



Schools as sorting machines: implications for students' development of in and outgroup trust

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A philosophical reflection on the purpose of education

One of the most common features of contemporary education systems is the sorting of students into schools and –within schools- into different categories. In the first instance, children are sorted into a school on the bases of their residential location, parental preference, and, when entering secondary education, often also personal attributes such as their measured academic skills, maturity, and other cognitive, cultural and socioemotional characteristics (Domina et al, 2017). Within schools, the sorting continues by placing students into meaningful categories, such as by age into grades, classrooms, ability groups and instructional tracks, or selective courses. Sorting students into different schools and categories within schools shapes the opportunities students have, both for social interactions with peers with a similar or different background, as well as the status, privileges and credentials they are assigned and the positions they can occupy in unequal societies. In a phase in their life when students develop their identity, the sorting and categorizing will also have meaningful implications for how they come to understand themselves, which group they belong to and their knowledge, acceptance and trust of others. This presentation will discuss and reflect on the implications of sorting and categorizing students for their development of generalized trust and particular in/outgroup trust in peers in the microcontext of the school. Should schools have a role in creating a more socially cohesive society with high levels of trust between different population groups? And if so, what role should they have?

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