

Shaken, not stirred. A sociological framework for relating school compositional features to school deviance

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In the last decades, the area of school effectiveness research has been subject to numerous criticisms. This contribution focuses explicitly upon one critique: the downplay of SES as a contextual variable. We argue that this critique can be broadened: SER has minimized the role of all compositional school features. However, focusing upon these characteristics could provide very interesting insights into the various effects the placing together of various groups of students has on specific outcomes and processes, especially from a sociological point of view. Taking account of two other prominent critiques, namely the lack of theorizing and the overreliance upon academic outcomes, this contribution shows, through an application of some well-known sociological theories to the topic of school deviance, that focusing upon school composition could be very interesting for SER. From strain theory, we can expect that both the ethnic and SES composition of schools could influence the level of school disorder of students, because both these characteristics can influence the levels of goal blockage and blockage of pain-avoidance behavior. A high sense of blockage invokes strain, ultimately leading to more school misconduct. Group threat theory expects ethnic composition to have an influence upon levels of school disorder: heterogeneous schools invoke more interethnic competition for the acquisition of control of the 'turf'. This conflict-ridden climate influences the likelihood of showing school misconduct, through the mechanisms of social learning theory. Two (sub)cultural theories, cultural deprivation theory and oppositional culture theory, state that students turn to deviant subcultures if they perceive that they have no valid way of attaining status, or of making scholastic progress. The cultural deprivation theory applies this to the SES composition, oppositional culture theory relates this to the ethnic composition of schools. Finally, we argue that some of the mechanisms brought forward by the theories, are actually expressions of reference group theory, which can be used as an encompassing theoretical framework for the study of the relation between school composition and individual school misconduct. This sociological framework is presented to stir up the discussion concerning the role of school composition in school effectiveness research.