Towards sustainable social diversity at schools – what role for parents (and others)?
The case of the Netherlands
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Is this white enough for you?

Amsterdam, May 22, 2015

- A mixed neighborhood
- With segregated schools

- School and parents of a 'black' / low SES primary school organised media attention for the problem

- They went into the neighborhood with students and flyers

3

Every child has a right to integration

St Catherine School

- Parents and teachers want a mixed school

- Why?

- Learning to live together

  [*Education in the 21st century*, 1996]

Two questions, no simple answers

Is this white enough for you? Or how to combat and prevent segregation?

- By discussing parental school choice

- By discussing school admission policy

- By implementing 'controlled choice', a balance between equity and choice

- … and by addressing residential segregation

How to implement the right to integration of every child?

- By forming effective and affective mixed schools

- By building strong parent-school relationships

- By being examples for children as parents and teachers

The Dutch context

- Causes of segregation:
    - School choice of parents (lifestyle, SES)
    - Admission policy of schools (formal, informal)
    - Residential segregation (rent or own a house; type of house)

- Dutch (?) Dilemma:
    - No actor can solve the problem alone
    - You need schoolboards, schools, parents and government to cooperate

- Therefor we need policies
    - That address all causes
    - That address and involve all actors

7

Parental choice (cause 1)

- Take parents seriously, dialogue
  - What are parental worries?
  - Micro choices, macro effects –> intervention

- Exchange information
  - School visits, school tours, school market, interactive website
- Sent information (Brochures, letters)

- Discuss mixed schools
  - 'argument map'
  http://www.gemengdescholen.nl/content/pdfs/Argumentmap%20mixed%20education.pdf

ARGUMENT MAP MIXING EDUCATION

What are the various important arguments for and against mixing students in primary education?

FOR

STUDENTS

Mixing increases students' opportunities to develop
- Weaker students can benefit from the support of stronger students.
- Stronger students can learn more by explaining lesson materials to weaker students.
- Students with diverse backgrounds get the same opportunities for good education.
- Students get more attention at mixed schools, with smaller classes, than at non-mixed 'white' schools.
- Mixing increases opportunities for disadvantaged students, while retaining these for advantaged students.

Mixing can reduce the social and cultural gap between students
- Students come in contact with societies' diversities at an early age.
- Students learn to get along with people of varied cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

PARENTS

Parents want the best for their child
- Parents want their child to grow up in an environment that has the least amount of segregation possible.
- Parents feel that it is important for their children to learn to cope with diversity.

Mixing has advantages for parents
- With a mixed school in the area, parents don't have to 'flee' to a non-mixed 'white' school elsewhere.
- Mixed schools sometimes have shorter waiting lists than non-mixed 'white' schools.
- Parents from diverse backgrounds come in contact with one another.

SCHOOLS

Mixing prepares schools for the future
- Mixing increases eligibility of (formerly) non-mixed 'white' schools for more funding.
- Through mixing, non-mixed 'black' schools can attract parents and students from advantaged backgrounds.

Mixing encourages schools to make conscious educational policy choices
- By mixing, school boards engage with educational policy, which leads to quality improvement.
- Acceptance policy agreements between schools guarantee the continued existence of all schools.
- By mixing schools fulfill their obligation to pay attention to 'active citizenship and social integration'.

Mixing makes teachers' jobs more rewarding
- Mixed classes provide teachers with challenges.

GOVERNMENT

Mixing has (local) political priority
- Segregation is a high-priority issue on the political agenda – mixing is a means to address this issue.
- Mixing helps to prevent the closure of neighbourhood schools, and other facilities along with them.
- Existing buildings are better utilized when students are distributed more evenly.
- Mixing contributes to the Netherlands' international reputation as an integrated society.

Mixing is a way of fighting segregation
- Mixing promotes the acceptance of diversity in society.
- Mixing promotes integration and social cohesion.
- Mixing contributes to the emancipation of cultural minorities and disadvantaged groups.

AGAINST

STUDENTS

Mixing reduces students' opportunities to develop
- Stronger students' cognitive development and ambitions are curtailed.
- Weaker students loose the specialized guidance they need.

Mixing can increase the gap between students
- Students form small groups with their 'own kind', discouraged by differences in (cultural) background.
- Differences become more obvious, making students more conscious of them.

PARENTS

Parents want the best for their child
- Parents of advantaged children are afraid that their child's academic achievements will deteriorate.
- Parents feel as if their children are being exposed to a social experiment.
- Parents want their child's school to be aligned with their own way of life and childrearing beliefs.
- Parents don't want their children to be influenced by the norms and values of others.

Mixing has disadvantages for parents
- Parents feel at home with people of similar backgrounds, and do not feel comfortable in mixed schools.

SCHOOLS

Mixing creates unrest in schools
- Non-mixed 'black' schools could lose funding if they accept more advantaged children.
- Non-mixed 'white' schools fear losing advantaged students, and/or losing the ability to attract them.

School boards do not see the necessity of mixing
- School boards at non-mixed 'white' schools think that things are going well at their schools.
- School boards at non-mixed 'white' schools think mixing is just another trend they don't want to follow.
- High goals (achieving the best results for one's own non-mixed school) are not compatible with mixing.

Mixing makes teachers jobs more complex
- A mixed school demands a lot from teachers: specific skills, affinities, time and energy.
- In addition to being an educator, teachers need to fulfill childrearing and social worker tasks.

GOVERNMENT

Politicians think that mixing is unnecessary
- Politicians are afraid that too much attention is being paid to mixing and not enough to good education.
- Solving the problem of segregation is not the primary responsibility of education.
- Society cannot be 'shaped', and class differences will therefore always exist.

Mixing does not combat segregation
- Mixing primary schools can only be successful if neighbourhoods are mixed as well.
- Only primary schools are mixed – secondary schools are not.

Mixing is difficult to achieve
- Freedom in education is threatened by enforced mixing.

This Argument Map gives an overview of the arguments for and against mixing students in primary education. The arguments are arranged per stakeholder: students, parents, schools (and school boards) and government.

For the purposes of this map, mixing is defined as the (voluntary) mixing of students from different cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. A premise that is often chosen is that the mix of students in a given school should be a reflection of the school's neighbourhood.

Parent initiatives

- What are they?
  - A group of parents (higher educated) apply their children to a good school with lower educated parents

- Can they be stimulated and facilitated?
  - Yes. Stimulated bij city governments (e.g. via tours). Welcomed by schools and schoolboards

- Parent initiatives are an effective way to desegregate one school at a time
  - Compare Denmark, Flanders

Parent associations

- There are many parent associations in the Netherlands (mostly for higher educated parents)
  - They are not interested in (de)segregation

- Program facilitated local associations for parents with migrant/minority background
  - To empower parents to join parents'councils

- Attempts to stimulate initiatives of minority parents failed

Controlled choice (cause 2)

- All schools involved, common problem

- Level playing field for parents
  - every child the same chances to get into preferred schools

- Criteria
  - Parents can still choose any school
  - They have priority in schools in their neighborhood
  - ... desegregation as a criterion?

Reflections

- Priority in your neighborhood can combat segregation in mixed neighborhoods
  - Especially if & when desegregation is an explicit goal, a focus in policy and practice

- But what about segregated neighborhoods?
  - Cause 3 and the most difficult one to address

Question 2: integration

After desegregation

- Mixed schools are an effective way to combat **segregation**.

- However: they are a _necessary but insufficient_ condition for integration.

- What (more) is needed for **integration?**

Integration

- *Learning to live together* needs planning & efforts

- Activities in school and class
  - targeted, meaningful and sustainable
  - aimed at bonding ánd bridging
  - using cooperative learning methods (*Jigsaw Method*)

- Related goals
  - *Learning to be* – (functional) identification
  - *Learning to do & to know* – (social) competencies
  - Schools that are both effective and affective

Parents and teachers

- The role of parents and teachers is crucial
  - even with friendship between students and with attitude towards 'others'

- Parents and teachers are role models
  - Bridging friendship, dealing with diversity

- Strong parent-school relationships
  - Use diversity as an asset

Reflections

- Segregation and integration are wicked, complex problems

- There are no simple solutions, no silver bullets

- The broader context makes it even more complex

  - Segregation in housing

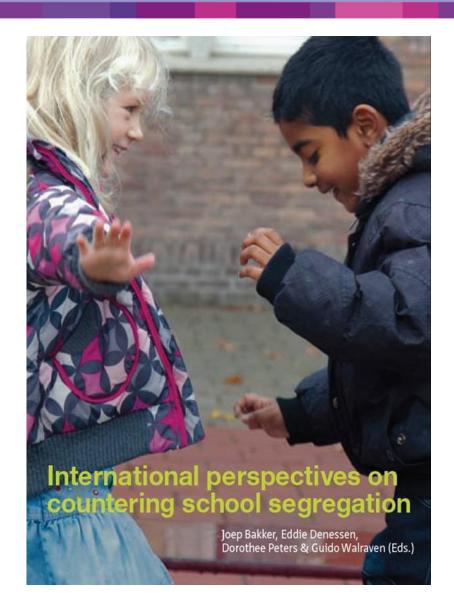 - Social-economic inequalities

- However …

"Investing in equity pays of"

"If the educational system does not stimulate every student to develop to its full potential, the costs are high for both individuals and society."

[OECD, Equity and Quality, 2012]

International perspectives on countering school segregation

Joep Bakker, Eddie Denessen,
Dorothee Peters & Guido Walraven (Eds.)

> Information & contact

www.gemengdescholen.nl

(with page in English & argument map)

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