

Primary school choice – an important mechanism influencing equity in education

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Abstract

This dissertation describes the process of school choice in primary education and the factors influencing it. Using a qualitative grounded theory design, the work builds on data from 41 interviews with parents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Parents' decision-making about school choice is shaped primarily by the organizational needs of parents and their inner need to be a "good parent". When being interviewed, parents report a number of criteria, which, according to them, are important in school choice. However, for many of them they fail to obtain relevant and reliable information. Therefore, they may eventually make a decision based on criteria other than those referred to as important, although they are rarely aware of this shift and the change in criteria. There are three unavoidable criteria in decision-making: availability, reputation and the emotions that parents experienced at school during their visit. The child's needs are the important intervening conditions. They play an important role, especially if the parents feel that their child has some particular needs. The parents' experience with the education system and their personality characteristics are also important. The significant limiting factors are the economic conditions and the nature of the locality. In many respects the school choice process does not match the rational action theory, which is used to explain the selection mechanism. The result is therefore a proposal to look at the school choice process using the theory of bounded rationality, whose bases better correspond to the processes that have been described in the research.

Key words

school choice, primary education, grounded theory, rational action theory, theory of bounded rationality