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Catholic and Protestant Schools, a Better Choice in the Netherlands?

The opportunities in tertiary education and on the labour market for pupils who attended Catholic, Protestant, or public Dutch secondary education

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the influence of the sector of education (Catholic, Protestant and public) on the success of their pupils in tertiary education and on the labour market in the Netherlands. In the United States Coleman and Hoffer (1987) could hardly find any differences between the job prospects of pupils of private and public schools, but they did find effects of Catholic secondary education on success in tertiary education. In this study, which is based on longitudinal data of a nationally representative cohort of Dutch primary school leavers in 1965, an analogous comparison is made between the success in tertiary education and the job careers of the pupils who attended Dutch Catholic, Protestant or public secondary education. Differences are found between success in tertiary education and on the labour market of those who attended Catholic, Protestant or public Dutch schools. Pupils of public schools enter the university more often than pupils of private schools and pupils of Catholic schools enter the lower valued tertiary vocational education more often than pupils of Protestant or public schools. Significant effects of school sector were only found for those job characteristics which indicate the kind of job (sector of the job, nature of the job) but not for job characteristics which indicate the level of job. Especially pupils of Protestant schools less often have jobs in the administrative-financial sector and the medical-social sector than pupils of non-Protestant schools. They also less often have jobs which have an exact or social nature. These differences in success in tertiary education and on the labour market are not systematically in favour of the private Catholic and Protestant schools.

This article is a strongly revised version of the first author's doctoral thesis in Sociology at the University of Tilburg, which was supervised by the second author.

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INTRODUCTION

Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore (1982) claimed that American private high schools are more effective than public high schools. On basis of data from the High School and Beyond (HSB) study they concluded that private school students learned substantially more than public school students during their last two years in high school. Their conclusions evoked a storm of protest. Critics have argued that private schools enrol students of superior academic competence, because of either selection or self-selection. In their more recent study Coleman and Hoffer (1987) reanalysed the HSB follow-up data on achievement growth in the last two years of high school to test the effectiveness hypothesis and found support for their earlier claims. They also analyzed the effect of the sector of secondary education on the attainment processes during tertiary education and on the labour market. They found more success at colleges for pupils of Catholic and other private secondary schools than pupils of public schools. However, on the labour market the success of these pupils from different sectors hardly differed. Coleman and Hoffer (1987) attributed these differences in success to the stronger ties between parents and schools in the case of the Catholic schools and the role of the Catholic church as an intergenerational community around the Catholic school. The social capital of the Catholic adults and their community is more readily available to their children, which promotes their educational achievement in college. Public schools in the U.S.A. have to cope with children who have on average less strong family ties or who live in a community with less social capital.

It is clear that even the most accurate assessment of the sector effect in the American school system will retain some uncertainty. The selection problem cannot be solved entirely, because in the USA the public and private sectors are unequally financed. That means that students in private and public schools differ in at least one respect: the parents of students in private schools have to pay substantial extra costs. To what extent this is a "proxy" for parents' seriousness about educational outcome or motivation and support for academic achievement will not be elaborated here. The simple fact that students and their parents differ systematically across school sectors in terms of the amount they spend on education means that the estimation of the sector effect is biased to some unknown degree.

James (1984) remarks that the educational system in the Netherlands is a good example of a system in which public and private education are equally funded. The equal funding of public and private education was one of the major victories of the denominational political parties in the first half of this century. In 1917 the so-called "Schoolstrijd" (Schoolstruggle) led to full government support of denominational education on the same footing as public education.

The educational system in the Netherlands is characterized by a large private

tion along religious lines in Dutch society at large (often called 'pillarization', see Lijphart, 1968) has been waning in the last decades, denominational schools show no sign of losing ground to the public sector. More than 60% of school pupils still receive schooling within the private sector. Apart from denominational schools, there is also a small number of private secular schools which, as a rule, are administered in accordance with educational concepts. Although there is substantial government control, the non-public schools have some degree of freedom in hiring teachers and in making their own additional educational programs, within the context of government-controlled examinations, conditions of employment and capital investment.

Till now in the Netherlands there has only been research on the effects of the three main sectors of education (public, Protestant, Catholic) on the school success of their pupils during primary and secondary education (Van Laarhoven, Bakker, Dronkers and Schijf, 1986, 1987; Blok and Eiting, 1988; Brandsma and Knover, 1989; Costongs and Dronkers, 1989; De Jong and Roeleveld, 1989; Dronkers, 1989; Dijkstra, 1990). These studies found generally speaking that the Catholic and Protestant schools had positive effects on the attainment processes in primary and secondary education. However, the occurrence of these positive effects differed in time and space. On the basis of the mentioned studies one can argue that two conditions have to be fulfilled in order to find significant differences between school sectors. The first condition is that religious attitudes become less important for parents and schools, because only then can other motives for choosing a school sector (e.g. quality of the school) become important. This first condition is fulfilled by the secularisation of Dutch society during the last decades. This condition explains why Dronkers (1989) did not find school sector effects on educational attainment in the still religious fifties and why Dijkstra (1990) did not find positive effects of orthodox-Protestant schools. The second condition is an imbalance between public, Catholic and Protestant school sectors within a community. A school sector which has only a minority of schools within a community has different relations with parents, teachers and local government than a school sector which has a majority of schools within that community. Parents who choose a school of a minority sector will have on the average stronger relations with that school than parents who choose a school of a majority sector, because their choice has to be more conscious and perhaps requires more efforts (e.g. travelling time). The same holds for teachers choosing a school of a minority sector. This more conscious choice of teachers and parents of a school of a minority sector can promote a stronger community which defends their school against hazards and stimulates the quality of teaching and learning. This condition explains why De Jong and Roeleveld (1989) found positive effects of the Catholic school sector in Amsterdam, where the public sector has the majority of schools, and why Costongs and Dronkers (1989) found positive effects of the

This interpretation of the Dutch school sector effects that have been found deviates from that of Coleman's interpretation of the USA school sector effects. Coleman attributes the stronger ties between parents and schools in American Catholic schools to the role of the church as an intergenerational community around the American Catholic schools. This role can explain the enduring effects of American Catholic schools on success in tertiary education and on the labour market. Our interpretation of the Dutch school sector effects points at the average effectiveness of school sectors. Most Dutch religious schools are not any longer surrounded by such a strongly church-oriented community, because of the strong secularization of Dutch society and the decreasing religiosity of the parents who send their children to religious schools. Therefore, we should not expect to find effects, comparable to those found by Coleman and Hoffer of Catholic or Protestant schools on success in tertiary education or on the labour market.

So, the central question of this article is whether pupils who attended Dutch Catholic or Protestant secondary education, have better opportunities in tertiary education and on the labour market than pupils who attended public secondary education, after controlling for social background, school characteristics, contact between parents and school and final level of secondary education.

We control for social background, school characteristics and contact between parents and school because we want to measure a 'pure' effect of attending Catholic or Protestant secondary education, which is not biased by differences in social background and school characteristics between the school sectors. Only this 'pure' effect can be attributed to the role of the church as an intergenerational community after leaving secondary school, which is Coleman's interpretation of the USA school sector effects.

DATA AND METHODS

The data used for the analysis include longitudinal information on pupils who left primary education in 1965 (they were born around 1953). This cohort is part of the so-called 'Van Jaar tot Jaar' (From Year to Year) research (Diederden, 1981). In 1965, the Netherlands' Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) sampled 405 schools from the total population of Dutch primary schools. A stratified sample of 2031 respondents was taken. The *Institute for Social and Behaviourial studies* (ITS) in Nijmegen interviewed these respondents in 1970 and 1974 on their educational and occupational careers. In 1974 only 1845 pupils could be interviewed. Diederden (1983: 46-47) concluded after studying this non-response in the 'Van Jaar tot Jaar' research, which is not unusually large for panel-research, that it caused no significant distortions in the relations between the variables within the population. This means that the non-response was more or less random.

general education. The pupils, who only attended junior domestic science schools and junior technical schools were not examined because the measure of the school sector proved to be unreliable.

One of the major problems of the measurement of contextual effects (such as school sector effects) is how to correct for individual characteristics. In this case we have to control for initial differences among the students entering the various secondary education sectors *and* for the result-differences leaving secondary education. We start to control for four groups of variables: social background (father's occupation, parents' education, gender, scholastic ability at primary school, religion, vocational interests, etc.), features of the secondary school (extracurricular activities, etc.), contact between parents and secondary school (the level of contact between school and parents measured with several indicators), and the final level of secondary education (either lower general education or grammar school). The presentation of our analysis of success in tertiary education and on the labour market is confined to only those aspects of the educational and occupational careers, where we found significant effects of the sector of secondary education.

Most of the independent variables have been extensively used in Dutch educational attainment research and we do not discuss them here due to lack of space. The score of each school sector is computed as the ratio between the total number of attended secondary schools of a sector and the total number of attended schools during secondary education. They range between 1 (all attended secondary schools were in the same sector A) and 2 (one of the attended schools was in this sector). So we get four interval variables: Protestant school, Catholic school, other private school and public school. We deleted the less important sector score (other private school) to avoid dependence between the school sector variables.

To estimate sector differences we mainly use analysis of covariance (ANOVA; SPSS-X3). This technique enables us to examine the relationships between an interval independent variable and interval independent variables (called 'covariates') as well as nominal or ordinal independent variables (called 'factors'). ANOVA provides a significance-test for the contribution by each independent variable to the explained variance of the dependent variable. Moreover, ANOVA yields estimates for the strength and direction of the relationships, comparable to the normal unstandardized regression coefficients computed for a multivariate regression equation. In the next tables we shall report only the unstandardized regression coefficients of school sector and shall omit the regression coefficients of all the other independent factors and covariates for which we control (e.g. school features), for lack of space and because they are not central for our central question (the effect of school sector). However, all presented unstandardized regression-coefficients of school sectors are controlled for the relevant independent variables. We mention the groups of independent variables for which we control in the title of each table. The number of analyzed respondents can differ because

RESULTS

The effects of the sector of secondary education on success in tertiary education

We start with the analysis of the effect of the sector of secondary education on success in tertiary education. Dutch tertiary education has two different forms: university and tertiary vocational education. The former has a higher status and higher entrance-requirements and takes a longer time to complete than the latter, which is more vocationally and practically oriented. We distinguish therefore several indicators of success in tertiary education but only a few happen to produce significant sector effects: the entrance into tertiary vocational education (contrasted with no entrance into vocational education) and entrance into the university (contrasted to no entrance into the university). Note that a substantial number of pupils does not enter any tertiary education. Therefore these two dependent variables are not complementary. We can see in Table 1 that pupils from public schools enter the university more often than pupils from Catholic and Protestant schools, after controlling for social background (panel A). Especially pupils from Catholic secondary schools enter the university significantly less often. This result cannot be explained by the greater effectiveness of Dutch religious schools. In panel B of Table 1 we control also for contact between parents and school and for school features. The differences between pupils from public schools and pupils from Catholic and Protestant schools remain unchanged,

Table 1. The unstandardized regression coefficients of the sector of secondary education on entrance into tertiary education (vocational education, university).

school sector	A. Controlled for social background and final level of secondary education		B. Controlled for social background and final level of secondary education, contact between parents and school, and school features	
	Vocational	University	Vocational	University
Public	-.05	+20 **	-.10	+20 **
Catholic	+.07	-.19 *	+.12	-.19 **
Protestant	+.11	-.06	+.18	-.06
R ²	23 %	25 %	25 %	33 %
N	1518	1480	1356	1480

RESULTS OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC DUTCH SECONDARY EDUCATION

despite the apparent effect of these school characteristics on entrance into tertiary education as one can see in the increase of the explained variance (R²). Pupils from public and Protestant secondary schools enter tertiary education still significantly more often than pupils from Catholic schools, despite positive effects of Catholic schools on the attainment processes in secondary education that have been found in the earlier mentioned Dutch research. These results, which deviate from those of Coleman and Hoffer (1987), do not show the role of Catholic and Protestant churches as intergenerational communities. They may reflect a still existing lag in educational development of the Catholics, a dwindling remainder of the powerless position of the Dutch Catholics during the 16th to 19th centuries.

The effects of the sector of secondary education on characteristics of the first job

The first job is the first job after the cohort's finishing their secondary schooling. Depending on the type of secondary and tertiary education, the pupils of the 'Van Jaar tot Jaar' cohort entered these first jobs at different ages, ranging between 16 and 21. We have analyzed several variables which characterize these first jobs, and the results can be found in Table 2. The first five dependent job vari-

Table 2. The unstandardized regression coefficients of school sectors on characteristics of the first job, after controlling for social background, final level of secondary education, contact between school and parents and school features.

sector of job:	Public	secondary school sector	R ²	N	
		Catholic			Protestant
adminfin	.00	.03	-.24 *	21%	1498
medisoc	.02	-.02	-.16 *	9%	1475
industry	.01	-.01	-.02	7%	1493
commerce	-.01	.02	.06	3%	1540
service	.01	-.01	-.15 **	4%	1518
nature of job:					
exact	.07 *	.05	-.27 *	16%	1475
social	.03	-.03	-.22 **	6%	1511
technical	.00	.00	-.09 **	5%	1514
physical	.00	.00	-.05	4%	1541
level of job:					
SES	-.03	-.01	.51	6%	765
complexity	-.01	-.05	-.15	14%	740
tenure	.06	.18	2.16 **	8%	768
qualification	.01	-.05	-.15	14%	740
management	.02	-.02	-.24	2%	775

note: p < .05 = **, p < .10 = *, all dependent variables, except SES, complexity and

ables indicate the sector of the labour market of the first job: administrative-financial sector (adminfin), medical-social sector (medisoc), industry, commerce and service. School sector and specially the protestant school sector has significant effects on the sector of the first job. Pupils from protestant schools find their job less often in the administrative-financial, medical-social and service sectors than pupils from the other school sectors. The second group dependent variables indicates the activities required by the job: jobs which demand more exact activities like mathematics (exact), jobs which require more social activities like getting along with people (social), jobs which require more technical activities like working with machines (technical) and jobs which require more physical activities like manual labour (physical). Again, the Protestant school sector has significant effects on the nature of the first job. Pupils from Protestant secondary schools have less often jobs which require social, technical or exact activities. The last group dependent variables indicates the level of the first job (SES; complexity; qualification-level; tenure; management). They have almost no independent significant school sector effects, except for tenure of pupils from Protestant secondary schools. The significant school sector effects found are on characteristics which indicate the kind of job (sector of the labour market or nature of the job) but none on characteristics which indicate the level of job. These school sector effects are shown in table 2. We would like to underline the importance of this non-significant result of job variables which indicate the level of the job. It shows that the differences between the jobs of pupils of Catholic, Protestant and public schools thus do not reflect vertical differences between these pupils as to their value on the labour market. They have more or less equal SES, job complexity, qualification-level of job, etc., after controlling for social background, final level of secondary education, contact between school and parents and school features. But pupils of Dutch Catholic, Protestant and public school sectors have different orientations to the kind of attractive jobs and thus tend to enter jobs of different kinds. Especially pupils of Protestant schools less often have jobs in the administrative-financial, medical-social and service sector than pupils of non-Protestant schools. They also less often have jobs which require exact or social activities. But our results cannot be explained by the role of churches as intergenerational communities. We found only effects of Protestant schools and not of Catholic schools, although both school sectors are connected with churches, which would act as intergenerational communities, according to Coleman and Hoffer (1987). Our results can be easier explained by the different histories of the religious groups, which have influenced the culture of the different school sectors and the connected churches, then by the social capital of the Catholic and Protestant churches.

DISCUSSION

But these effects are not systematically in favour of all types of Dutch private schools. Pupils of public schools enter the university more often than pupils of private schools and pupils of Catholic schools enter the lower valued tertiary vocational education more often than pupils of Protestant and public schools. Pupils of Protestant schools have different orientations to the attractive jobs than pupils from public or Catholic schools. These different orientations, however, do not differ in their value on the labour market. Significant effects of school sector on SES, complexity, qualification-level, management of pupils' first job were not found, after controlling for the relevant independent variables. So, we cannot interpret our results as unlimited favourable support for private or public education. Studies showing positive effects of Dutch private schools on educational opportunities in primary and secondary education, reviewed in section 1, are in the Netherlands not affirmed with comparable average positive effects of private Catholic and Protestant schools in Dutch tertiary education and on the labour-market. This indicates that the average greater school-effectiveness and the stronger community of teachers and parents of private Catholic and Protestant schools only has effects during primary and secondary education. Catholic and Protestant schools are only a better choice in primary and secondary education in the Netherlands but their direct effect does not extend to tertiary education and the labour-market. Coleman's and Hoffer's explanation of the Catholic school effect on opportunities in tertiary education and on the labour market by the role of Catholic church as intergenerational community does not hold for the Netherlands.

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REVIEW

Unusually Effective Schools: A Review and Analysis of Research and Practice

Daniel U. Levine and Lawrence W. Lezotte, *Unusually Effective Schools: A Review and Analysis of Research and Practice*.

Madison, Wisconsin: National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development, 1990. 85 pages.

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Over a decade ago Ron Edmonds (1979) identified the basic correlates of an Effective School and sent the message that schools could make a difference in the lives of children. In writing 'Unusually Effective Schools: A Review and Analysis of Research and Practice', Daniel E. Levine and Lawrence W. Lezotte have reminded us of that message and, at the same time, sent one of their own. Their message is that those who seek to design and implement "effective schools" must link Effective Schools Research to research about curriculum, pedagogy and organizational change and renewal. If those who are adherents of Effective Schools Research or, more importantly, anyone who believes that the public schools have a responsibility to ensure "Teaching for Learning for All" read this monograph they will hear that message clearly.

For those fortunate individuals who work in or have seen an "effective school" it is easy to get excited about this work because it corroborates and reinforces the beliefs that the Effective Schools Correlates, when used appropriately, can be a powerful catalyst for improving our schools. For those who have not seen or worked in such a school and therefore find it difficult to believe that such schools exist this monograph not only supports the contention that such schools exist, but provides substantial evidence about what must occur to develop such schools. What is particularly valuable about this monograph is the manner in which the analyses were written. One senses that the authors went to great effort to maintain a balance between their commitment to Effective Schools Research and the need to maintain an objectivity. The result is an analysis that is well written and highly credible.

This monograph of approximately 300 pieces of research includes a wide range of articles about the successful design, implementation and institutionalization of school improvement efforts based upon Effective Schools Research.