
RESEGREGATION OF SCHOOLS

Resegregation is the reinstatement of segregation after a period of desegregation. Although desegregation spurred the multicultural education movement, which has been critical to interrogating, complicating, and broadening the work in the field of curriculum studies, resegregation brings to bear more critical challenges for the field to consider, not the least of which is its impact on the promise of quality education for all children. More than 30 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which mandated school desegregation, educational scholars have noted a disturbing trend toward the resegregation of U.S. schools. Since the late 1980s, the number of Black and Latino students attending schools with a 90% to 100% minority population increased significantly, just as the number of White students attending predominately White schools did. Research also confirms that the schools with predominantly minority populations are typically located in central cities, are underfunded and therefore are also under resourced compared with predominately White schools in suburban districts. The impact of resegregation on the development, implementation, and study of school curriculum has been significant.

In 1954 in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the “separate but equal” mandate established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, and in a follow-up decision ordered U.S. public schools to desegregate “with all deliberate speed.” As many school districts and public institutions of higher education began to implement desegregation plans, students and scholars began to recognize that access was but one challenge in the struggle for equal educational opportunity. Another challenge dealt with the lack of minority representation in school curricula, which was either altogether absent or projected in a negative light. By the 1960s, many underrepresented groups began to push for more and better representation

in school curricula. Their protests rendered the rise of ethnic studies programs in colleges and universities, which eventually became the basis for the multicultural education movement, which has not only called for more representation of minority groups but has also sought to rethink school curricula in ways that support a pluralistic democracy. Beginning in the 1970s, multicultural education was implemented in school districts and institutions of higher education across the nation. At the same time, many public schools were also implementing desegregation plans, which were far more successful in the South, where residential segregation was less of a problem, than in the North. For nearly three decades following the 1954 decision, the notable achievement gap between White and Black students began closing. According to many researchers, this was a sure sign that equal educational opportunity was being realized.

By the late 1980s, however, scholars began to notice a disturbing trend toward resegregation of U.S. schools, a trend that steadily increased throughout the 1990s in major metropolitan areas across the country. Researchers have noted that one of the key factors driving the resegregation trend has been White flight, which is the tendency of White residents to move out of neighborhoods that have been integrated by minority families for fear of a decrease in property values and school quality. In various communities, the result was the reestablishment of racially segregated urban neighborhoods and consequently racially segregated neighborhood schools, which often face a decrease in necessary funding because of decreases in property value and thus, the property taxes, which are important sources of school funding. Financially strapped school districts in urban communities with high rates of poverty have been shown to have multiple curriculum-related problems, such as high rates of teacher turnover, high rates of teachers teaching in areas for which they are not credentialed, significantly less college preparatory courses, and less resources and updated materials. These also are shown to be the schools where the curriculum tends to be dominated by rote learning materials and strategies in lieu of critical engagement and thinking. Since the late 1980s, U.S. public schools have grown more racially isolated, and for some researchers this correlates with the widening

achievement gap between Black and Latino students and their White counterparts.

Besides funding, the phenomenon of White flight reveals another primary dynamic that adversely affects the development, implementation, and study of school curricula as a whole. The idea that a minority presence is a negative presence whether on property values or school quality reinforces many of the traditionally derogatory images and ideas that cast some minority groups as lazy, uncivilized, and intellectually inferior. The circulation and reinforcement of these ideas result in a number of other problematic dynamics, including low teacher expectations and tracking students in remedial and noncollege prep courses among others. In some instances, tracking has also led to patterns of resegregation that take place within desegregated districts or schools. Magnet schools and programs, for instance, which are usually associated with high academic standards and quality curricula, began emerging in the 1960s as a way to deal with racial segregation. They were placed in many urban districts or particular schools to attract White students into majority minority districts and schools. However, although most of the White students are tracked into the magnet programs, most of the minority students are tracked into the general school curriculum. What results is an isolated White magnet school drawing curricular resources from the already struggling larger minority school or district in which it is located.

Although White flight has been an important contributor to resegregation trends, recent decisions in the U.S. Supreme Court are causing far more concern among educational scholars. In June 2007 with a 5–4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the efficacy of two desegregation plans in Louisville and Seattle, noting that no student could be assigned or denied a school assignment based on race, not even for the purposes of integration. Many scholars are convinced that this historic reversal of *Brown v. Board of Education* contention that separate is inherently unequal will only exacerbate the resegregation trend in U.S. schools, therefore continuing the drastically unequal educational curricula offered to majority minority schools.

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See also Desegregation of Schools

Further Readings

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