation contributes to the total capital of the proximity.

Economists Lundberg and Startz' (2000) concept of community social capital hypothesizes "the average stock of human capital" is transmitted from one generation to the next. The authors however do not address the processes of human capital acquisition among individuals of the same generation. Peer effects for example are intra-generational effects that emanate from decisions made contemporaneously among peers and make significant contributions to human capital outcomes (Manski 1993). Lundberg and Startz' (2000) definition of endogenous capital is largely a hierarchical one that does not account for the influence of lateral relationships in social reproduction. While supporting the examination of variation in social outcomes within neighborhoods (instead of only between them), exploring lateral processes also avoids rather functional accounts of social mobility that are typical of work detailing macro-level intergenerational transmissions of social status. Endogenous capital needs to be cast in a way that sets forth the conditions of places and dispositions of individuals that allow for or impede its conversion into social mobility.

[5] Others such as Defilippis (2001) have criticized these conceptualizations of community social capital on the grounds that the first articulations of social capital offered by Loury (1977), Bourdieu (1985), and Coleman (1988) locate social capital in human interactions, not within individuals or communities. These theorists define social capital as the human capital, relationship norms and possible mobility one acquires from interacting with another whom possesses greater human or social capital. The factor which seems to determine the acceptability of social capital as a neighborhood or community construct depends on whether one's perspective privileges the social ties or the endogenous externalities (norms, etc.) such ties produce (Durlauf 1999, 2002).

Social Mobility Under Assumptions of Ecological Homogeneity & Heterogeneity

Due to their consideration of average socioeconomic levels and concentration effects, conceptualizations of neighborhood capital set aside the importance of heterogeneity within places in an effort to inform how they, on average, differ and are stratified. Places that are stratified in the amount of proximity capital they possess offer a commensurate amount of social mobility to their inhabitants thus constituting a system of mobility operating largely between places or at a macro level. In affluent communities for example, individual capital is used to gain access to places where it is rewarded through the externalities arising from its concentration among individuals. The power to form, maintain, and secede from social class associations, as well as exclude others and mitigate their associational preferences accrues to advantaged populations, reinforcing the spatial distribution of social class associations. This power is reflected in the political influence of communities of capital that protect their capitalizing interests; in top-down market impacts that reflect and value exclusivity and place stratification; and in institutions that under the guise of meritocracy reward secession of the privileged with the resources, knowledge, and socialization of greatest social value.

Those that are marginalized and disempowered in communities with little capital also contend with concentration effects that have been at times inappropriately reduced to a "contagion effect,"—a concept that suggest social immobility in low income places arises from the presence of disadvantaged individuals. A recent alternative perspective reasons immobility in low income places is more likely caused by the absence of proximity capital than by the presence of low income populations or a corollary "bad proximity capital." As Johnson (2003, unpublished manuscript) and Massey (2001) have recognized, the most influential neighborhood characteristic in empirical research is the presence of individuals of a middle class or affluent social standing. When the number of advantaged individuals falls to low levels in neighborhoods and schools, incidences of behavior inconsistent with social advancement increase dramatically (see Crane 1991). My empirical synthesis of neighborhood effects finds the effects of neighborhood affluence to be more influential in determining education outcomes than any other neighborhood factor within neighborhood studies (Johnson 2003, unpublished manuscript). In comparison, the concentration of low SES individuals is frequently insignificant in analyses of neighborhood effects in education and often in school effects research (Myers et al. 2002, unpublished manuscript). In short, it is more important to consider *who does not* live in places of concentrated poverty than *who does* in explanations of immobility.[6] Hence, positive externalities in places correspond to the existence of proximity capital whereas negative ones correspond to its absence.

Of course, heterogeneous environments exist as well implying an incomplete dissimilarity in the capital of places at the macro level. Economically heterogeneous

[6] This observation is consistent with the concerns expressed by Goetz (2003) and Benabou (1993) regarding the creaming effects of redistributive policy. Both authors point out the consequences of individuals moving to more prosperous environments are greater for the communities left behind than for those being joined.

environments emerge, temporarily in some instances, as contests between the privileged and underprivileged for exclusivity and access are waged, giving way to demographic shifts within the metropolis. Succession, changes in the demographics of surrounding or contiguous communities (Sampson et al. 1999) and changes in the location of public structures (e.g. highways, public transportation, public housing, etc.) contribute to changes in the balances among the distributive mechanisms that work to order populations. Individual concessions of "preference" also arise as demonstrated when individuals sacrifice exclusivity for the gain of political office or public sector jobs that frequently require individuals to live in the areas they serve. These conditions in tandem with the existence of fewer discriminatory federal policies explain why many places are economically heterogeneous. So it becomes important to articulate a second system of mobility and a corresponding externality that accounts for the variation in social mobility among individuals of different social classes co-located in heterogeneous environments.

Social mobility within areas where the associations are more economically diverse rely on what Benabou (1993, 1996) and Durlauf (1994) term the "spillover,"—an externality emanating from social ties and passive role modeling (between the well-off and less fortunate), and non-human environmental resources (facilities; updated and rigorous curricular materials; and upon graduation, the symbolic capital of institutional prestige) that positively affects the behavior and level of opportunity of individuals or groups with relatively less human capital in the proximity. Hence the more micro-level distributive system in operation within heterogeneous places appears less deterministic when compared to macro-level processes because its externalities can only be decisively controlled and guaranteed to avail those in power through the creation and maintenance of exclusive associations. Areas of economic heterogeneity represent the capitalists' loss of exclusivity and consequently control over the modes of mobility. The concept "proximal capital" relies on sociological and fiscal spillovers to explain the subsequent social upgrading of individuals of a lower socioeconomic position with access to proximity capital. Proximal capital then is the conversion of proximity capital into social mobility.

The Complications of Conversion, Schools & the Reproduction of Associations

Places of heterogeneity are not a panacea for the less fortunate. There are at least three factors that complicate the conversion of proximity capital into proximal capital. The first factor stems from the influence of market fluctuations. Conversion requires individual capital to offset the premium the market sets for maintaining associations with better-off individuals. For example, gentrification epitomizes the struggle of less advantaged individuals to maintain access to capitalizing associations as they are eventually priced out of neighborhoods by rising property taxes and rents that accompany the influx of economically better-off individuals. In such processes the spillover gives way to the concentration effect as fewer less advantaged individuals remain within proximity to benefit from its increasing capital. Second, while concentration and spillover effects presume a mutually

beneficial relationship between associating individuals, as Hawley (1950) pointed out, other social processes can be viewed as commensalistic, that is, competitive, concerned with efficiency and differentiation with regard to social resources. Subsequently, sociologists and activists have argued the high social costs less advantaged individuals pay as they experience racial and class discrimination and isolation in economically heterogeneous areas may outweigh the sum of the other environmental advantages (Hamilton 1968; Rosenbaum et al. 1988; Fischer 1991; Wells and Crain 1997). Heterogeneous places may give rise to other norms including cultural incongruities among neighbors, between school personnel and students and feelings of relative deprivation within individuals.[7] These social effects represent a group of hypotheses called "conflict models" within social research that acknowledge the presence of middle-class and affluent individuals within proximity is not always beneficial for the less advantaged (Gephardt 1997).

Last but most importantly, a more systematic inhibitor to ones proximal capital can be found in the distributive function schools perform in economically heterogeneous environments. Here we identify place as the axis of differentiation within schools in that it envelops other more popular candidates of differentiation, namely ability and achievement. Children are first distributed into relatively homogeneous or heterogeneous economic associations before they enter school by larger distributive processes operating between neighborhoods and communities. Schools find children already situated without the aide of indicators of ability or achievement, in the stratified ecological structure within environments that are concentrated in affluence and poverty or between them in economically heterogeneous environments.

Of the latter, scholars have noted that schools within heterogeneous areas are among the most stratified primarily because advantaged families demand student differentiation (Jencks and Mayer 1990; Brantlinger 2003). Of course advantaged families recognize the outcomes of student differentiation would be less predictable and more inefficient if differentiation was not synonymous with place stratification. The prevailing objective ecological relations suggest the same to the disadvantaged; that stratification is desirable because access to the most exclusive and profitable associations is a goal and attainable for all who merit membership. Consequently and unlike theory in cultural studies, a theory of place recognizes heterogeneous schools are efficient agents of social stratification in that they function to dispel heterogeneous associations and their corollary spillover effects. Children from economically heterogeneous environments enter school and are physically sorted into different classrooms, tracks and programs—in short, "places" within schools—that create more economically homogenous and stratified peer associations and instructional groupings. These groupings allow for the more efficient allocation of

[7] Lopez-Turley (2002) questioned whether relative deprivation was advantageous for lower income populations in an analysis that admittedly did not consider the associated social psychological feelings of deprivation within the dispositions of learners. Without considering the occurrence of deprivation feelings, her analysis by chance explores proximal capital, that is, the advantage youth derive from being located in areas and institutions with individuals that are financially better-off. In sum, she finds a positive relationship between "relative deprivation" and the educational outcomes of youth within economically heterogeneous environments.

the educational resources schools provide in terms of classroom instruction, teacher qualities and the type of knowledge, all of which conform to the social class of the grouping (Anyon 1981). Children accordingly experience the academic privileges of concentrated advantage in gifted programs and accelerated placement courses, or fewer or no relative benefits within remedial, special education and vocational courses. The stratification of place then is sine qua non to the stratification of knowledge in schools; without the former there would be much less of the latter.

The ecological forces that bring about the ordering and grouping of a setting's populations according to social class are ultimately expressed in the structural organization of schools. This structure appears as a grid of cells of size and shape that moreover mirrors the demography of capital among the students. Once applied as an overlay of stratified classes, programs and places of certain knowledge according to the social class cleavages within the distribution of students, this grid imposes its organization and creates varying concentrations of capital which, like a variety of cookie cutters, forms each student according to its mold to achieve a certain amount of (im)mobility and to attain a certain social position. Two children attending the same school but learning in different environments can therefore receive educations as different and unique as if they were educated in two different schools; a feat achievable only if place, and therefore ecology, is as evident in schools as it is between them. Within school variability is subsequently but a microcosm of the same ecological structures that support between school differences.

Then what of achievement, the functionalists' arbiter of mobility? The function of achievement serves to exonerate schools of their rather blatant structural organization and fuel the yearly reproduction of a youth's social class associations. In doing so, achievement represents the relationship of the school's objective ecological structure, that is, the demography of proximity capital among the learning environments within it, to the lateral processes that are structured by that structure—those lateral processes being akin to what Bourdieu (1977b) characterizes as the "regulated improvisation" of individuals in response to objective structures. Their subsequent and subconscious or perhaps quasi-conscious behavior, that constitute in the constructivist-structural ideal "substructures of the proximity," in the end not only support the objective structure but also relieve the structure of an appearance of coercion and, at some point given the successful and efficient reification of the social class associations of an individual early in their matriculation, of its effect entirely. Put differently, cookie cutters are no longer required in the later stages of the process to ensure the shape of the final product. The student behaviors inspired by the proximity capital of the environment—the place of learning—eventually provides the mandate for schools to continue ecological stratification, whether the school wishes to adopt another egalitarian mandate or not. Achievement then, rather than indicating merit and natural endowments, merely identifies the effectiveness and efficiency of ecological differentiation within schools; associates the effects of ecological differentiation with individual students; provides the individual access to the appropriate ecological strata in which students with a similar educational record and social class are concentrated; and, upon school completion provides the individual with educational credentials that indicate her eligibility for membership in the appropriate institution

and environment within the stratified opportunity structure. In this regard schools represent another mode of associational distribution in that they are socially organized to finish macro level processes of allocating individuals into social class associations. After a more perfect sorting of individuals is achieved the mode of (im)mobility within heterogeneous schools relies on concentration effects arising from the presence or absence of proximity capital within classrooms and programs.

Through these complications of conversion, access to proximity capital for the less advantaged works to undermine the acquisition of human, social and cultural capital and later the economic and symbolic capital necessary to gain access to other areas of capital. Neighborhood and institutional level heterogeneity in its most inequitable social function provides a context where the "have nots" and "have too littles" possess the greatest potential for social advancement while the pay-offs are reserved for those who "have the most." These conditions serve to reify the structure of the distribution of social class associations.

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