Research Notes:

Social Selectivity in the Secondary Schools of Buenos Aires, La Paz, and Santiago de Chile

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By comparing data on social backgrounds of students in their final year of secondary school, the value of disaggregating school system to the level of individual schools is evident. Patterns of selectivity, overall and by type of school, are found to be different for each of the three cities studied. The data support the idea that increasing access to the school system is not necessarily the same as "democratizing" access to schooling.

RESULTS OF THREE recent dissertations at the University of Chicago Comparative Education Center (Petty, 1971; Fischer, 1971; Cleary, n.d.) provide comparative data concerning the selective function of secondary schools in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Santiago de Chile, and La Paz, Bolivia.[1] These data show the value of disaggregating the school system even to the level of individual schools when examining social selectivity (or "access" to schooling). Without such disaggregation, the fact that systems continue to function selectively as enrollments expand may be obscured.

[1] Field work for all three dissertations was carried out in 1969. The data presented pertain only to males in their final year of secondary school in each city.

Sociology of Education 1973, Vol. 46 (Summer):355–361

TABLE 1

Selectivity Ratios for High School Seniors in La Paz, Santiago, Buenos Aires, and the United States [a]

	Percentage of Students with Fathers of High Occupational Status [b]		Percentage of High Occupational Status Jobs in Adult Male Population [c]	Selectivity Ratios	
	All Schools	Private Academic Schools		All Schools	Private Academic Schools
La Paz	61	76	15	4.0	5.1
Santiago	53	86	18	2.9	4.8
Buenos Aires	40	51	30	1.3	1.7
United States	34	..	24	1.4	...

[a] *Sources:* For the United States: Husén; for Chile: Fischer (1971); for Argentina: Petty (1971); for Bolivia: Cleary (n.d.).

[b] U.S. students are "Population 3a: those studying mathematics as an integral part of their course of their future training or as part of their pre-university studies." (See Husén, 1967:205.) The sample is an urban sample. In Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia the sampled students were those finishing *liceo* or vocational school studies in the metropolitan capitals. High occupational status is indexed by those holding a white-collar job or "above."

[c] The occupational distribution of the labor force was inferred for the United States from "Population 1b" (all pupils at the grade level where the majority of pupils' age 13.0–13.11 are found); Husén considered the figures for the father's occupation of these pupils as "the best available national estimates of the occupational distribution of a given country." (See Husén, 1967:45.) The basis for comparison in the three Latin American countries was with the adult male population over 20 years of age. For Chile the data were obtained from the 1960 census. For Bolivia the source was: Bolivia, Ministerio de Planificación (1969:42–46). For Argentina, the source was Germani (1963).

Table 1 sets out social selectivity ratios for the school systems and for private academic schools in the three urban areas. These selectivity ratios relate the percentage of students in their final year of secondary school whose fathers' occupational status is that of white-collar worker or "above" to the percentage of adult males in the urban population who have attained at least a white-collar occupational status.[2] According to this summary statistic, which

[2] The percentage of student fathers in the top occupational categories formed the numerator of the selectivity ratio. Care was taken to make the occupational categories as comparable as possible when coding student backgrounds. Seven-point occupational scales were used. By concentrating on the top categories (white-collar workers or "higher") which were reasonably well defined, the inaccuracy associated with problems of classification was minimized. Emphasis is placed on the upper occupational categories as most indicative of how schools relate to "elite" status.

The percentage of adult males in the labor force with white collar occupations or above formed the denominator of the selectivity ratio. See footnote c of Table 1 for an explanation. There is little reason to believe that more accurate and comparable percentages for the denominators would alter the argument made. The same point can be made by referring to the descending order of the numerator percentages in column 1 of Table 1 and by making the extreme assumption that percentages in column 2 are the same for all four countries.

takes no account of differences in selectivity among *individual* schools within the respective systems, secondary education is more selective in La Paz than in either Santiago or Buenos Aires—as demonstrated by the fact that children with upper socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds are more highly over-represented in the La Paz system than in others. Looking only at private academic schools however, one encounters high social selectivity in both Santiago and La Paz but not in Buenos Aires (selectivity ratio of 4.8 and 5.1 as against 1.7).

In Figures 1, 2, and 3, the means and the standard deviations (SD) of students' SES are displayed, school by school, for a sample of secondary schools in each city,[3] with sub-groupings by public/private control and academic/vocational organization. In each figure, the mean SES may be interpreted loosely as indicating how socially elite a school is; the SD indicates roughly how homogeneous or heterogeneous student backgrounds are for each school.

The general pattern in the scatter of schools is similar for La Paz and Santiago: a cluster of private academic institutions appears in the upper left-hand corner which gives way to broad dispersion of schools throughout the lower right portion of the figures. Buenos Aires schools are arrayed distinctively with few obviously "elite" schools and with a large group of relatively homogeneous, low-SES institutions in the lower left-hand corner of the figure. The La Paz and Santiago systems, then, emphasize selection at the top and the Buenos Aires system selection at the lower end of the social continuum (not unlike what we would expect to find for urban school systems in the United States).

In all three cities, the generally high average SES of academic schools and the generally low average SES of vocational schools shows clearly. In Santiago and La Paz, no vocational school has an average SES above 4.0; in Buenos Aires, only one is above that cutoff. For La Paz and Buenos Aires, however, it is difficult to sort out schools along the social continuum simply in terms of their academic/vocational nature. One must look closely at individual schools in the middle range to determine which are the more or less socially selective.[4] Notice particularly the broad spread among academic institutions in the two cities. In Santiago, on the other

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[3] For La Paz, all secondary schools in the city were included. For Santiago, a random sample of secondary schools was taken. For Buenos Aires, random samples of schools were taken within the public and within the private school sectors, leading to a slight underrepresentation of private schools from Buenos Aires in Figure 3.

Schools were defined in terms of academic units. If a school building housed an academic program by night, then each program was treated as a "school."

[4] The spread among La Paz and Buenos Aires schools may be explained partially in terms of the skewed distribution of school types in each system: La Paz leans toward the academic side (only 15 per cent of the schools are vocational) while Buenos Aires schools are predominantly vocational (62 per cent).

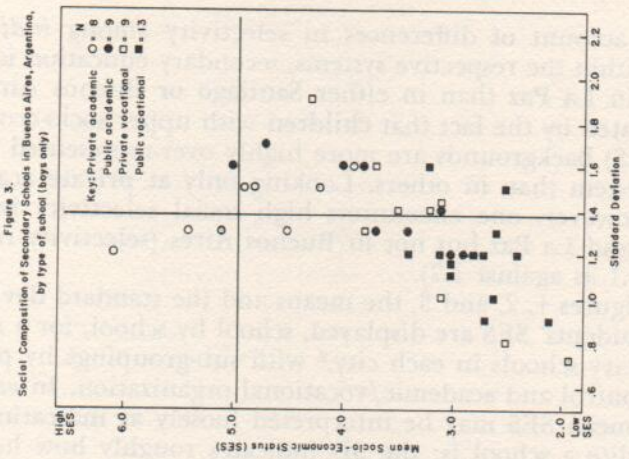

Figure 3.
Social Composition of Secondary Schools in Buenos Aires, Argentina, by type of school (boys only)

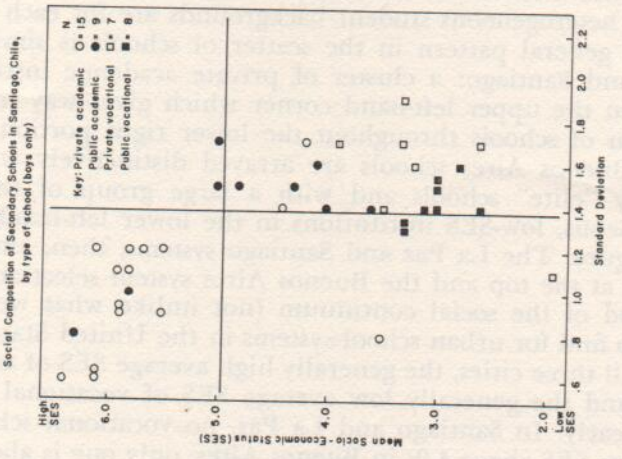

Figure 2.
Social Composition of Secondary Schools in Santiago, Chile, by type of school (boys only)

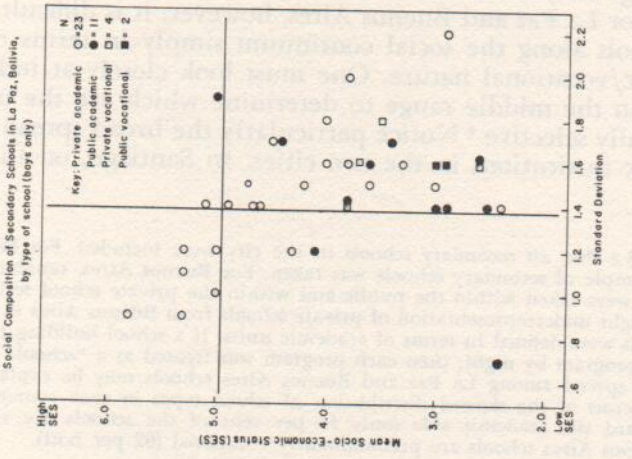

Figure 1.
Social Composition of Secondary Schools in La Paz, Bolivia, by type of school (boys only)

hand, the two groups barely overlap.[5] A clear division occurs between academic and vocational schools at about the level of the artisan or small merchant (3.4 on the SES scale).

In all three cities, private schools are generally more "elite" than public schools, but there are notable exceptions. In Santiago, for instance, two public academic institutions are highly homogeneous and upper-class.[6] The range in mean SES among private and among public schools is wide for all three cities; distributions for the two sets of schools overlap considerably. Generally, selectivity is less closely related to a public/private division in La Paz schools than in Santiago or Buenos Aires schools. One might hypothesize for La Paz, with its lower level of enrollment, that selection occurs primarily by just being *in* the system.

The above highly simplified observations support an already well documented (See Sussman, 1968:321–341), but not yet well accepted, idea that increasing access to the school system (by, for instance, increasing enrollments from the lower level found in La Paz to the higher level found in Buenos Aires)[7] is not necessarily the same as "democratizing" access to schooling. Furthermore, eliminating private schools will not eliminate (nor necessarily reduce) social selectivity; distinctions are evident even among public institutions. These data also suggest that the attempt to open access to schools by multiplying the number of vocational schools may lead to greater (or at least a different form of) social differentiation within the school system, further reinforcing social inequalities.

As school systems change size and mode of control and curricula, then, schools continue to carry out a social selection function, but the basis for the selection shifts. Access to particular types of schooling or to particular schools continues to be unequal.

To obtain a clearer picture of how shifts occur, systems should be observed over time. In addition, the importance of social selectivity to schools needs to be interpreted against a back drop of the "fit" between secondary schooling and subsequent occupational placement in each urban setting. Until a tight "fit" has been established, it is inappropriate to conclude, on the basis of the data presented here, that schooling in any one of the three systems does *more* to impede mobility than to foster it. Nevertheless, these fragments add to the need for viewing the relationship

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[5] Therefore, the choice that students make at the end of their eighth year of an academic or vocational track has strong social implications.

[6] Both are "experimental" schools with a long tradition of enrolling children from higher-SES backgrounds.

[7] In 1967, the secondary school enrollment ratio for Argentina was 39 per cent as against 25 and 21 per cent for Chile and Bolivia respectively. The ratios are crude and for the countries as a whole rather than for the capital cities. Nevertheless, it seems safe to say that Buenos Aires enrollment is substantially higher than enrollment in either Santiago or La Paz. (See Unesco, 1970:83.)

between schooling and social mobility with an increasingly skeptical eye (for an early skeptical note, see C. A. Anderson, 1961: 569–70).

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