Diversity, segregation and school choice in Sweden

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Sweden – diversity and education

• Sweden has become an ethnically diverse society due to immigration and globalization (16% foreign born).

• 20% of all students in elementary schools and 20% of children in preschools have another mother tongue than Swedish.

• 146 languages are spoken in Swedish schools.
Major challenges

- Housing segregation
- Achievement gap
- Newly arrived refugee and asylum-seeking students
- General lack of knowledge among teachers about how to work with language development
- Relations with parents
- Selective use of school choice policy
Major policy initiatives

• Additional resources allocated to schools according to social and ethnic composition of their students.
• More education and training for teachers.
• All students, irrespective of their migration status, are entitled to education.
• Various and pretty affluent integration and urban development projects set up over the last decade in the most deprived areas.
• Mother tongue teaching, instruction in students’ native language and Swedish as a second language as a part of school curriculum.
• Cooperation with universities and university student unions in order to provide students in immigrant dominated schools with additional assistance (home-work, language learning, positive role-models).
• Extra teaching hours in Swedish as a second language and summer schools.
School choice policy – a part of the solution or a part of the problem or both?

- Ideological expectations that the policy will entail more integration and equality.
- Public schools (run by local municipalities) and Independent (free) schools (run by private or corporate interests).
- Attendance zone principle and right to choose.
- The principles of fairness and non-discrimination for admittance to independent schools.
- Competition between public and between public and independent schools.
- Universal vouchers; independent schools cannot charge any admission or top-up fees.
- Public debate: Segregation, profit, achievement and equality.
School choice policy and its outcomes

- Social and ethnic diversity
- Segregation
- The overall contribution of independent schools to better performances and lower costs?
- The legitimacy of independent schools
- Reversing to catchment area only-policy?
Conclusion – In order to achieve and support diversity at schools we need to work with following areas

• All schools involved – not just schools in urban suburbs
• Integration – creating meeting places
• Inclusion in school’s social and pedagogical arenas
• De-stigmatization of certain neighborhoods, schools, ethnic and religious groups
• Pedagogical efforts to promote acquisition of knowledge and language and to increase achievement among the most disadvantaged students
• School choice policy should be reformed in order to minimize its negative effects and maximize its positive outcomes