



Report on the thematic workshop on Segregation and Integration in Education.

0. Introduction

The city of The Hague hosted a Thematic Workshop on Segregation and Integration in Education on the 9th of October 2013. The workshop was organised by the Dutch National Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools, on behalf of the SIRIUS Network (a European Policy Network on the education of children and young people with a migrant background).

The aim of this workshop was to exchange experiences and to have a dialogue between policymakers, researchers and educational practitioners. Around 25 education and migration professionals participated from 9 European countries and some international organisations. They shared experiences, discussed dilemmas and pitfalls, and formulated policy recommendations on segregation and integration in education.

This report offers a brief account of the workshop. The power point presentations of the key note speakers are in the appendices (in a separate file), together with the program, the list of participants and country notes on segregation and integration in education of all the participating member countries.

Opening statement by Guido Walraven (Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools)

Segregation and integration in education is an urgent issue. What kind of segregation we are talking about: ethnic and/or social-economic segregation? In the Netherlands as well as in many other countries these types of segregation overlap (80% in the big Dutch cities). Therefore we might talk about social-ethnic segregation.

There are different effects of segregation. In the cognitive domain of academic results (reading/writing, math) there is discussion about the effects; however, a recent review study showed no significant effect of school composition (Herweijer, 2011). On the other hand the effects in the social domain are substantial; for instance regarding learning to cooperate and learning to live together.

Children have to learn how to live together in a diverse society. That is the reason why segregation and integration in education is so important. The best place to learn to live together in a diverse society is in education, since almost all children attend school. And without integration there is a risk of wasting talent and that will come at high costs for the individuals as well as society as a whole.

Equity and quality

“Investing in equity pays off” (OECD, 2012). Member states are urged to develop a policy on this matter. One of the aims of the workshop is to discuss how we can realise this.

The focus in most discussions is on desegregation, but in the end we are looking for integration. Desegregation is only a necessary condition, not a sufficient one; so we need to do more. What can we do and what is effective? There are no simple answers, there is no magic bullet, so we have to discuss the dilemmas and pitfalls in this domain and formulate recommendations both for policy and practise.

1. Keynote Introduction, Joep Bakker (Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands)

There are differences between countries as far as school segregation is concerned. For instance different groups are involved. In the United States school segregation is mainly defined by racial background. In Western Europe migrant background defines school segregation. In Eastern Europe school segregation is partly created by geographical situations: minorities of neighbouring countries within their borders. Another group that lives segregated in Eastern Europe are the Roma and Sinti.

School segregation is caused by residential segregation and school choice behaviour of parents (like ‘white flight’). Characteristics of the school system also effect school segregation: the earlier the choice for secondary education, the more segregated the school system is.

Is segregation always a problem? In some Eastern European countries it is seen as a right of minorities to have their own schools. In general, however, in Europe many adhere to the reasoning of the US Supreme Court (in the Brown vs school board case) that school segregation stigmatises minorities and leave children of migrant background with less schooling opportunities.

PISA- and OECD-data demonstrate an achievement gap between ‘native’ and minority-students in the academic domain. However, student composition only marginally affects minority student cognitive outcomes. Schools predominantly visited by minority students, may have test scores that are equal, sometimes even better than the scores of schools predominantly visited by majority students. Separated education enables adaptive schooling (own mother tongue, culturally adapted education).

In the social domain Allport’s contact hypothesis is important. In US there are studies showing that intergroup contact can lead to more as well as to less prejudice. The success of school integration largely depends on the quality of teachers in mixed classrooms. They are playing a key role in creating conditions for positive effects of classroom diversity. So policymakers need to focus on enrolment numbers as well as on the teacher quality (especially the way they handle diversity in their classroom).

Since there is a lack of empirical research-data that unambiguously legitimize desegregation in education, we should emphasise that desegregation is, besides a pedagogical choice, above all a political and moral choice.

Questions and discussion

The language of the minority groups -- what do you do if large groups speak a non-majority language?

In the Netherlands all children have to learn Dutch, and Dutch is the only language in education; but in other countries bilingualism is permitted, even adhered. The effect of teacher behaviour is connected to language use and the way teachers deal with the non-native speakers in the classroom. In some countries language is used as an argument to promote separate schools for minorities.

2. Sharing country perspectives

All of the attending member countries contributed a country note on the state of school segregation and integration in their country, before the start of the meeting. The country notes were the basis for sharing experiences from the different countries. We started with an introduction of each participating country.

Hungary

There is a difference between separation and segregation. Separation is a deliberate voluntary choice, for example to keep the own culture alive. In contrast segregation is not merely a matter of free choice, but can be enforced by societal circumstances.

In Hungary, the Roma minority has been subject to segregation since the 70s. They are no newcomers but a minority group residing there for a long time. There is free school choice. The schools the Roma attend are very segregated, however, and the achievements of Roma in schools are very low.

A good example of a desegregation policy is a city in Hungary that aimed at desegregating their entire school system, including all partners involved. This experiment produced promising results. However, the mixing alone doesn't offer good outcomes; in order to get good school results for all students, there also has to be a focus on social interaction within the school and the classroom (for instance using cooperative learning). In this example desegregation is not a goal in itself but an instrument in striving for equity.

We have to be careful with using the word separation. The word can be easily used by politicians to claim that it is the result of a free choice by the minority, and that there is no problem.

Latvia

The main issue in the field of segregation and integration is about the Russian-speaking minority. There are Russian and Latvian speaking schools; the school system is separated according to language differences. In Russian schools pupils learn Latvian as a second language and this seems to work well. In the bilingual schools the school achievements are better than in other schools, maybe due to the relatively small cultural difference within these schools.

Lithuania

In Latvia there is also a bilingual school system. In the 90's (after the collapse of the Soviet Union) there were troubles with the Russian minority. The bilingual schools use the same way of instructing

the state language as regular schools. All children have to take their exams in Lithuanian. In the scores on the exams there are no differences between regular schools and bilingual schools.

Austria

The debate on segregation and integration focuses on children who speak another language (their mother tongue) at home. The differences in reading results between native and non-native speakers are very large. Even if controlled for the social economic background of students, there remains a big gap. In Austria the discussion is now about giving more funding to schools with more bilingual children. This will happen on the basis of four factors: highest education level of parents, social economic status, country of birth, and language spoken at home. The main goal is to improve the school outcomes. Desegregation isn't an explicit aim in this policy. In Austria the general believe is that it is possible to teach children with a different level of cognitive abilities in the same class.

Spain (Catalonia)

Since the fall of the dictatorship, Catalan has been the first language and Spanish is the second language. In school both languages are taught. For native Spanish speakers it's not obligatory to learn Catalan. In the Basque country and in Valencia there are other models of bilingual teaching. In Spain (as well as in other countries) the collaboration between policymakers, schools, teachers and parents is important.

Cyprus

There are extra lessons in the Greek language for non-native speakers. To support children in the classroom there is an interpreter to translate classes for non-native speakers.

Belgium (Flanders)

In secondary education the achievement gaps are mostly explained by individual characteristics. But also school composition has an effect. This is mainly negative for children from a disadvantaged background.

The policy in Flanders aims at having the same composition of pupils in the school as in the neighbourhood. This means that policy doesn't target school composition in segregated neighbourhoods but only in mixed ones. Primary schools have the option to give priority to neighbourhood children. If a school is not representing the social or ethnical composition of the neighbourhood, it can give priority to social-economic and ethnic backgrounds that are underrepresented in the school. In other situations schools aren't allowed to refuse children. However, schools manage to work around the priority registration, and middleclass parents are more aware of the issue and are more active in the selection of popular schools. All in all that is leading to more instead of less segregation.

There is more funding for schools with children with a disadvantaged background. The changing demographics make it hard to conclude the programs bring about the desired results. In Flanders segregation and integration are the main issues.

The Netherlands (and Croatia)

The Dutch country note was not introduced at the workshop due to a lack of time during the meeting.

The country note from Croatia was not introduced because unfortunately the Croatian delegate could not attend because she went ill.

Discussion

An important difference between countries is whether there is separation (mostly determined by language) or segregation (which is based on ethnicity and social economic status).

There need to be a systemic approach. The different levels are politics and politicians, the school class level and teachers, and at the level of parents. For changing national and European policies, support at all levels is important. Associations of teachers and parents are also important actors.

3. Role of teachers: Orhan Agirdag (University of Ghent, Belgium)

There is a difference between (academic) school performance in schools with or without a segregated population. If you control for the value added by a school (by comparing the level when a student enters the school with the level when a student leaves the school), however, there is no difference.

The composition of schools might not be the reason why segregated schools perform badly. But since the students in these schools do perform badly, we need to ask why?

Teacher expectations are a key factor. Teachers tend to believe that their disadvantaged students are not able to perform well. This has a negative influence on the actual performance of children.

Teachers communicate their expectations to students and parents, and that might influence the student self-expectations. In all that ways low performance is related to the stereotypes teachers hold. Teachers' expectations determine learning outcomes. We have to alter the expectation of teachers. This can improve the performance of the teachers. We can focus on having the best teachers in the minority schools.

The popular stereotype is that native Flemish children with a lower-class background have the same learning abilities as ethnic minorities do.

The disregard of non-Dutch tongue is communicated in different ways. This is repeated by the students and has an impact on their academic performances. Self-esteem of students is better in schools with a higher percentage of ethnic minorities.

Mixed schooling makes it possible for children to form interethnic friendships. But also conflicts can arise. This gives a possibility to learn how to deal with intercultural conflicts.

For the social cohesion we need voluntary desegregation.

Discussing interventions

In Flanders there is a connection between the capacity of children to speak correct Flemish and expectation by teachers: teachers tend to have low expectations of children with low language skills. Standardized tests can help to change the expectations of the teachers.

From a policy point of view poor performing schools are the place where you have to change the performance. The reason why the schools on the lower end are seen as a problem is based on the dominant culture. The so-called normality is not questioned, so the problem is elsewhere. The dominant culture is (automatically) excluding the lower social groups.

The groups that are defined as segregated are very diverse. The use of segregation is focused on differences in origins. What we need to talk about is: how do we organise diversity in schools and in the schooling system. The meaning of 'segregation' is politically charged. We have to be careful with the use and the background ideas that come with it.

We can have a look at the different approaches and see what we can learn from them. What can we do to improve the conditions for children in segregated schools? This is strongly related to the skills of the teachers.

Apart from the teachers, parent involvement is important for children and their school success. This is not self evident, a lot of parents don't know how to express their interests in their child's school career. If you want parent involvement, the school will have to approach the parents and show them how they can get involved. If you only tell parents speaking their mother tongue is not favourable for the development of their child, they don't feel welcome and are pushed away.

In the Netherlands we have parent rooms where parents are invited in to the school, and there is a liaison person who facilitates the contact between parents and school (a so called 'oudercontactpersoon') working at the school. This person helps to communicate between parents and the school and helps the school to support parents to deal with their educational problems and to support their children in education at home.

We started with the question about how the school system works in a particular situation and how this leads to an unequal division of the common good of education. This is a completely different question than how we can improve, in a given situation, the educational outcomes and compensate for unequal outcomes. We have to split this issue in two questions. One question is about what systematic sources created segregation. The second question is about improving the outcome in the system and the equal distribution of the benefits of education. Both questions are important for our policy recommendations.

It is important to look at the characteristics of the school systems and the consequences they have for immigrant children; for instance bilingual or monolingual school systems? In some countries there is segregation based on religion, in others religion does not play a role at all. Selection processes in the system can have a segregation effect, for instance the age at which students choose a secondary school. How is the teacher training organised? They have to be trained in dealing with different cultures. And how are children welcomed into the system? Newcomers should feel welcomed by children, schools and teachers.

4. Critical Reflection, Michael Merry (University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands)

Is segregation inevitable, and if it is, how should we respond?

We can talk about segregation in a different way by talking about spatial concentration. Instead of integration we can use mixed environment. How do we get the environment mixed, if that is what we must strive for?

The general idea is that there is something wrong with segregation. In our mind we connect segregation with historical examples (for instance 'apartheid' in South Africa) and are not paying attention to the real problems.

We have different beliefs. Mixing schools will correct injustice. This will help to transport social capital. This is the belief underlining the mixing argument.

The index of segregation has influence on the equality of the labour market.

In all the countries there are constitutional rights on freedom of school choice. On top of that people tend to hang out with people that are similar. This is an obstacle in breaking down spatial concentration of specific ethnic groups. Voluntary association happens on both sides. Discrimination obstacles are working together with the voluntary association. There are different mechanisms that are creating spatial concentration. What can we do?

Mixing is not always a good idea. But it can be a good idea.

Is it possible to gain equal possibilities within segregated situations? How can we reproduce the success in segregation situations? There are structural obstacles. Teachers are asked a lot and it is not clear if it is possible to make teachers better.

Questions for discussion:

What is the result of mixing, should we strive for it?

Are there other options?

If mixing is hard, what other options remain? We have come a long way, but what are we going to do now?

Discussion

Do parents want to mix to get access to good schools, or do they want a mixed school?

What happens in a mixed school; is there equality within such a school?

There are differences between children that are not speaking Dutch, some are doing well and others do not. The assumption is that you need to connect with native speakers. How would it be possible to have children speaking a mother tongue in a school with more than 80 ethnicities? There should be flexibility to deal with those situations for the people in positions that matter.

Segregation is a political concept. In the Netherlands there is a distinction between migrant and non-western migrant. How can we skip the politicized and leave the ethnicity as the dominant issue? It is more relevant to see where the problems are and where the concentration of problems is, and how we can counter both.

We have to deal with policymakers and politicians. We can bring our views (on the real problems and the minor role of ethnicity) in the public debate and try to renew the current discourse.

Discussing recommendations

In the participating European countries segregation is discussed in very different ways. In general differences in social economic status are important and migrant background in some countries as well. In some countries language is the key factor in segregation.

In discussing segregation and integration we need to look at the educational system as a whole.

- What are the effects of the system, and how is segregation developing down the institutional line?
- What is the role of national, regional and local policies?
- What is the role of the teacher, what is happening in the school and the class, and what is the effect of teacher expectations on achievements of students?
- What role can parents have?

Is segregation 'bad' and integration 'good'? Maybe we could talk about spatial concentration; and about mixing instead of integration. Voluntary separation in some cases seems to have positive effects on school results.

We are searching a balance of equity and free choice, tailor made for the local context.

There are at least two ways to solve the problem of inequity. One is by changing the educational system in order to distribute the public good of education equally. The other is by compensating for unequal outcomes of the existing educational system

What can we learn from good practices?

- Controlled choice policies prove to affect school compositions
- Parent initiatives contribute to mixed schools
- Strengthening schools may lead to increased attractiveness for mixed groups of parents
- We need a strong research agenda to gain more evidence for successful interventions.