

Segregation

Editorial

“And you know, there was a little girl in California who was a part of the second class to integrate her public schools, and she was bused to school every day. And that little girl was me.”

Harris, 2019

One of the most remarkable moments during the US Democratic primary election may have been the debate between Kamala Harris and Joe Biden when she confronted his position on busing in the 1970s with her own biography and thereby emphasized the importance of school desegregation for equal opportunities. Kamala Harris visited an ‘integrated’ elementary school in Berkeley and referred to a busing plan to desegregate local public schools that had been implemented two years before she was enrolled. The controversy quickly developed into a public debate not only on both candidates’ contributions to education policies and civil rights but also on the history of desegregation, and the effectiveness of integration measures in general. The eleventh issue of On_Education aims to contribute to this renewed public and academic interest in educational segregation by exploring definitions, forms and dynamics of school segregation over time and across contexts.

Segregation in education refers to a considerable overrepresentation of students characterized by (ascribed) characteristics such as social status, ethnicity/race, gender or (dis)ability. As a result, different groups are being educated in separate schools or classrooms. School segregation usually mirrors residential segregation but is likewise determined by the structure of the education system and parental choices. Structural characteristics such as early tracking in different school types, ability streaming within schools or private schooling reinforce segregation just like policies that foster school choice and school competition. However, privileged parents tend to get their children in high status schools no matter what organizational rules and educational policies are in place (Roda & Wells, 2012). Attempts to restrict certain forms of segregation, such as ability streaming, are likely to trigger other forms of segregation such as private schooling. In which ways policies unleash or constrain school segregation remains a controversial issue.

There are two main arguments against segregation.

Firstly, segregation perpetuates educational inequalities by further disadvantaging already underprivileged students. In this view, school segregation undermines educational justice because students in segregated schools receive on average fewer resources compared to students in non-segregated schools or because segregated schools (by design) restrict or impede access to high-status occupations or tertiary education. Secondly, desegregation can be seen as a social value itself. In an increasingly fragmented society, integrated schools are important since education plays a crucial role in strengthening social cohesion. The concrete empirical relation, however, between school segregation on the one side, and educational inequality and social cohesion on the other side remains a subject of academic debate (e. g. Baysu & de Valk, 2012; Benito et al., 2014; Bonal & Bellei, 2018; Reardon, 2016). This also holds for the relevant political and ethical questions concerning the value or disvalue and (il-)legitimacy of certain forms of integration and segregation in different school systems and societal contexts (e.g. Anderson, 2010; Brighouse, 2007; Clayton et al., 2021; Merry, 2013, 2020; Swift, 2003).

In this issue of On Education we have invited scholars to reconsider fundamental questions about school segregation, such as: Why does segregation matter? What normative considerations are relevant when thinking about segregation? What are the effects of advanced school choice? How does segregation influence inter-ethnic friendships and social cohesion? What are recent trends with regard to the segregation of students with disabilities and newly arriving migrants? How should private schools be regulated? Adam Swift explores the normative arguments that must be taken into consideration when thinking about segregation. He compares consequentialist and non-consequentialist as well as parent-focused and child-focused perspectives on segregation. Michael S. Merry investigates the often hypocritical talk about school integration and explains why integration is not a proxy for educational justice. Faith in integration, he argues, is bad faith. Referring to recent developments in the US city of Detroit, Noliwe Rooks argues that segregation benefits the wealthy and criticizes the influence of private businesses on schools. Isabel Ramos Lobato shows how the abolition of school catchment areas selectively influenced school choice behavior and school competition in the German city of Mühlheim. Tamás Hajdu, Gábor Kertesi and Gábor

Kézdi¹ analyze how higher or lower segregation relates to inter-ethnic friendships between Roma and non-Roma in Hungary. Based on his research in the Paris metropolitan area, Marco Oberti argues that school segregation invokes a feeling of being abandoned and deprived among working-class and immigrant families. Juliane Karakayalı and Tobias Buchner investigate the history of school segregation of first-generation migrants in Germany (Karakayalı) and of students with intellectual disabilities in

Austria (Buchner). Finally, Rita Nikolai and Marcel Helbig review recent developments in private school expansion and suggest minimum requirements to private school regulation. With this broad spectrum of arguments, contexts, and disciplinary perspectives, we hope to rejuvenate discussions around school (de)segregation and its predicaments.

The Editorial Team

References

- Roda, A., & Wells, A. S. (2012). School choice policies and racial segregation: Where white parents' good intentions, anxiety, and privilege collide. *American Journal of Education*, (119), 261–293. <https://doi.org/10.1086/668753>
- Anderson, E. (2010). *The imperative of integration*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400836826>
- Baysu, G., & de Valk, H. (2012). Navigating the school system in Sweden, Belgium, Austria and Germany: School segregation and second generation school trajectories. *Ethnicities*, 12(6), 776–799. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796812450857>
- Benito, R., Alegre, M. À., & González-Balletbò, I. (2014). School segregation and its effects on educational equality and efficiency in 16 OECD comprehensive school systems. *Comparative Education Review*, 58(1), 104–134. <https://doi.org/10.1086/672011>
- Bonal, X., & Bellei, C. (2018). *Understanding school segregation: Patterns, causes and consequences of spatial inequalities in education*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Brighouse, H. (2007). Educational justice and socioeconomic segregation in schools. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 41(4), 575–590. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2007.00583.x>
- Clayton, M., Mason, A., Swift, A., & Wareham, R. (2021). The political morality of school composition. The case of religious selection. *British Journal of Political Science*, 51, 827–844. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000649>
- Harris, K. (2019, June 28). *And you know, there was a little girl in California who was a part of the second class to integrate her public schools, and she was bused to school every day. And that little girl was me.* Twitter. <https://twitter.com/KamalaHarris/status/1144427976609734658>
- Merry, M. (2013). *Equality, citizenship, and segregation*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137033710>
- Merry, M. (2020). *Educational justice. Liberal ideals, persistent inequality, and the constructive uses of critique*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36023-8>
- Reardon, S. F. (2016). School segregation and racial academic achievement gaps. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 2(5), 34–57. <https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2016.2.5.03>
- Swift, A. (2003). *How not to be a hypocrite: School choice for the morally perplexed parent*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203423059>

Recommended Citation

Editorial Team (2021). Segregation. *On Education. Journal for Research and Debate*, 4(11). https://doi.org/10.17899/on_ed.2021.11.0

¹ Gábor Kézdi died on June 29 in Ann Arbor, Michigan after a long illness. We are grateful that he found the time and energy to contribute to this issue.