Spatial order and social position: Neighbourhoods, schools and educational inequality
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CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION
7.1 INTRODUCTION

This book has engaged with literature and debates on neighbourhood effects, segregation, school effects and neighbourhood social mixing policy. The aim of this book was to assess the extent and nature of neighbourhood effects on youth outcomes, to test whether neighbourhood effects on youth are transmitted through the school context, and to work towards combining the study of neighbourhood and school effects on youth. A broader aim of this study was to assess the usefulness of the neighbourhood effects framework for understanding the relationships between youth, their social outcomes and neighbourhood inequality. Chapters 2, 3 and 4, based on quantitative analyses, empirically examined the evidence for neighbourhood effects and school effects on youth and the relation between these two effects, while Chapters 5 and 6 dealt with conceptual issues in the study of neighbourhood impacts and reflected more critically on the notion of neighbourhood effects. In this concluding chapter, I bring together the main findings of each chapter and reflect on their implications for other studies. I offer suggestions for future research, outline what I see as limitations of the neighbourhood effects framework, and discuss how this framework might be complemented and enriched. To recap, the following research questions were addressed in this book:

1. Can neighbourhood effects on youths’ educational outcomes be identified and if so, what is the nature and extent of these effects? (Chapter 2)
2. Does the socioeconomic or ethnic composition of the school have an effect on youths’ secondary school outcomes? (Chapter 3)
3. Are neighbourhood effects on youth transferred through the school context? (Chapter 4)

7.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

7.2.1 Neighbourhood effects on education?

At the most basic level, the current research demonstrates that educational outcomes are unevenly distributed across neighbourhoods in the Netherlands. We can speak of a ‘geography of educational inequality’ in the Netherlands. And this geography is not trivial: on average, 28 percent of the variance in students’ achievement in secondary school (as measured by standardized tests in either the
first or third year) is associated with the neighbourhood level\(^1\). An example more familiar to those in the Netherlands comes from the 2010 Amsterdam *Cito-test* results and recommendations for secondary school, reported per city district for the 95 percent of primary school students who took part in the test (Waijenberg, 2010). Even at the city district level, a geographical patterning is recognizable; around 80 percent of the children living in Centrum and Oud-Zuid received a HAVO and/or VWO recommendation, while for children in Zuidoost this was 33 percent, and 38 and 40 percent for those in Geuzenveld-Slotermeer and Noord respectively\(^2\) (*ibid.*). This geography has a lot to do with the various factors that sort and sift people across space and thus generate and maintain socio-spatial structures. For example, the similarity in housing types and prices generally found on a street or in a larger area ensures some degree of similarity in the social class or income level of the residents. Although overall levels of socioeconomic segregation in the Netherlands, as measured by conventional segregation indices, are comparatively moderate (Musterd, 2003), there are higher- and lower-income areas, and neighbourhoods where more or less affluent households cluster. This socioeconomic patterning across space is relevant for education because in the Netherlands, and elsewhere, school choices and educational outcomes are associated with socioeconomic status.

Thus, it is well-known that there is a geography of educational outcomes in the Netherlands. But, are there ‘neighbourhood effects’ on educational outcomes? This was the research question that instigated this dissertation: *Can neighbourhood effects on youth educational outcomes be identified, and if so, what is the nature and extent of these effects?* To first address this question, a multilevel model was specified in Chapter 2, in which the first year secondary school achievement scores of around 18,000 youth were analysed. Levels of achievement were found to be considerably clustered at the neighbourhood level, with more than one quarter of the variance attributable to the neighbourhood level (i.e. differences between the neighbourhoods). The vast majority of this clustering was explained by differences across neighbourhoods in terms of the characteristics of the people who live there, indicating what are often referred to as ‘composition effects’ (i.e. correlation in the outcome variable due to the

\(^1\) As described in previous chapters, ‘neighbourhood’ in this study is operationalized as the *buurt*. ‘Buurten’ are administrative spatial subunits representing the lowest neighbourhood level in the Netherlands. These areas vary in terms of population size and surface area and tend to be defined on the basis of natural borders, such as roads, rail- and waterways, parks, and by building styles and periods.

\(^2\) The *Cito-test* is a standardized test taken at the end of primary school, which largely determines one’s place in secondary school. The HAVO and/or VWO recommendation includes the highest two (out of five) tracks of secondary school, which prepare students for, and allow entry into, university education.
socioeconomic patterning of households across space, as described above). However, support for neighbourhood effects over and above these composition effects was also found, suggesting that there are neighbourhood effects on youths’ educational achievement. The neighbourhood characteristics in the analyses improved the fit of the model and accounted for around five percent of unique neighbourhood variance in achievement, indicating that neighbourhood conditions help to explain some of the differences in youths’ educational achievement.

The findings indicate that youth living in economically better-off areas attain higher levels of educational achievement than those in more economically disadvantaged areas, over and above background characteristics such as gender, age, parental education, family structure and ethnicity. This relationship, however, is not uniform across all groups of youth. Effect heterogeneity across youth socioeconomic background and native Dutch/minority ethnic background was found. The achievement outcomes of youth from families with higher levels of socioeconomic resources appear to bear a weaker relationship to their neighbourhood conditions than those of youth with lower levels of socioeconomic resources; the achievement outcomes of youth with a minority ethnic background appear be related to the level of neighbourhood affluence, but not socioeconomic disadvantage. Thus, I conclude from these findings that the relationships between neighbourhood conditions and youth outcomes are likely to be obscured in studies that measure average neighbourhood effects across all individuals. Indeed, there is no a priori reason to believe that all individuals are influenced by neighbourhood conditions in the same way; rather, there is much evidence pointing to the diverse ways in which places are experienced, and how this can be shaped by factors such as social class, gender and age (Reay and Lucey, 2000).

Taken at face value, the results from Chapter 2 provide support for the existence of modest neighbourhood effects on youth school outcomes, which operate above and beyond youths’ background characteristics. The results of Chapter 4 also support this finding. The empirical magnitude of these effects is in line with several other Western European studies and is considered to be small, but not inconsequential. Determining the practical importance of (even statistically small) neighbourhood effects is a topic of ongoing discussion, which I deal with below.

3 In this paper, the constructs ‘neighbourhood affluence’ and ‘neighbourhood socioeconomic disadvantage’ are the result of a principal components analysis of neighbourhood characteristics and are essentially made up of the following variables: average income per resident and per income earner; the share of high-income residents (i.e. affluence); and the share of unemployment benefit recipients and of low-income residents (i.e. socioeconomic disadvantage).
These results, however, have to be viewed in the context of several important caveats, which have been described extensively in this book, and which I briefly outline here. Importantly, although the word ‘effects’ is used loosely in social science research to refer to statistical effects, the ‘neighbourhood effects’ I find, as those found in nearly all non-experimental quantitative analyses, are in fact empirical associations, not estimates of causal effects. The variables used in these models (e.g. neighbourhood socioeconomic disadvantage) are constructs that serve as proxies for the social processes thought to drive effects. The mean neighbourhood income level does not have a direct effect on youth education, but processes associated with neighbourhood socioeconomic status might. Finding out which social processes drive the neighbourhood effects found in quantitative models requires ongoing work and collaboration between qualitative and quantitative researchers. Because there is a necessary trade-off between data representativeness and the ability to comment on broad relationships on the one hand, and contextual understandings and the ability to uncover complex social processes on the other, the methodology I adopt in Chapter 2 does not enable me to explore the intervening social processes that might explain the associations I find.

Thus, I find support for the existence of neighbourhood effects on youth educational outcomes; the next question is, why would this be so? The literature points to a number of processes thought to drive neighbourhood effects, including those tied to institutional resources and structural factors (e.g. the quality and nature of schools, childcare facilities and public service provision; institutional gatekeeping practices; neighbourhood stereotyping), social-interactional mechanisms (e.g. peer relations, socialization, social networking, the setting of social norms), and selection effects (e.g. the non-random processes through which people come to reside in certain neighbourhoods, which may affect not only the place of residence, but also the outcome variables). In my view, these are not competing but rather interrelated explanations for neighbourhood effects, and the results I find are likely the outcome of multiple factors related to each of them. The intervening pathway of neighbourhood effects that I focused on in this book, and discuss next, is the school.

7.2.2 Neighbourhood and school effects: Considering two contexts
If the neighbourhood context is important for young peoples’ development and outcomes, schools are arguably one of the most important reasons for this. In the theoretical literature on neighbourhood effect mechanisms, schools are posited to be one of the local institutions that contribute to place-based effects (Sampson
et al., 2002; Galster and Santiago, 2006). There are two main reasons for this. First, schools, as institutional resources operating in a quasi-market system, vary in terms of their quality and effectiveness, attractiveness to parents and teachers, features and programme offerings, atmosphere, and so on, and thus, school characteristics differ across place. Secondly, and relatedly, schools bring local children, youth and their families together, and processes such as socialization and learning, peer relations and social networking, take place in and around the school. As the neighbourhood plays a role in sorting students into schools and in shaping families’ school choices, schools are where some of the ‘neighbourhood effects’ could occur.

Chapters 3 and 4 examined the extent and nature of school effects on youths’ school outcomes, and whether the school serves as a pathway of the neighbourhood effect, addressing the second and third research questions respectively. The results of these chapters provide support for the notion that some of the influence of the neighbourhood is transferred through the school context. Chapter 4 examined whether the observed relationships between neighbourhood conditions and youths’ school outcomes are explained by the schools they attend: Are neighbourhood effects on youth transferred through the school context? By specifying a cross-classified model, the analyses in Chapter 4 took youths’ membership in neighbourhoods and schools into account and concurrently estimated the ‘effects’ of both of these contexts. The results reveal that once school effects are taken into account, there are no statistically significant neighbourhood effects remaining, suggesting that the school does indeed transfer a large part of the observed neighbourhood effects.

Although the original aim of these analyses was to incorporate the school into neighbourhood research by testing whether schools are a pathway of the neighbourhood effect, the story is more complex than schools simply mediating neighbourhood effects. While it is reasonable to believe that some of the influence of the neighbourhood is transferred through the school context, implying that the school is a pathway or mechanism of the neighbourhood effect, not all young people attend a school in their home neighbourhood. Although for many children their primary school is located in their home neighbourhood, this is less often the case at the secondary school level. Thus, the findings of Chapter 4 are bound to be partly the result of confounding between the school and neighbourhood characteristics experienced by youth. This calls for further analysis, which considers separately those who are educated locally and those who are not. A broader issue is the complexity of separating out the influence of contexts, which we know are in fact related (e.g. the neighbourhood, school, family). Although we can analytically and methodologically separate ‘neighbourhood
effects’ from ‘school effects’ (and from ‘family effects’), in reality these factors are interconnected, and thus, the actual causal pathways of these effects are bound to be intertwined. For example, a family’s residential decisions may be related to their choice of schools for their children, both of which are known to be related to family social class background. Commenting on the intertwined effects of home, neighbourhood and schools, Pacione (1997: 176), remarks that “[w]hile seeking to disentangle this complex has pedagogic value, disaggregation is an artificial exercise which does not reflect the totality of the local educational environment”. This issue is discussed further below.

Chapter 3 zeroed in on school effects. The chapter examined the relationships between school characteristics and student outcomes, with a special view to the inequalities in educational achievement between ethnic and socioeconomic groups and their potential relationship to school segregation. A number of studies find that levels of school segregation in the Netherlands are comparatively high, for both primary and secondary education. School segregation reflects patterns of residential segregation, but is known to be reinforced by institutional features of the school system, including open school choice and family school choice decisions, and academic tracking at the secondary school level. One of the main reasons that school segregation is a cause for concern is the worry that it generates or reinforces educational inequalities. The differences in school performance between different social and ethnic groups raise questions about school conditions which might be unfavourable for students’ educational development, and school segregation is seen as potentially being one of these conditions.

Chapter 3 tested the effects of school ethnic and socioeconomic composition on youths’ school outcomes in Year 3 and Year 5, taking youths’ prior achievement in Year 1 into account. This ‘control’ for prior achievement means that the analyses tested specifically for the effects of school composition in secondary school. The results indicate a negative relationship between school ethnic composition and students’ third year achievement, but not Year 5 position; however, this relationship was entirely explained by differences in school socioeconomic status. Thus, as other studies have found, school socioeconomic status is associated with students’ educational outcomes in the Netherlands, over and above individuals’ prior achievement, socioeconomic status and other background characteristics. Because school ethnic segregation is tied to socioeconomic segregation, segregation along both ethnic and socioeconomic lines appears to be relevant for students’ school outcomes.

The results of Chapters 3 and 4 point to school effects that are tied to school composition and underscore the need for more research which considers school
and neighbourhood effects together. Just as in Chapter 2, the school effect analyses do not uncover the actual processes driving the observed associations between school characteristics and youths’ educational outcomes. Likewise, it is not simply high-socioeconomic status (SES) peers that create a positive school effect; rather, school research suggests that student body composition, teaching and classroom processes, school management and organization, and external factors, interact with each other in complex ways (Gewirtz, 1998; Hattie, 2002; Thrupp et al., 2002; Lupton, 2005). This has importance for how we think about school composition effects and school mixing policies.

Importantly, even after taking a key set of individual background and school characteristics into account, including youths’ prior achievement levels, the analyses in Chapter 3 reveal that several minority groups perform worse relative to the native Dutch majority, and that low-SES groups perform worse than their higher-SES counterparts. The social and ethnic composition of the schools these youth attend do not account for this educational disadvantage. These performance differences are, however, more pronounced for the achievement test outcome in Year 3 than for the school position outcome in Year 5; in terms of school position in Year 5, the differences between ethnic groups are smaller and some minority groups perform better than the native Dutch group.

Taken together, the results of Chapters 2, 3 and 4 all reveal persistent differences in educational outcomes across socioeconomic and ethnic background, even after taking individual socioeconomic status, school characteristics, neighbourhood characteristics, and in some analyses, prior achievement, into account. Such systematic differences in educational outcomes are worrying, especially given that government measures explicitly aim to redress educational inequalities. This does not necessarily imply that government interventions have been ineffective; moreover, minority ethnic groups have made steady headway in terms of levels of educational attainment and there is no reason to believe that differences across ethnic groups in educational achievement are permanent. While most would agree that education is a critical factor in future labour market outcomes and life chances, and that in advanced capitalist societies those with higher levels of education receive more (economic) rewards, it is also not the case that everyone aspires to high levels of education. However, the relationships between socioeconomic and ethnic background on the one hand, and educational outcomes on the other (e.g. the socioeconomic gradient – the link between parental educational background and individual educational background), vary widely across different national contexts (Schnepf, 2007; Willms, 2010), and thus, finding out what drives this variation, and how to create a more level playing field, is an ongoing task for those concerned with social justice.
in education. From this perspective, the results of this book show that many of the standard predictors used in models of educational achievement (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, prior achievement, school SES, school type), in addition to youths’ neighbourhood characteristics, do not fully account for observed differences in educational outcomes, particularly across socioeconomic lines. Other factors are at play.

7.2.3. Neighbourhoods, their effects, and social mix: The policy and research context
Chapter 5 shifted gears and examined the policy context surrounding neighbourhood restructuring and neighbourhood social mixing initiatives. There is a good deal of work that connects the neighbourhood effects framework to government social mixing and poverty deconcentration initiatives, both in North America and Western Europe (Curley, 2005; Lipman, 2008; Lupton and Tunstall, 2008; Fallov, 2010). It has been argued that the notion of neighbourhood effects lends support to the current policy focus on promoting ‘socially mixed’ neighbourhoods and ‘cohesive communities’ as part of the answer to the problems of poverty and social inequality. The idea of socially mixed neighbourhoods has strong appeal; as Smith (2002: 98) points out, “[s]ocial balance’ sounds like a good thing – who could be against social balance?” However, looking more closely at how social mixing initiatives are implemented, the assumptions underlying these strategies, and the research findings to date, cautions against accepting these policies uncritically. Certainly, not all attempts to promote socially mixed neighbourhoods can be criticized, but much literature suggests that the objectives of social mixing initiatives are often blurred between promoting endogenous neighbourhood revitalization and promoting broader gentrification processes. And importantly, research finds weak evidence supporting the expected positive effects for incumbent households.

One of the key interests of Chapter 5 was the notion that the neighbourhood effects framework might work to inspire, or legitimize, neighbourhood social mixing policies. It has been suggested that the emphasis placed on neighbourhood effects has inadvertently lent theoretical and empirical weight to the idea that neighbourhoods are (at least in part) responsible for their own social problems, and hence, that solutions to these problems lie in the neighbourhood and its population mix. In calling attention to the neighbourhood and its social composition, attention may be shifted away from the institutional and economic constraints that individuals face and from more fundamental determinants of poverty and inequality. In the US discussion, scholars have argued that the extensive use of the concept of ‘concentrated poverty’ to describe the conditions
in poor neighbourhoods has led to an important theoretical slippage, whereby concentrated poverty has come to be seen as an underlying *cause* of poverty, and thus deconcentrating low-income households is seen as an effective means of tackling poverty.

While it goes without saying that researchers should always be specific and careful in their analyses and specifications, one of the main messages that emerges from Chapter 5 is that even more can be done to improve this in the field of neighbourhood effects research. A number of commentators have argued that there has been an over-reliance in neighbourhood effects research on often crude proxies, and a tendency to centre attention on behaviour which diverges most from so-called middle-class standards. There is often an implicit assumption that growing up or living in a poor neighbourhood must constitute a negative force in one’s life, even though there is a great diversity of experiences and social outcomes in even the poorest (and richest) neighbourhoods. This within-neighbourhood heterogeneity is often overlooked in neighbourhood studies. Moreover, the forces that produce and reproduce neighbourhood social structure are given little attention in most neighbourhood effects frameworks, and thus, there is a risk of overemphasizing the role of the neighbourhood and its social composition, at the expense of obscuring wider structural forces. As Wacquant (2008: 9) writes, “[t]o forget that urban space is a *historical and political construction* in the strong sense of the term is to risk (mis)taking for ‘neighbourhood effects’ what is nothing more than the spatial retranslation of economic and social differences” (emphasis in original). While I do not believe that neighbourhood effects are merely the reflection of broader differences in society, I think more attention has to be given to the processes – including those *beyond* the neighbourhood – that generate and maintain neighbourhood and individual social inequalities. Understanding the effects of neighbourhoods requires an understanding of how these places are produced. This would give a more balanced picture of neighbourhood effects, and would, in my view, oppose the spatial deconcentration of poverty as an effective means of promoting individual social mobility.

Most neighbourhood effects researchers are well aware that they are working with imperfect proxies when they use census tracts or administrative units to define neighbourhood and aggregate population characteristics to represent neighbourhood conditions. However, for large-scale studies, time and cost constraints necessitate some degree of reductionism. Moreover, there exists no perfect proxy for ‘neighbourhood’; as outlined in Chapters 1 and 6, people’s sense of neighbourhood may vary depending on the activity in question, their age, and multiple other factors, just as the neighbourhood of interest to researchers may
vary depending on their topic of investigation. In my view, these are valid starting points for exploring geographical differences and neighbourhood effects, but there is also a pressing need for more collaboration between qualitative and quantitative researchers and more nuanced data.

7.2.4. Above and beyond the neighbourhood: Extending the framework

Chapter 6 followed from the previous chapter and explored some of the challenges in researching and understanding the meaning and role of the neighbourhood in young peoples’ everyday lives and longer-term social outcomes. While some of these challenges stem from methodological difficulties inherent in trying to measure the influence of complex social contexts, they also include conceptual issues concerning the definition and interpretation of ‘neighbourhood’ and how we conceptualize the relationship between neighbourhoods and people. I focused on how we view neighbourhoods and especially how we view their relationships with, and effects on, young people. I argued that neighbourhood effects research could better link up with (the mainly geographical) literature on place and space. Linking up with this literature would compel us to ask not only how neighbourhoods influence individuals, but also how individuals influence and interact with neighbourhoods – that is, how individuals come to be in particular neighbourhoods, and how they interpret, shape, draw on and give meaning to these places. The main argument of Chapter 6 is that the neighbourhood effects framework could be enriched by thinking more explicitly in terms of overlapping and reciprocal relationships running between (multiple) neighbourhood places, places of education (e.g. schools), and young people, with these relationships embedded in a wider system of institutions and socio-spatial practices.

I showed, through young people’s descriptive accounts, that neighbourhoods do have meaning for their everyday lives, routine activities and probably also their longer-term outcomes, but that youth are also active in choosing and interacting with the places they encounter, including their secondary schools and places within and beyond their neighbourhood. The relationship between neighbourhood and individual should be thought of as mutual interaction, rather than a one-way effect of neighbourhood on individual. Youths’ reports of their residential histories and interpretations of neighbourhood boundaries underscore the multiple neighbourhoods that young people inhabit and the different ways in which they define and view these places. Rather than thinking of the neighbourhood as a bounded area or a context for social activity, it is helpful to view the neighbourhood through the geographical concept of ‘place’. From this perspective, the neighbourhood could be seen as a unique place with many
overlapping places nestled within it, which have porous and dynamic boundaries and links to the wider world. Without taking a more holistic and relational view of the neighbourhood, or by reducing the neighbourhood to a few variables, we are bound to miss many of the characteristics that make it a meaningful place. The interview findings also show that the perspectives of young people merit a larger role in research on school and neighbourhood selection.

7.3 OVERALL CONCLUSION

Nearly no neighbourhood effects studies begin with the assumption that they will uncover ‘large’ neighbourhood effects on individual outcomes. We know that individual outcomes like educational attainment are the result of a combination of many interrelated factors, the most important of which concern individual and family characteristics, such as individual aptitude, motivation and interests, social class background, and parental level of education. However, individuals and their families are situated in, and react to, wider neighbourhood and social structures. Thus, individual interests, friendships, parenting behaviour and so on, may also be shaped by the neighbourhood setting.

This study finds support for the existence of neighbourhood effects on youth educational outcomes. More precisely, youths’ educational outcomes were found to be significantly associated with characteristics of their neighbourhoods, over and above important background characteristics. However, neighbourhood characteristics do not play a direct role in youths’ school outcomes. What explains youths’ educational outcomes lies foremost at the individual level (prior achievements, aptitude, family socioeconomic status, family structure, gender, age, ethnicity) and the school level. Insofar as neighbourhoods shape school choices and school populations, which other research shows they do, neighbourhoods can be considered to have an indirect effect through those pathways. Neighbourhood conditions may also affect family functioning, parenting behaviour, and individual interests, which, in turn, may affect individual school outcomes. Thus, neighbourhood effects on young people’s educational outcomes can best be thought of as indirect and incidental.

The extent to which a unique or independent neighbourhood effect can be accurately identified is questionable. Where young people live is related to the friends and peer groups they have while growing up, the schools they attend, and their families’ social class background, and thus, many facets of a young person’s social world are intertwined. It is widely recognized that by ‘controlling’
for variables which may themselves be affected by the neighbourhood context, it is likely that neighbourhood effect models often underestimate the true impact of the neighbourhood and confound possible mediating pathways. This calls for the need to take a more holistic approach to the study of neighbourhood effects, which considers the interactions between youth and the multiple places that they inhabit, both concurrently and over time. The analyses in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 support the notion that the neighbourhood is relevant for young people’s social outcomes, though determining the relative impact of the neighbourhood, versus the family or school context, for example, is probably impossible given the complex interconnectedness of these contexts. Thus, there are many reasons to look further into the role of the neighbourhood, and the interaction between neighbourhoods and youth, but ideally this should be conducted with an awareness of the interconnectedness among youth, their current and past neighbourhoods, schools, and homes.

7.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation has resulted in a number of ideas and suggestions for future research, some of them already mentioned above. Above all, I suggest two ways in which thinking about and researching neighbourhood effects could be complemented and extended. I think it is necessary to complement neighbourhood effect studies with studies that adopt a more holistic and relational perspective. First, it is necessary to be more conscious of how neighbourhood space and neighbourhood social structure are produced and maintained. There is a vast geographical literature on the (re)production of uneven geographies; in my view, this literature helps to put the notion of neighbourhood effects into perspective. While inequalities across neighbourhoods have implications for individuals, the production of these spatial inequalities is not an arbitrary matter. The underlying causes of neighbourhood effects do not always lie in the neighbourhood. Thus, one could ask, for example, which social and structural relations underpin neighbourhood segregation? What do socio-spatial inequalities and neighbourhood effects reveal about the political, economic, social and cultural processes in which they are embedded? The production of neighbourhood geographies is also of direct importance to the issue of selection effects (or selection bias) in neighbourhood effects research. It is widely recognized that people do not come to live in neighbourhoods through random processes (and likewise, that children and youth do not come to attend certain schools through
random processes). To understand the impact of place, it is important to view neighbourhood selection as a fundamental social process in itself and something of substantive interest to neighbourhood effects and to how neighbourhood structure is continuously made and remade.

In the geography of education literature, a useful distinction has been made between inward- and outward-looking approaches (Hanson Thiem, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010). The inward-looking geography of education regards education to be the ‘ultimate ends of investigation’, with spatial variations in the provision, consumption and outcomes of schooling as topics of enquiry. The outward-looking approach is more instrumental, and uses these same patterns to comment on broader political, economic and social processes in society. In a similar way, much of the neighbourhood effects research could be classified as inward-looking. This research is often concerned with documenting and exploring spatial variations in certain characteristics and attributes (e.g. unemployment, income, collective efficacy), in an attempt to explain differential individual outcomes. This kind of analysis could be complemented by also thinking about what these neighbourhood patterns (or indeed, ‘neighbourhood effects’), say about wider, external social and structural processes. As Mitchell (2001: 1359) comments, “[y]ou cannot have a deprived place without deprived people, and it is social and spatial processes which bring deprived people together, hold them together, and continue their deprivation”.

Secondly, I advocate a better awareness of the mutuality or reciprocal relations between people and the multiple places they inhabit and spend time in, including the neighbourhood. Although the neighbourhood is seen to affect individuals, how individuals shape the neighbourhood tends to be given little attention in neighbourhood effects research. There is a greater dialogue between people and place than is suggested by the notion of neighbourhood effects. The mutual relationships between people and place are a fundamental fact of human life and of key interest in some fields of study – people, place and space are always reciprocally interrelated (Massey, 1994). This issue is widely acknowledged in the neighbourhood effects literature (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Buck, 2001; Sampson et al., 2002), yet still tends to be underappreciated. As Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000: 331) explain, “in studying context, an important issue is the simultaneity problem, as addressed by transactional models of human development. Interactions between children and families are bidirectional in nature (Sameroff & Chandler, 1975). Those between families and neighborhoods may be as well”. Likewise, as Lupton (2003: 13) asserts, “there needs to be some mechanism for reflecting the interactions between people and place, in order not to identify neighbourhood effects that really arise from individuals, or vice versa”.

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While this mutuality does indeed pose a significant challenge to measuring the ‘effects of neighbourhoods’, it suggests that we might look at the question of neighbourhood effects from a different perspective: not only how neighbourhoods affect people, but also how people affect neighbourhoods, including how they choose, are selected into, excluded from, shape, give meaning to, and interact with neighbourhoods. Taken together, these two interrelated points about neighbourhood selection/production and simultaneity/mutuality encourage neighbourhood effects researchers to broaden the lens through which neighbourhoods and their relationships with people are viewed, and to examine both sides of the person–place relationship. Diez Roux (2004: 1958) writes, “[j]ust as over simplification limits our ability to understand, the inability to simplify can be paralyzing”, and I agree. While it is necessary in research to reduce the complexity of the social world, still, we need to be cognizant of how our abstractions resonate with real world relationships.

In this book, I made a several steps towards integrating neighbourhood and school research, but many more opportunities remain. At a very general level, asking how the school fits into the schema of neighbourhood effects (and vice versa, how does the neighbourhood fit into the schema of school effects?) are important questions. In neighbourhood research, the school is sometimes implicitly thought of as (part of) ‘the neighbourhood’, while in other studies it is contrasted with the neighbourhood (e.g. studies that find that neighbourhood segregation is not important for social ties, but suggest that school segregation may be). Neighbourhoods and schools are undoubtedly relevant to each other – for many youth, their schools are geographically embedded in or proximate to their home neighbourhoods, while for others, attending a certain school is a reason to leave their local neighbourhood. Some families’ residential and school choices are intertwined or made in tandem (Croft, 2004). In the realm of urban policy and research, there are many similar neighbourhood and school issues (e.g. neighbourhood and school segregation, neighbourhood and school mix policies). I think that the growing field of the ‘geography of education’ (e.g. Hanson Thiem, 2009) provides many opportunities to further develop knowledge about issues that concern neighbourhoods, schools and youth education, such as school choice processes (e.g. the spatial imprint of school choices), neighbourhood change and gentrification, residential and school segregation, and the pursuit of socially and ethnically mixed neighbourhoods and schools.

In conclusion, further integrating qualitative and quantitative knowledge and research methods, and adopting a more place-sensitive approach to the study of neighbourhoods and people, will be important steps in moving forward in the field of neighbourhood research.
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