Choosing by Habitus

Multi-Case Study of Families & Schools in the Context of School Choice

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Abstract

This qualitative multi-case study explores the dynamics among schools and families during the process of choosing a school through a social class lens and includes narrative data gathered from families and school professionals in four schools within one local commune of Chile. Findings illustrate that families and schools enacted social class through their habitus. Bourdieu’s concept of socialized norms or tendencies (and values) that guide behavior and thinking (Wacquant, 2000). Three types of habitus emerge: historical, aspirational, and survival. In the case of families, habitus is expressed in the process of choosing a school. In the case of schools, staff members activate elements of their habitus in the ways they perceive and face the process of enrollment and recruitment of students. The study illuminates the ways in which social class moderates school choice by affecting not only families but also schools. Because schools have preferences in the type of families they seek and wish to retain, they reinforce the habitus of the families. The relationship between institutions and families points to the complex relationships among social class, social capital, identity, and educational institutions in a setting where choosing among different educational options is normative. Conclusions raise questions about; the role of habitus in the process of choosing a school, the influence of social class, through habitus, by impacting the ways families choose schools and schools recruit families; and the contribution of schools in social reproduction.

The Chilean Education System

The Chilean educational system includes 12 years of compulsory education. Primary education is from ages 6 to 13, and secondary education is from ages 14 to 17. Both public and private alternatives exist for all educational levels (UNESCO/IBE, 2010). Chile has operated with a nationwide voucher system in a market-driven educational system for more than three decades. Parents are driven educational system for more than three decades

Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

I employ a multiple-case study in order to explore families and schools enactments of social class in the process of choosing. Family relationships and school choice dynamics. This study utilizes four levels of sampling. The first level is the selection of commune (a territorial area that represents the smallest geographical and political-administrative unity in the Chilean territory) the second level of sampling involves the selection of neighborhoods within the commune, the third level is the selection of schools, and finally the fourth level is the selection of participants within each school. Four school institutions from the same commune in two different neighborhoods will be chosen as cases for this multiple case study. The sampling method used is a non-probability sampling procedure because in each level the sampling was chosen following a set of predetermined criteria aligned with the purposes of the research.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection strategies focused on parents and school staff. And they were: semi-structured interviews (36), focus groups (10), observations, and document analysis. Data analysis included an overall strategy and specific analytic techniques to be applied in two moments: a within-case and a cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). Data analysis procedures included transcribing a subsection of the material and elaborating the code book. A second round of analysis involved listing and coding the audios for all the rest of material through NVivo software.

Conclusions and Implications

• This study disclosure the richness of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus to explore the process of choosing a school, and how habitus enriches our understanding of the role of social class in educational processes.
• Literature has extensively described how families chose schools. But to what extent schools are involved in the process of choosing a school through by investing time, resources, and energy in recruit not only students but families that are the best fit for their habitus. More empirical research in diverse settings about schools’ habitus and how they might reinforce, recreate, or interrupt family’ habitus would be beneficial to deepen our comprehension of school choice dynamics.