The Segregating Effects of the Social Construction of Academic Quality

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Introduction

- Schools have become increasingly segregated in the last several decades (Reardon and Owens 2014).
- School choice advocates propose school choice as solution to segregation. (Friedman 1955)
- Two school choice assumptions:
  - Disadvantaged will escape segregated schools.
  - Parents choice will be based on school quality.
- Both assumptions unsupported by research. (Saporito and Sohoni 2006)
- Parents say they choose school based on academic quality but choose equal or lower performing school (Stein, Goldring, Cravens 2011).

Results

- A majority of parents gave evidence their children attended good schools
  - One day he was being teased an’ most of the class stood up for [son1] an’ Mr. [teacher1] actually rewarded the entire class for being, you know… supporting people an’ stuff. He was a really good teacher for that.”
  - “[They are]teaching them to be able to progress in the 21st century …It’s not usual, in the box, educating. And I really like that.”
    (Hispanic Mother at failing charter school)

- A majority of parents rejected test scores as accurate indicators of academic quality
  - “It just didn’t seem like an F school to me. I would have gave it a B+ or something.”
  - “I’m only concerned how my kids are doing the other kids are not my kids”
  - “I don’t consider [test scores] because it doesn’t matter what score they get ‘cause I can take a test an’ I can know the information but I’m being tested on It so it’s like out the window.”

- Three social interactions.
  - Teacher
    - “I like … how they deal with the kids… They are not like I’m the teacher you are the student, I’m up here you’re down here. They make them feel like a family. It’s a family thing…I think it’s awesome.”
  - Staff and Administrators
    - Everything that I had experienced. the interactions with the principal, the vice principal with the teachers and the kids there. it just didn’t seem like an F school to me. I would have gave it a B+ or something.
  - Child
    - An so when she switched over here she just gets along with people so good. She seems happy to go to school every day.

Discussion

- How bad schools can be good.
- Are failing schools really failing?
- Under researched social interactions that influence school choice and segregation.

Conclusion

- Parents social construction of school quality is largely shaped by their social interactions.
- Findings suggest that unfettered school choice could lead to greater segregation.

Research Question

How do disadvantaged parents construct school quality?

Method

Materials & Procedure
- Purposefully selected 10 public schools and 1 charter school.
- Interviewed 92 parents from a random sample.
  - 29 Caucasians
  - 32 Hispanics
  - 30 Polynesians
  - 1 African American
- Semi-structured interviews
  - What is a good school?
  - Sorted 17 factors of choice (e.g. test scores, safety, discipline, etc.)

References