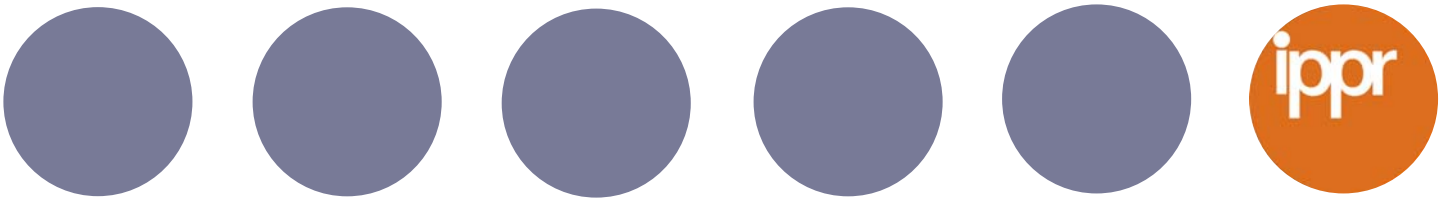

How does place affect education?

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How does place affect education?

On the face of it, education seems intimately connected with 'place'. More so than virtually any other public service, schools are embedded in neighbourhoods. Often physically located at the centre of housing estates or villages, they exist and act locally. Catering for successive generations, day in, day out, they unavoidably interact with neighbourhood life. They link with community organisations in local projects and with businesses for work experience, sponsorship and careers advice. They deal with the impact of new housing or demolitions. They manage the fall-out from local unemployment. They cope with family break-ups, neighbourhood feuds and spates of crime or anti-social behaviour. They liaise with other local organisations such as police and social services.

Despite the rhetoric of choice and mobility, many schools are still thought of as serving specific, geographically bounded communities, and the vast majority of students are still educated locally. For many parents, the idea of the local primary school or the local comprehensive, within a safe walk or cycle ride, where all the neighbourhood's children may learn and play together, dies hard.

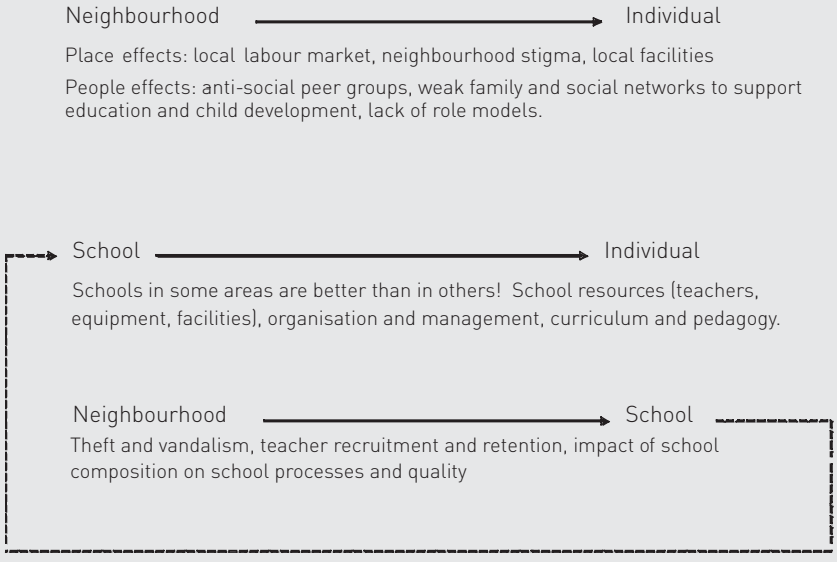
Moreover, while its policies of choice might serve to weaken school-neighbourhood links, in other guises the current government continues to place schools at the heart of neighbourhoods, driving their renewal and sustainability. In promoting modern, well-equipped, successful schools to attract and retain families with housing choice, and extended schools as the hub of welfare services for the less well-off, the Government is attempting to strengthen, rather than weaken, school-neighbourhood connections.

Thus, in discussions of educational inequality as a factor in social immobility, it is particularly pertinent to interrogate the role of 'place'. Given the connections between education and place, to what extent is place implicated in differential educational outcomes - and, if there are 'place effects', by what mechanisms do they come about?

This paper attempts to provide some initial answers to these questions, with a brief (and almost certainly not comprehensive) overview of relevant literature. It is structured around three potential kinds of place effects, outlined in Figure 1. First, it explores the impact of neighbourhood on individuals - on motivations and opportunities to learn, considering place effects (such as the local labour market or environment and resources) and people effects (the other people who live in the neighbourhood) alike. Both are potentially important.

Second, it looks at the impact of schools on individuals. Schools are key neighbourhood resources, sufficiently so as to merit being treated separately, rather than simply as one of a number of place effects. For those students who are educated locally, the school is a principal mechanism by which their neighbourhood might affect them.

Figure 1: Neighbourhood effects on education: potential mechanisms



Third, it explores neighbourhood effects on schools: the extent to which schools do not just exist within neighbourhoods, but are constituted by them. Understanding that neighbourhood characteristics may have consequences for schools - for example, for their pupil composition or for their resources, curriculum or pedagogies - adds another dimension to the notion of school effects and how they might be addressed.

For each of these three mechanisms - individuals, schools and neighbourhoods - this chapter briefly considers the strength of the evidence base and reviews what it reveals, before bringing the three issues together in a discussion of possible implications for policy. For the sake of focus and in line with the bulk of the evidence on this issue, this chapter takes the limited view that 'education = school'. Pre- and post-compulsory education and learning in informal settings are not considered here, although place effects might be equally important in those contexts. It also takes a limited view of place as equivalent to 'neighbourhood' or 'locality'. This is because although global, national and city-regional influences might also be considered separately, they are effectively woven into local life through the identities and actions of individuals and the distribution of resources, power and participation. Thus the chapter focuses on neighbourhoods, and on schools.

Neighbourhood effects on individuals

Evidence of neighbourhood effects on individuals comes from two sources. The first is a long line of small-scale qualitative community studies and school ethnographies designed to understand the actual experience of living in low-income neighbourhoods of various types. The second is a more recent set of quantitative studies designed specifically to measure whether neighbourhood has any effect on individual outcomes, over and above the effect of individual and household characteristics. In other words, is it worse to be poor in a poor area?

Numerous qualitative studies on education and other subjects reveal glimpses of adverse effects of living in a poor neighbourhood for young people's educational experiences, including:

- low aspirations because of historically or contemporarily weak labour markets
- alternatives to formal education (such as drug dealing, paid labour or crime)
- effects of neighbourhood stigma on self esteem and learner identities
- parental isolation and low social capital influencing, among other things, childcare, school and university choices
- limited educational resources such as libraries, computer facilities, safe play areas and equipment, and supervised youth activities.

There is a strong case for arguing that these restricted opportunities are important in their own right. It is inequitable that some young people should have to battle these difficulties to make the same progress with their education that others would take for granted. However, we might also want to know whether these problems have any significant short- or long-term effect on educational outcomes. Perhaps they are outweighed by personal resilience or family support, or are insignificant alongside individual or household determinants, such as academic ability or level of parental education?

Quantitative investigations into neighbourhood effects can answer some of these questions. However, they are fraught with data problems and methodological difficulties. They may use data at highly aggregated spatial scales because neighbourhood data is not available. Some test for associations between neighbourhood deprivation and individual outcomes but not for the specific theoretical mechanisms that might lead to these associations. Others tend to measure neighbourhood attributes only in terms of population composition, to the exclusion of place characteristics (for a full discussion, see Lupton 2003).

In general terms, quantitative studies leave us somewhat uncertain about the extent and nature of neighbourhood effects. In their 1997 literature review, Ellen and Turner found no consensus about which characteristics affected which outcomes, which types of households might be most affected by neighbourhood, or the causal mechanisms involved. They recommended employing 'some caution in interpreting the evidence' (Ellen and Turner 1997: 833). Similar inconsistencies were reported by Harding (2002) in his review of the US literature and by McCulloch (2001), who noted inconsistency in the findings of UK research, partly because of differences in theoretical or methodological approach. Much work remains to be done.

That said, existing studies have tended to find neighbourhood effects on education - for example:

- neighbourhood (ward) effects on test scores for children aged four to five but not older children (McCulloch and Joshi 2000, using UK data)
- neighbourhood effects on development outcomes aged four to five and on school drop-out and teenage pregnancy (Brooks-Gunn et al 1997, using US data)
- drop-out rates from school being influenced by availability of unskilled work and by concentrated neighbourhood poverty (Overman 2000, using Australian data)
- place effects (such as the lack of services and safety) on the likelihood of developing problem behaviours (Peeples and Loeber 1994)
- Families adopting different strategies in high-risk neighbourhoods (Furstenberg et al 1998, using US data).

The results of these studies suggest that neighbourhood has some effect, in that it probably is worse for one's education to live in a poor neighbourhood than a rich one. They do not tell us which, or which combination, of the mechanisms identified in the qualitative studies account for the effects. And importantly, they consistently find that neighbourhood effects are considerably smaller than individual and household effects.

Studies of residential mobility programmes in the US offer useful evidence. What happens when people move from a low-income neighbourhood to a more advantaged one? Evidence from the Gautreaux programme in Chicago suggested that moving to a better neighbourhood reduced school drop-out rates, and improved college participation rates (Rosenbaum 1995). However, the more recent 'Moving to Opportunity' programme found more mixed results. Delinquent and risky behaviour was reduced only among girls, not boys, and moving to a better neighbourhood had only a very small impact on educational attainment (Orr et al 2003).

Notably, in this latter study, children experienced only small improvements in the quality of schools attended as a result of their neighbourhood move. Thus, although other studies do suggest some evidence of neighbourhood effects on outcomes, this latter finding leaves us with the suggestion that perhaps it may be schools, rather than neighbourhoods in themselves, that really make the difference.

What, then, is the specific evidence of school effects?

School effects on individuals

It is now well established that disadvantaged neighbourhoods tend to have schools that are of lower quality than those in rich neighbourhoods - not just in terms of academic results, but in terms of the adjudged quality of school processes. In the UK, they score less well in official inspections (Ofsted 2000) and are more likely to be diagnosed as failing and put into special measures or closed. Concern with the quality of schools in disadvantaged areas is what has spawned the current government's Excellence in Cities initiative - a programme of improvement for 'schools in challenging circumstances', and the Academies programme. Thus, while this is not always the case, students living in disadvantaged areas are more likely to be served by poor quality schools than their counterparts in the 'leafy lanes'.

To what extent do these differences between schools matter? More than 20 years of school effectiveness studies have established that quality of schooling does make a difference. The most often-cited figure is that differences between schools account for somewhere between eight and 15 per cent of attainment differences. Individual, home and background factors account for the rest (Reynolds et al 1996, Sammons 1999). This puts school efforts into perspective, but nevertheless positions them as having a significant impact. For example, Thomas and Mortimore (1996) suggested that, taking background factors into account, good schools could lift GCSE results by about 14 points for pupils with average prior attainment - equivalent to the difference between six Bs and six Ds.

On this basis, we can conclude that securing better schools in poor neighbourhoods might not compensate for wider inequalities, but it would make a contribution to closing the social-class gap in educational outcomes.

However, what we do not know is how this should be done. Until very recently, school effectiveness and

school improvement studies have concentrated on generic issues, applicable to all schools, and have been reluctant to identify what different or additional measures might be necessary for schools in poorer areas to close the gap.

Recent papers (Harris 2002, Potter et al 2002, Chapman and Harris 2004, West et al 2005) have started to redress this balance, identifying features that might make for success in schools in disadvantaged areas. These include:

- a shared belief in the potential for growth and development in all pupils (and staff)
- a distributed leadership approach
- investment in staff development
- emphasis on high quality personal relationships
- a commitment to an 'interconnectedness of home, school, and community'
- strategies to foster social and emotional development as a precursor to learning - a particularly important factor.

This move towards distinct approaches in schools in poor neighbourhoods is an important one. It begins to suggest that neighbourhood context might be important as a driver of school quality, and that this factor might need explicit responses if school quality is to be improved. This brings us to the third potential place effect - neighbourhood impacts on schools.

Neighbourhood effects on schools

Developments in the school effectiveness and improvement literature reflect the emergence, since the mid-1990s, of a strong body of qualitative evidence demonstrating the ways in which neighbourhoods appear to impact on school processes and quality. Sharon Gewirtz described this as 'intricate and intimate connections between what school managers do and the socio-economic and discursive contexts within which they operate' (Gewirtz 1998: 440).

Gewirtz's study of two inner-London secondary schools showed how staff spent time on different activities. In the struggling school, they spent less time on curriculum matters and extra-curricular activities. There were difficulties in staff recruitment and parental involvement, and strained relationships between management and staff as improvement agendas became hijacked by day-to-day firefighting. Numerous other studies produced similar results (The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 1997 and 1999, Johnson 1999, Thrupp 1999, Ofsted 2000, Thomson 2002).

On the basis of his study of New Zealand schools, Thrupp (1999) categorised the effects of school processes under three headings: organisation and management, curriculum and pedagogy, and peer relations. Opdenakker and Van Damme (2001) tested these findings quantitatively, using Belgian school data. They found significant correlations between variables in school processes, such as 'an orderly learning environment', and those in school composition, such as mean ability and socio-economic status.

Much of this work covers the secondary sector, leaving primary schools somewhat under-investigated, although local effects might be most strongly evidenced in primary schools, with their stronger neighbourhood connections.

My own work on UK schools (Lupton 2005), and that of Thomson (2002) in Australia, has developed Thrupp's work by pointing to the differences between neighbourhoods that are similarly impoverished. These include the importance of neighbourhood composition (particularly ethnic composition but also specific local issues such as the presence of children's homes or refugees), of neighbourhood resources including businesses and voluntary organisations, of neighbourhood issues such as family feuds, and of the local market for schooling.

From this work, it seems clear that neighbourhoods do impact on school processes, and that a disadvantaged neighbourhood context may make school quality harder to achieve. As with neighbourhood effects on individuals, we might argue that this is important in its own right. But does it impact on educational outcomes? Again, attempts to establish this quantitatively face methodological problems. One challenge is dealing with selection effects, with the notion that low-income students in failing working-class

schools might be different from those who have managed to get into successful schools. Another is the difficulty in separating group, class and school-level effects.

The greatest difficulties can arise when measuring the composition of schools, that is to say the mix of pupils within the school. Most studies use only crude measures (if any) of socio-economic composition, such as the proportion eligible for free school meals (FSM), which takes no account of important local factors, such as ethnic composition or pupil turbulence, and no account of school composition above the FSM threshold. A school with 40 per cent of pupils on FSM and 60 per cent from high professional and managerial homes is very different from one with 40 per cent on FSM and 60 per cent whose parents are in low-paid work and fall just above the FSM cut-off point. School composition studies do not appear to be able to capture place effects as well as student composition. There is room for more refined data and more sophisticated methodologies.

Meanwhile, the evidence is mixed. Nash (2003: 444), claiming that compositional effects are spurious, argues that 'for every analysis that finds a compositional effect there is another that does not.' Thrupp et al (2002: 496) argue that the evidence is 'inconclusive but suggests the presence of school compositional effects'. They cite studies such as those by Bryk et al (1993) and Ho and Willms (1996) in the United States and Lauder et al (1999) in New Zealand, on the grounds that these have more robust data and methodologies than UK studies, which have been less clear on evidence of compositional effects.

Whether an effect of school composition, or simply of within class selection, it is worth noting that in England, children eligible for free school meals make better progress up to Key Stage 3 in schools with low levels of FSM eligibility than do their non-FSM counterparts in schools with high levels of eligibility, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage pupils progressing from expected level at KS2 in 1999 to expected level at KS3 in 2002 (mathematics)

School FSM band	Non FSM	FSM
<5%	90	83
5-9%	88	79
9-13%	85	77
13-21%	82	74
21-35%	80	70
>35%	74	67

Source: DfES 2004

Some evidence suggests that certain students are affected more than others from compositional effects - being taught with pupils of mixed degrees of ability. Opdenakker and Van Damme (2001) found that pupils with higher ability benefited more than those with lower ability from being in high socio-economic status schools. Much research, such as Robertson and Symons (2003), has found that higher-ability students tend to do better in streams, where they are taught with a group of similar-ability students for most of their courses, while lower-ability students tend to do better in mixed-ability groups. In other words, there is a trade-off in benefits to the two groups.

Most recently, however, Ireson et al (2005) did not find differential effects of setting - teaching students of similar ability by subject - on higher- and lower-ability students. This may be because students of all ability tend to be taught a similar curriculum in UK schools, contrary to US ones, where those in lower-ability classes may end up with a reduced programme. However, for individual students, particularly those with intermediate prior attainment, being placed in a set with students of similar, rather than mixed, ability had significant effects. These findings suggest that, for individual students, school composition may be mediated by in-school decisions on how to group students for teaching.

To summarise, overall it appears that neighbourhood socio-economic composition and other characteristics do have qualitative effects on school processes, and on school quality. This, in turn, would be expected to have an impact on pupil outcomes. This has been demonstrated in a number of quantitative studies, although one could not argue that it has been demonstrated beyond doubt. What happens within schools will also be important.

Two final points are salient. First, neighbourhoods' impact on schools depends largely on the extent to which local children go to local schools. School choice policies, and of course geography, transport and the availability of school places, can all serve to break the link between schools and their local neighbourhoods. This can make school composition a function of choice rather than locality, and weaken the impact of neighbourhood composition, neighbourhood resources and neighbourhood issues. The importance of place differs depending on the regime for allocating school places.

Second, any discussion of neighbourhood effects on schools must also take account of the effect of schools on neighbourhoods. Families with housing choice can - and do - move to secure places at better schools, thus altering neighbourhood composition both in the neighbourhoods they move to and in the neighbourhoods left behind. Schools can make or break neighbourhoods, as well as vice versa.

Conclusions and policy implications

These findings have a number of implications for education policies designed to reduce inequality and enhance social mobility.

Schools do affect educational outcomes

In the first instance, the evidence underlines the fact that schools do matter, and that equalising the quality of schooling across neighbourhoods must be an important element in reducing the gap in educational outcomes - although wider socio-economic inequalities will still present the bigger problem. This is well known and uncontroversial, but how to do it is highly debatable.

The Government's 2005 schools White Paper (DfES 2005) proposes to improve schools in low-income areas through another combination of carrot (increased investment) and stick (swifter closure for failing schools), along with structural reform in the form of trust schools with external sponsors. I have argued elsewhere (Lupton 2005) that, in recognition of the very different job that schools in poor areas are carrying out, a more effective alternative might be significantly greater investment that would support different organisation models and facilitate greater compatibility with the Every Child Matters and neighbourhood renewal agendas (DfES 2003, Cabinet Office 2001).

To be effective, school improvement strategies must take account of the fact that schools do not operate with a 'hermetic seal' around them (Thompson 2002). They are porous to neighbourhood influences, and are challenged by them. Effective schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are likely to need a different set of provisions to those in more affluent neighbourhoods. These might include greater management resources, more welfare functions, more support staff, perhaps more curriculum options, and innovative and intensive strategies for parental involvement, as well as training incentives and more non-contact time for teaching staff.

Neighbourhoods affect educational opportunities too

It appears that non-school neighbourhood factors probably make a difference to educational opportunities, although it is not entirely clear what exactly they do, and how. Equalising neighbourhood conditions through neighbourhood renewal strategies could be expected to yield educational benefits, regardless of specific school-based interventions.

Parental isolation and low social capital, limited educational resources, poor facilities, high crime and dilapidated, stigmatised environments all seem to impact on learning opportunities and learning identities. As a result, the educational case for safer neighbourhoods with safe play and youth facilities, opportunities for family learning and for parents to interact and network seems well made, although perhaps hard to quantify in terms of hard educational outcomes. More mixed communities might also help.

School composition affects educational processes and possibly outcomes

The question of admissions must be raised. School composition seems to have an effect on school processes, and probably has an effect on outcomes, in that low-attaining students may be adversely affected by being in schools with high proportions of other low-attaining students. An obvious response - and one that can also be supported on grounds of reducing social segregation, regardless of educational impacts - is to engineer a situation in which more schools have balanced, socially mixed intakes, rather than simply

disadvantaged ones.

The Government proposes to do this within the context of market mechanisms, helping low-income families travel outside their neighbourhood to school, enhancing the advice available to them, and establishing academies and trust schools in low-income areas so that better-off families might actively choose them. However, other models might also be considered, including area banding, admissions lotteries, or incentives to schools to take more disadvantaged students. ippr's current educational work specifically aims to explore some of these options (Tough 2006).

However, changes in admissions arrangements cannot be seen as a panacea. Schools serving socially mixed areas present a relatively straightforward case. Admissions mechanisms could be designed to ensure that such schools more adequately reflect the characteristics of their localities, admitting students from across the social gradient, rather than only the most disadvantaged. But schools serving uniformly disadvantaged neighbourhoods present a more difficult challenge. Mixing their intakes necessarily involves breaking links with place, at the cost of long journeys to school, reduced leisure and home-study time, diminished local social networks, and difficulties for schools in forging links with identifiable geographical communities.

Moreover, the risk for middle-class parents of being allocated to such schools might be averted by moves even further afield, embedding residential segregation. This suggests that admissions policies cannot be the only answer. Place is likely to continue to be important. Designing and resourcing high quality schools, while also working with, utilising and building on their strengths, must continue to be a top priority that can offset the detrimental effects of high-poverty neighbourhoods.

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