Linking Research, Policy and Practice
to Promote Quality in Education:

The case of the Dutch National Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools

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1. **Introduction**

In this paper, we explore possibilities to link research, policy and practice to promote a broad type of quality of education, by focusing on the field of school (de)segregation and on a knowledge centre as an interface.

We state that schools with a mixed population (in terms of social economic status, ethnicity et cetera) have greater chances to prepare students for a life in a mixed society. We can do that by building on the results of an earlier international study (Bakker, Denessen, Peters and Walraven, 2011).

Some comparative findings from the earlier study are shared together with examples of interventions from the Netherlands.

In this introduction general concepts of knowledge production and research utilization are loosely coupled with the example of the Dutch National Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools.

1.1 Linking Research, Policy and Practice – in what ways?

When the effective school movement started (Edmonds, 1982; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore and Ouston, 1979), the dominant idea was that research could offer (quantitative) models to practice and objective advice to policy. A phrase catching the period would be "speaking truth to power" (also the title of an excellent handbook on policy science from 1979). It was top-down, from the ivory tower of science to the work at the ground of practice and policy. Schön (1983) characterized the dominant view of those days as technical rationality. Professionals were supposed to use or apply scientific tools, techniques and theories as instruments to solve clearly defined problems.

Schön argued that the dominant view was inadequate and ineffective in a time characterized by uncertainty, complexity and value conflicts. He was interested in what makes professionals effective and what are they thinking while they are in action? Since much of their knowledge is tacit, Schön observed e.g. what senior professionals say and do when they mentor juniors in practical situations, especially in architecture, city planning and education. He discovered they reflected in action, they were reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983). He found out they posed a problem and reflect on different ways how to solve it using practical competence and

professional artistry. Which is, of course, completely different from instrumental application of scientific knowledge that researchers would throw at them from an ivory tower.

Almost 30 years after the groundbreaking work of Schön most of us are well aware of the inadequacies of technical rationality, top-down approaches and of speaking truth to power. The educational field is a good case in point. The art and craft of teaching is a complex profession and the tacit knowledge of educational practitioners can be uncovered best when researchers and practitioners cooperate. It is a process of co-creation of knowledge. As a consequence, the linking of research, policy and practice is more bottom-up, more about negotiated truths than about 'objective truth', and more about a network of actors than about hierarchical power.

That is all reflected in the newer generation(s) of the model of effective schools. The process of school improvement is now more important (as the name ICSEI shows: International Congress of School Effectiveness and School Improvement). Schools need to be learning organizations, there is a learning community of a wider group of professionals (e.g. from social work and health) and that might even be expanded to parents. Teachers and policy officials need to be reflective practitioners, have an investigative attitude and be able to utilize research results. Schools keep focusing on learning results, not only cognitive or academic results, but also non-cognitive (social competency, citizen education, music, sports) and meta-cognitive (cooperation, problem solving).

Educational research needs to adept to this situation in order to be able to play its part in linking with policy and practice. Utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 4th edition 2008) is important. In fact all steps in the research process need to be scrutinized on how they can optimize the results for policy and practice, of course without compromising criteria of (social) science. Addressing knowledge questions that practitioners and/or policy professionals have, involve them and other stakeholders in the process of inquiry (e.g. to explicit their practical and tacit knowledge, or to gather other forms of practice based evidence) and the formulation of useful recommendations.

In order to facilitate the interplay between research, policy and practice several interfaces are used. In this paper we focus on one example, a knowledge centre for a well-defined area: the Dutch National Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools. By appointment of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the independent Centre has a clearing house function: creating and maintaining a database of extensive information regarding school segregation, and disseminating that information to the relevant actors. Those actors are local public authorities, school boards, head-teachers and their teams, parents.

By disseminating state of the art knowledge and giving advice, the Centre also aims to activate and empower those actors to combat segregation and stimulate integration. Knowing about the state of the art can prevent one from 'reinventing the wheel' and can inspire one to take action.

The Knowledge Centre started in 2007 and has years of experience in linking research, policy and practice.

1.2 Promote Quality of Education – what quality?

Many national governments tend to interpret the quality of education solely in terms of cognitive learning achievement. Hence the Dutch government, for instance, tried to improve student cognitive performances at schools with many students at risk by means of priority measures in relation to social, economic and ethnic inequities. Other participants in the discussions use a broader definition of educational quality, including effects in the social-emotional domain. For instance, social skills such as being able to cooperate with different partners, solving problems together and learning to live together, as Delors (1996) put it.

Governments and schools which focus solely on the 'basics' of cognitive results like language and arithmetic overlook the fact, that social wellbeing and a safe learning environment are prerequisites for good learning results. In other words, working on non-cognitive skills is helpful and in some ways conditional for results (both cognitive and non-cognitive).

Those participants in de discussions that tend to look at both cognitive and non-cognitive results of education state that in general mixed schools offer a better learning environment (if all other dimensions are equal) as compared to segregated schools. For them, mixed (and good) schools offer the best preparation to live and

work together in a mixed society (mixed in terms of socioeconomic status, culture, ethnicity, et cetera).

1.3 The focus of this paper

There is no need to restrict oneself to the national level in order to promote the dissemination of knowledge and good practices. We can look abroad and learn a lot about 'what works and why' in the specific circumstances that parents, (head-) teachers and policymakers are dealing with. That is why the Dutch National Knowledge Centre took the initiative to explore the international knowledge base regarding school segregation and integration. The result was an edited book (Bakker et al, 2011). We hope the knowledge presented in the book and the summary in this paper can inspire policy makers and policy researchers, schools and parents in many countries across the globe.

1.4 School segregation

School segregation is perceived as an unyielding problem worldwide, which is manifest along both ethnic and socio-economic lines. With the edited volume we aimed to share information about school segregation and policies focused on countering school segregation from an international perspective. Many countries develop policies to prevent and counter school segregation in order to provide equal opportunities for all children and to contribute to citizenship in multicultural societies. The aim of the book was to present the state of the art regarding research on socio-ethnic school segregation in almost 20 countries and regions, and to share ´good practices´.

The focus of the book is on the range of policy measures that have been applied to prevent and counteract segregation in primary education (e.g., distributing minority students over schools, school choice policies, and parent initiatives), the implementation in the national or local context, and the effects of those policies.

In the rest of this paper we summarize the comparative analysis of all the contributing countries and we give some findings from the Netherlands.

2. **Overview of general findings**

2.1 School segregation in various countries

Although ethnic registration is not universally allowed, almost all authors in this book state that elementary education in countries about which they report is characterized not only by socio-economic segregation, but also by ethnic segregation. The groups involved, however, vary widely from country to country depending on the specific socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts of the countries or regions in question.

In order to design desegregation policy initiatives, it is important to identify the causes of segregation. Without any doubt, residential segregation is the main cause of school segregation. Segregated schools can be found in areas where people are segregated. Concentrations of minorities can be found in certain regions, particularly near country borders and in large cities, and in those areas many segregated schools exist.

A second cause of school segregation is free school choice. Freedom of choice enables those majority parents who live in mixed areas to opt for a homogeneous majority school. However, in some cases, such as in Sweden, freedom of choice was assumed to function as a means to counter segregation by enabling minority parents to choose a predominantly majority school in order to optimize their children's opportunities. Research on parental choice (for example Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1995) showed that the use of the right to choose a school requires some level of social capital. Parents need to be aware of the existence of different schools in the area and to acquire relevant information about schools to make a reasoned choice. However, since social capital is unevenly distributed across socio-ethnic groups it seems that increasing freedom of choice as a means to counter segregation is not very likely to result in desegregated schools.

Features of school systems are a third cause of school segregation. The specific provisions and accessibility of private schools contribute to school segregation, especially in those countries where the access to private schools is limited to those who can afford to spend a considerable amount of money to send their child to a private school. Also, school provisions that address specific minority needs, such as

Islamic schools and regional minority schools, contribute to school segregation. In a previous study, we addressed the mechanism of self-segregation, in which parents actively choose segregated schools because they believe these schools address their specific education needs best (Denessen, Driessen, & Sleegers, 2005; see also Driessen & Merry, 2010).

2.2 School segregation: a problem?

As the title of the book and the paper suggests, school segregation is something to counter. It is perceived as an unwanted phenomenon, because, as stated by many authors, it may negatively affect student's cognitive outcomes and societal integration. Even apart from that, it is of general public interest that all students have the opportunity to fully develop their talents.

Some authors highlight the negative effects of school segregation. In segregated schools (i.e. school attended mainly by minority students), student outcomes lag behind those of students attending heterogeneous schools or homogeneous majority schools (cf. contributions from the US, France, Belgium/Flanders and Denmark). However, although some authors provide some evidence against segregated schools, in general, studies investigating peer effects on student outcomes show no or only weak segregation effects on academic results.

In terms of societal integration, inter-group contact realized by desegregation is presumed to contribute to positive out-group attitudes. This presumption is based largely on Allport's contact hypothesis, which states that inter-group contact, at least under certain conditions, may lead to a reduction of prejudice. Many studies have provided some empirical confirmation of Allport's contact hypothesis. However, contradictory outcomes have been reported with respect to outcomes of diversity in terms of prejudiced attitudes.

We would also like to note that school segregation is not regarded as a major societal problem everywhere. On the contrary: in some (South-)Eastern European countries ethnic minorities even explicitly claimed their segregated position in education. In this context it is important to explicitly refer to Michael Merry's perhaps somewhat controversial social-philosophical statement on segregation and

desegregation in the book. He challenges the integrationist ideal and advocates the necessity of forms of voluntary separation in order to realize the desire for quality education and to promote emancipation, self-respect and a fulfilling community membership.

Throughout the chapters in the book, the question arises as to whether segregation or desegregation is the best means to empower disadvantaged groups. The answer to this question has strong implications for the legitimization of desegregation policies that aim to improve students' perspectives on a successful career and their citizenship education.

2.3 Policy measures to counter school segregation

Considering the contributions to the volume, segregation in education in the US and in most European countries is generally regarded as an undesirable phenomenon and consequently desegregation is considered to be a goal worth striving for. However, this dominant opinion is often considered to be self-evident, based on assumptions that are seldom subject to empirical investigation. This also applies to the policy measures that have been described in the various country chapters to counter segregation. Since residential segregation lies beyond the scope of educational policy, most initiatives are aimed at manipulating school segregation.

In the vast majority of countries, policy makers try to achieve desegregation by limiting the existing free choice of parents by introducing so-called 'controlled choice' policies. By limiting the proportion of minority students to be enrolled in schools – as is the case in Italy – or to distribute students over schools based on some kind of (reasoned) lottery – as is sometimes the case in the US, the Flemish community in Belgium, and in some cities of The Netherlands – or, for instance by 'bussing' which is the case in some working class neighbourhoods in France. All these interventions are aimed to decrease school segregation.

Besides school choice policies, authors of the various chapters mention a number of other policy measures to promote desegregation. These initiatives are partly focused on the attractiveness of segregated schools and the willingness of majority parents to send their children to them. In Denmark, the case of the Brug Folkeskolen parents' association in Copenhagen provides an example of an attempt to persuade majority

parents to choose a neighbourhood school. Such initiatives have also been developed in the Netherlands and have been largely successfully. Small groups of majority parents are usually the initiators of this kind of initiative. By convincing parents who are about to choose a school to collectively send their children to a neighbourhood school, parents can ensure that their child will not be the only majority student enrolled in the local school.

2.4 Effects of policy measures to counter school segregation

One of the major aims of the book was to collect information about the effectiveness of various desegregation policies. With respect to policy effects, a distinction should be made between effects in terms of school compositions (to what extent did schools really become less segregated due to specific policy measures?) and effects in terms of student outcomes (did the policy measures indeed result in improved cognitive and/or non-cognitive outcomes?).

Effects on school composition

Concerning effects on school compositions, several authors point to positive effects of desegregation policies whereas others point to negative effects. Authorities in most countries seem to be quite content if the student population mirrors the composition of the district in which the school is located. But even to realize and to preserve such a reflection is not an easy task. Especially controlled-choice interventions do seem to indeed reduce school segregation trends, as is reported in the chapters on the US, The Netherlands, and Denmark. When choice policies are too strict, as was the case in Slovenia, some additional residential segregation might be evoked, because parents then tend to relocate to areas with schools of their preference. It turns out that controlled choice policies require some adherence on the part of the parents in order to succeed, and - not unimportantly – to guarantee some parental involvement in their children's school and education. However, when parents object to the proposed measures, negative effects may result.

The Swedish case showed that increasing freedom of school choice had an adverse effect. Schools became more segregated due to increased freedom of choice. As is the case in The Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark for example, 'white' and even 'black' flights occur. Such results provide some support for considering freedom of school choice as an important cause of school segregation and not just as a

measure to counter it. Findings from the England chapter may endorse this somewhat paradoxical conclusion. In England school choice policies often fail to increase social and ethnic mixing of schools. According to the author, that must not be regarded as a failure of choice policies as such, but is above all a failure to facilitate choice, especially for those parents who lack the needed social capital. Other policy measures, such as investing in schools' reputations and attractiveness, did not seem to have resulted in changing school enrolment numbers.

Effects on school performance

Although in many countries desegregation politics expressly started to improve student's school performances, evidence for their positive effects on student outcomes is scarce. Apart from observations in Denmark and especially in the U.S., where remarkably positive effects on student performance are reported, hardly any effects of desegregation measures on student outcomes were reported. At most, there are some vague indications that minority children benefit in this respect from mixing ethnic groups. Nevertheless, desegregation policies have not been systematically evaluated in these terms. In most cases it was simply assumed that desegregation would contribute to the improvement of school performance.

Effects on social cohesion and citizenship

If there is a lack of research into the cognitive effects of desegregation, this is equally true for research into its social implications. For decades, scientists and policymakers have speculated about the potential for interethnic group contact to reduce prejudice, and to promote tolerance and mutual understanding. Notwithstanding that, there have only been a few cases in which school desegregation policies seem to have explicitly pursued this goal. Dutch, but also British and Belgium education authorities strive for school desegregation in order to achieve not only an improvement of student's school performance but also to stimulate more interethnic contact between students, obviously anticipating the promise that contact theory offers (cf. Pettigrew, 2009). Judging from what the authors say on this topic, desegregation measures have not been evaluated from that perspective in any of these countries yet. However, previously mentioned results from research on student contacts and attitudes in 'naturally' mixed schools in The Netherlands do not always give rise to optimism.

Effects of policies aimed at countering within-school segregation

As stated above, some of the described interventions were aimed at integration of mixed students groups within schools, such as the implementation of some form of intercultural education. Authors may not have been able to report on the specific effects of intercultural education in schools and classes in Ireland and Italy for example, simply because purposive research on this domain has not been executed yet. However, there are some indirect indications that the intended goals were not always achieved and that intercultural education may sometimes have even had an adverse effect by strengthening and disseminating stereotypical views of other cultures and ethnicities. Intercultural education in mixed classes may lead to a greater awareness of racism, and, more importantly, children may learn to label and interpret the negative behaviour of their peers in terms of racism and discrimination (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

2.5 Teachers' role in mixed classrooms

As stated in some of the chapters, the success of school segregation largely depends on the quality of teachers in mixed classrooms. Teachers are expected to play a key role in creating conditions for positive effects of classroom diversity. For teachers to positively contribute to academic success and successful integration of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds they need, for example, to understand students' background cultures, to build cross-cultural communication, and to deliver culturally responsive instruction (Brown, 2007). Moreover, teachers' level of culturally responsiveness largely depends on their attitudes towards diversity. Banks (2008), for example, challenges the liberal assimilation conception of citizenship that has dominated citizenship education and pleas for classrooms 'in which students from diverse groups interact and deliberate in equal-status situations' (Banks, 2008, p. 135). Precisely for that reason more implicit forms of intercultural education such as cooperative learning (see e.g. Slavin & Cooper, 2002) and so-called self-disclosure techniques (Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, 2007) seem to pay off the most. Unlike traditional forms of intercultural education they emphasize the sameness of students more than their otherness.

Banks (2008) explicitly links teachers' classroom behavior with their conception of

multiculturalism, which means that teachers' level of responsiveness is not just a matter of behavior, but also a matter of attitude. It may be that not all teachers welcome greater levels of classroom diversity. Teachers' ethnic attitudes may affect their classroom behavior and specifically teacher-student interaction processes. In a recent Dutch study, Van den Bergh et al. (2010) have found larger ethnic achievement gaps in classrooms with teachers who held strong prejudiced attitudes. The relation between teacher attitudes and student performance seemed to be established via differential teacher expectations. Highly prejudiced teachers systematically showed lower expectations of minority students than less prejudiced teachers. These results point out the risks of self-fulfilling prophecy effects in mixed classrooms with teachers who have highly prejudiced attitudes. In line with these results, we read from the education policy in Scotland that 'schools are encouraged by local and national government to have high expectations of all their pupils, and staff members are encouraged to avoid making assumptions or applying negative stereotypes which may cause barriers to learning and fulfillment of potential'.

In conclusion, teachers play an important role with respect to student performance and out-group attitudes in heterogeneous classrooms. Relevant teacher characteristics, such as their attitudes, their expectations of students and their classroom behaviors are likely to contribute to positive, but also to negative effects of classroom diversity. It therefore seems necessary to not only focus on enrolment numbers when designing desegregation policies, but to incorporate some teacher training as well.

2.6 Lessons learned
To wrap things up, we conclude the final chapter of the book with five key lessons that we derived from the description of national desegregation policies.

Lesson 1. *Controlled-choice seems to be the most effective desegregation policy*.
In the Dutch, Danish and U.S. chapters, a controlled-choice policy (with parents' consent, see lesson 2) seems to have been successful. The authors provided some convincing evidence that controlled-choice indeed leads to increased school diversity.

Lesson 2. *Effective desegregation policy needs support from parents and schools.*

Considering the content of the chapters in this book, one must almost conclude that the socio-ethnic desegregation of education in an otherwise segregated socio-ethnic world, is a difficult if not impossible task. The spontaneous school-choice behaviour of parents, but especially the often lawfully guaranteed right to free school choice, limits these efforts. When successful interventions are reported, parents' cooperation was a key factor for their success. When parents oppose the local policy interventions, failure is very likely.

Lesson 3. *We do not know very much about intervention effects on student outcomes.*

Even if desegregation of education is to succeed, it is by no means guaranteed that all its intended effects can be reached. Most authors in this book could not offer a definite answer on this question, simply because in their countries the necessary research is lacking. Only from the U.S. and Denmark have figures been reported showing that heterogeneous classes benefit the academic achievement of minority students, whereas in France, for instance, almost negligible peer effects are reported. On other, often explicitly pursued goals for desegregation, such as the stimulation of interethnic contacts and their potential to reduce possible stereotypes, or to promote social cohesion and citizenship, we are left to speculate because none of the authors in this book could provide data based on thorough empirical investigations on these issues.

The lack of knowledge about effects of desegregation policies on student outcomes calls for more effort to be put in policy evaluations. Mere before and after intervention comparisons are insufficient evaluation measures. Rather, specific quasi-experimental pre-test post-test control group designs are needed to establish whether interventions result in the desired student outcomes.

Lesson 4. *Desegregation should not always be strived for.*

In some local circumstances, school segregation may function as a means of strengthening minorities' identities and to deliver schooling that suit the needs of well-defined minority groups. When we add to this the scarce evidence for positive effects of school desegregation on students' future careers, there is a risk that

desegregation may result in contradictory effects in terms of emancipation of minority groups. In many cases efforts to contribute to citizenship values in segregated schools have been described as an alternative for aiming at integration of minority students.

Lesson 5. *Caution is needed when transferring good practices.*

Desegregation policies are highly context-bound. This means that good practices that have been described in one specific context are not easily transferable to other contexts. Specific features of local communities and parents, in combination with different laws and traditions in various countries seem to be very relevant for the success of desegregation interventions. Sometimes the transfer of good practices is perceived as legitimized, given the evidence provided from empirical research (so-called evidence-based practice). In many cases, especially when interventions are strongly related to contextual factors, this is problematic. For desegregation policies this means that good practices are to be interpreted within specific contexts and need some 'translation' before they may be expected to result in similar effects elsewhere. This also calls for localized effect studies of interventions, because intervention effects are likely to vary across various contexts.

3. **The case of the Netherlands**

The Netherlands has a history of school segregation with a religious-political tint. In line with a general system of 'pillarization' there were separate public, Catholic and Protestant schools, with all schools equally financed by the government. At the same time, there was segregation along socio-economic lines, both between schools and within schools. With the influx of migrants in the last forty years, ethnicity became part of school segregation. However, socio-ethnic educational segregation has only recently become important on the political agenda.

The centre-left cabinet that held office from February 2007 until February 2010 allowed municipalities to experiment with interventions to prevent and combat segregation and to facilitate dialogue and integration. At the time of this writing, twelve municipalities are implementing pilot projects in primary education (for students aged 4 to 12). All cities are supported by the Dutch National Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools.

Most interventions are aimed at student application and acceptance by schools, information and advice for parents, and facilitating parent initiatives. A prominent goal in all those interventions is a school population that mirrors the neighbourhood population. In effect, housing segregation will therefore be mirrored in the schools. Unfortunately, the number of evaluation studies on desegregation measures is limited.

3.1 Background

The Dutch school boards (and schools) are relatively autonomous; local authorities have no power to enforce interventions to combat segregation. The famous 'polder model' of wheeling and dealing is still very much alive in the educational sector. The consent and willingness to cooperate of all actors involved is needed. The Dutch discourse on school segregation was recently summarized as seeking a balance between freedom of choice and equity. Traditionally, freedom of education was favoured but in recent years the voices of equity have risen. However, there are indications that the pendulum is swinging back (i.e. that the two political parties in the current coalition cabinet favour freedom of choice).

Although there is no national policy of interventions against socio-ethnic school segregation, the topic is part of a broader policy initiative. In 2006 the national

government introduced a new policy line that prescribed the municipalities and the educational authorities or school boards a Local Education Agenda. Combating segregation and facilitating integration is one of the compulsory issues on that agenda. Municipalities and educational authorities have to make binding agreements on measures against socio-ethnic school segregation. However, only some cities comply with this legislation; approximately half of the largest 31 cities in the Netherlands (all with more than 100,000 inhabitants) have started a serious debate about segregation, and binding agreements are rare (Ledoux, Felix, & Elshof, 2009; Peters, Haest, & Walraven, 2007).

3.2 Interventions

There are two types of interventions in the Netherlands: those that local government and school boards agree upon, and those that parents start. The latter are bottom-up citizen initiatives; the former are not really top-down, but are based on an agreement on interventions between policy actors as equals (the 'polder model'). In both cases, the schools' commitment is needed for implementation since most Dutch school boards represent various schools and individual ones are granted some autonomy. Without the cooperation of the school principal and his/her teaching staff, it is impossible to take action against segregation. To make things even more complex, each school has a participation council (representing teachers and parents) and most also have a parents' council, and both have a different set of rules about rights of approval, advice and initiative. In short, the educational system is a participatory democratic system.

Here we will focus on three interventions to prevent and to counter socio-ethnic school segregation and to facilitate dialogue and integration: student application and acceptance by schools, information and advice for parents, and facilitating parent initiatives.

These are focused on desegregation as a condition for contact and integration. Mixed schools are, after all, a necessary but not a sufficient condition for dialogue and integration. Furthermore, it is important to note that mixed schools in the Netherlands are pursued particularly in mixed neighbourhoods. However, inviting and persuading parents to choose a school in their own (diversity) neighbourhood

does not necessarily lead to an outcome of all mixed schools. To achieve that, you need to set your goal on each school getting a school population that reflects the population of the neighbourhood. The focus on desegregation in mixed neighbourhoods has a downside, however, because the segregation in homogeneous neighbourhoods is left almost untouched.

When the effectiveness of Dutch interventions is evaluated, we need to keep the exact policy goals in mind. Unfortunately the interventions have only recently been implemented and therefore research is scarce; the main research we have is the mid-term evaluation of the pilot cities.

The three interventions enhance one another and are often implemented simultaneously. Parents want the best school for their children, and rightly so. In The Netherlands parents can choose the school they think is best for their child. And most of the time that turns out to be a school dominated by parents 'just like them' (e.g. in terms of socio-economic status, life style and educational style). As a consequence, even in a neighbourhood with mixed housing and a mixed population, there tend to be both 'black' and 'white' schools. Thus, if you do not intervene in a system with freedom of school choice, segregation will continue. Note that this is (generally speaking) an unintended consequence of a process of free choice. For individual parents, school choice is like an assurance game: you avoid taking risks with your precious child. On the other hand, if you think segregation is an unwanted outcome at the level of the community, you need to intervene. Dutch municipal authorities and school boards are allowed to do so, and so can groups of parents. That is why it was spot-on when the OECD review team on migrant education concluded that a balance was needed between freedom of choice and equity (OECD, 2010). In the next paragraphs we will elaborate on the ways in which the various stakeholders are trying to achieve such a balance in the pilot municipalities.

Application and acceptance of students
A type of 'controlled choice' was implemented in the cities of Deventer and Nijmegen. So far it is the most far-reaching intervention implemented in the Netherlands. Postal code policies or double waiting lists are employed in some other cities. In the USA controlled choice is perceived as an improvement (since as a general rule school districts assign children to schools), but in The Netherlands it is

perceived as being worse than the legal situation of complete free choice (theoretically). In reality, however, popular schools have waiting lists and many parents cannot transport their children to the school of their first choice. Unfortunately, there is no data on exactly how many parents find themselves in this situation. What we do know, however, is that in both Deventer and in Nijmegen the system of controlled choice resulted in more than 98 and 95 percent respectively of the students going to the school of their parents' first choice (Brink, Paulussen & Van Bergen, 2010). We also know that each parent has now had an equal opportunity to realise his or her preference – as opposed to the former situation in which highly-educated parents were more successful in getting their children in the school of their first choice. So in terms of equality among parents and of equity at the community level the results are positive. However, what about the other side of the balance – freedom of choice?

The system in Deventer and Nijmegen allows parents to rank several schools in order of preference. The local government and all the school boards agreed on a centralised application system for new pupils in primary education. The crucial part of the system is the set of rules of priority in accepting students for a specific school:
1. Brothers and sisters will be given first priority to be assigned to the same school,
2. Children who live in the closest to the school get the second priority.

The first rule is self-explanatory and is aimed at avoiding a situation in which parents need to bring their children to different schools. The second rule is essential for desegregation. For example, in Deventer a number of highly-educated parents who lived in de mixed centre of town chose specific schools in the suburbs, enhancing segregation. Under the new rule, their chances of getting accepted in the suburbs were diminished. If they would select a school in the suburbs as their first choice anyway and were not accepted, they would run the risk that the 'best' schools in their own neighbourhood would be full as well, so they might end up in one of the 'worst' schools in their own neighbourhood. To avoid that risk, the strategic choice would be to reconsider a good school in their own neighbourhood. For the system to function, all schools need to have a minimum level of good performance and all schools have to participate in order to prevent 'safe havens' for a white flight.

(In Nijmegen also a third rule was formulated, but in practice that did not need to be applied.)

As Schelling (1971) has shown using game theory, micro behaviour leads to macro consequences; in other words, when parents make their individual choices, they inevitably lead to macro consequences in terms of segregation. That is another reason why the balance between freedom of choice and equity is important.
Policy makers and school boards in Nijmegen and Deventer are confident that they are keeping that balance. Moreover, several experts in educational law have stated that the rules of the system do correspond fully with Dutch law.

So far, Deventer and Nijmegen are the best practices in the Netherlands as far as a city-wide system for school application and acceptance is concerned. Since the primary focus is on choosing a school in the neighbourhood, it remains to be seen whether there will be lasting effects on socio-ethnic segregation. Some other cities have discussed this type of policy and have encountered difficulties in building a consensus between local authority and school boards.

Information for parents
School boards and schools in most Dutch cities have agreed not to advertise their schools. As a consequence, information for parents is fragmented. They need to actively search for it, find out where the schools in their neighbourhood are, try to assess the quality of schools, visit schools and their websites, find reports of the educational inspectorate on the internet, etcetera. That is quite a time consuming task that requires capabilities as well as social capital, and it is very helpful when someone facilitates the structuring of all the information. Usually that is the municipality. A website is built, brochures are made with all the schools in a neighbourhood presented in a similar way, and an information market is organized in which all schools have the opportunity to present themselves. This is helpful for all parents, but the expectation is that presenting well-structured information will encourage parents to consider more schools than they otherwise would and to potentially choose a school in their own neighbourhood. So far there is only anecdotal confirmation of this hypothesis.

One way to attract (middle class) parents who probably would not visit (specific) schools in their neighbourhood is for schools that are located in the same area to coordinate the dates and times of school visits for new parents. One step further would be to is organize a 'merry go round' that allows a group of parents to visit several schools in a given neighbourhood in one morning. Usually the municipality coordinates this event, because they have the addresses of all the parents that are about to choose a school and can send them a personal invitation. The idea originated in Rotterdam, and now many cities have implemented this intervention. In The Hague, a thorough analysis of neighbourhood populations informed the selection of places in which to organize such 'merry go rounds'. How does it work? Before the school visits are arranged the parents' group meets with a facilitator to talk about what they think is important to look at when visiting and choosing a school. They often get a checklist to fill out. Parents say they feel more comfortable visiting schools in a group that they would not visit on their own. During the ride from one school to another the group can exchange views on what they have seen and heard. After the school visits, the group and the facilitator evaluate the morning and discuss school choice. Sometimes the outcome is that some of the parents want to start a parent initiative at one of the schools they visited. That is the intervention we analyse in the next paragraph.

Parent initiatives

An interesting intervention to counter segregation is a group of highly-educated parents that apply to a school in their neighbourhood that is indeed performs well but has a majority of disadvantaged students. By applying together they create a critical mass and avoid the risk that their child is one of the very few in a classroom of children from a different background.

In 2007 researchers identified 35 parent initiatives in the Netherlands in the last decade (Peters, Haest, & Walraven, 2007). A recent report showed that some of those were successful in 'mixing' the school population, whereas others had failed and/or faded away. Some were still active, while others had only recently started – a total of 38 parent initiatives were active (Versteegen, 2010). All initiatives consist of highly-educated ('white') parents mixing a 'black' school. Since a comparable percentage of schools is too white, other types of parent initiatives are possible and

necessary as well, in order to desegregate. Impulses to try and do this have been rare, however, and none of them have come to fruition.

An example in Amsterdam shows the potential possibilities of a citizen initiative on segregation. One might conclude that Schelling's model (1971) is also applicable to explain the process of a rather 'black' school that attracts more and more 'white' and highly-educated parents. Parents that will apply when 20 percent of the parents are well-educated will help to raise the percentage to 30 percent and then other parents consider joining. Activities in the domain of art and culture were instrumental in attracting new parents, among other things (compare the profiling in magnet schools in the USA and the Netherlands). Other initiatives show how difficult it is to change the popular image of a specific school and the prejudice that schools that cater for disadvantaged students do not perform very well. In terms of added value, many of those schools are perform well. In the city of Arnhem a study of the added value of all schools showed that the best performing school was an almost all 'black' school.

Local authorities can facilitate parent initiatives and the city of Rotterdam was the best example for some years. The alderman responsible for education took an interest in parent initiatives and set a target that a specific number of classrooms in the lower grades should desegregate during his term in office. An information campaign was launched, flyers were distributed in cooperation with schools, a website was created where parents could ask questions and get help to meet other parents in their neighbourhood, and last but not least, educational civil servants went into neighbourhoods to help start initiatives. This was quite effective: in 2006 about half of the new parent initiatives in the Netherlands were in Rotterdam (Peters, Haest, & Walraven, 2007). Whether parent initiatives that have been supported in this manner are more effective in changing the school composition than other initiatives we do not know because this has not been part of any research project.

A parent initiative is not an easy job for parents or for the school involved. When a school accepts a parent initiative, a process of changes will begin. Parents involved in initiatives usually want to discuss many topics of school policies and practice with the director. Highly-educated parents tend to be more assertive in asking questions of the teachers. Teachers need to differentiate their teaching to be able to challenge

all students. The school has to think and act upon the ways old and new parents are getting along, etcetera.

Some master theses have been written on parent initiatives and some explorative analyses have been conducted (Peters, 2007; Versteegen, 2010), but more in depth research is needed in order to identify key factors for success or failure and to monitor lasting effects on school composition.

3.3 Conclusions

The Dutch educational system is characterized by a high degree of freedom and autonomy of the actors involved – the municipality, school boards, schools and parents. No actor can force a policy on the others. Without interventions, this will lead to segregation. To be able to intervene, you need to build consensus and to seek a balance between freedom of choice and equity. Whether you want to intervene and, if so, where exactly that balance is to be found, is ultimately a political issue.

Unfortunately, the state of the art regarding evaluation studies of interventions aimed at desegregation in the Netherlands does not allow very firm conclusions about their effectiveness. What we can say, however, is that using the mid-term evaluation of the pilots and some other (explorative) evaluation studies, the interventions appear rather promising. Especially when it comes to achieving school populations that reflect the population of the neighbourhood – less can be said about levels of (de)segregation.

Schelling's model (1971) helps to explain how the micro behaviour of individual choices (freedom) leads to macro consequences of segregation at school and community level (inequity). The interventions that are implemented target the individual school choice and thereby try to prevent and combat segregation. A critical note might be that this is all they do. Facilitating mixed schools is a means to an end, however. The aim is to facilitate dialogue and integration, to allow students to learn to live together. Mixed schools are, in other words, a necessary but not a sufficient condition for dialogue and integration. Learning to live together is something that needs to be organised, just as other learning processes must be. Denessen, Driessen, and Bakker (2010a) have shown that without a pedagogical and didactical

approach, prejudices remain unaltered in mixed classes and schools. That is the challenge for further interventions in the Dutch educational system. We might add the recent requirement for schools to work on active citizenship and social cohesion. And we can learn from another intervention that has been implemented in some pilot cities: pairs of schools (one 'white' and one 'black') that have exchange activities aimed at dialogue and integration. It turns out that it is very hard to organize activities that are meaningful and sustainable and that comply with all the conditions Allport and Pettigrew have formulated for the contact hypothesis. So, in the Netherlands there is a world to win in that respect.

Literature

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