

Practices of change in the education sector: professionals dealing with ethnic school segregation

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at second-generation professionals in the education sector in Sweden, France and the Netherlands, whose parents were born in Turkey. In their stories, ethnic school segregation appears as an important topic that coincides with other inequalities in society and signals educational injustice. This so-called wicked problem is used to understand how second-generation professionals assert influence in their quest for educational change. The analysis, based on semi-structured interviews, shows that influence and change are conditional. Second-generation professionals are constrained by the structural boundaries of the sector, which seem particularly fixed because of the way in which the education sector is entangled with state policies. Simultaneously, they are aware of these boundaries, and of the nation-specific change-opportunities existing within them. Using their “in-betweenness” as second-generation social climbers, with their knowledge of the education system, they apply varying practices of change focused on moderating the negative effects of ethnic school segregation.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 6 July 2015; Accepted 19 July 2016

KEYWORDS Second generation; professionals; education sector; ethnic school segregation; influence and change

Introduction

Due to the immigration and settlement of large flows of international migrants in the past decades, Western Europe has witnessed the “establishment of numerous new ethnic groups” (Alba 2005, 21). One of these new ethnic groups that settled throughout Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s was labour migrants from Turkey (Lessard-Phillips and Ross 2012, 74–77). Their children, when born in the country of settlement, are the so-called second generation. This second generation has come of age and is joining the workforce.

In contrast to dominant opinions, which focus on problems among the second generation with parents from Turkey (Heath, Rothon, and Kilpi 2008),

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part of this second-generation group is highly educated (Crul et al. 2012, 149; Crul, Schneider and Lelie 2012) and constitutes an upcoming body of professionals working in leadership positions (Waldring, Crul, and Ghorashi 2015). Some of them have opted for a career in education. In the ELITES project we selected people in leading positions in the education sector in Sweden, France and the Netherlands. These professionals occupy varying positions of influence and this article has been constructed around them.

The aim of this article is to understand how second-generation professionals in leading positions assert influence on educational policies that they deem in need of change. The focus revolves around one much-debated and highly contested educational issue: the existence of schools that are segregated along the lines of ethnic background. Ethnic school segregation is considered a problem in many migration countries (Gramberg 1998; Westin 2003; Karsten et al. 2006; Oberti 2007; Beach and Sernhede 2011), as it is seen as a cause and result of social injustice, with ethnic-minority pupils having the most to gain from its demise (OECD 2010, 198). How second-generation professionals in the educational sector deal with ethnic school segregation is particularly interesting because of their own ethnic-minority background, and how this background influences their views and strategies to counter ethnic school segregation and its effects. This educational issue has proven difficult to solve because it is entangled with other societal issues, such as residential segregation and free school choice (Denton 1996; Gramberg 1998; Oberti 2007; Beach and Sernhede 2011). These societal issues vary from country to country. Including different national contexts in the analysis allows for a cross-country comparison of how the sector is organized and in what ways these arrangements affect how respondents may deal with ethnic school segregation (Crul and Schneider 2010, 1258). This leads to the central question of this paper: *How are second-generation professionals in the education sector able to shape outcomes concerning ethnic school segregation, taking the different national characteristics of the sector into consideration?*

The article will first discuss a theoretical exploration of the concepts of influence and change-making, followed by a discussion of ethnic school segregation and a short outline of ethnic school segregation as a wicked problem. It will then focus on the methodological underpinnings of the research, and continue with an analysis of the interviews. I will show that practices of change regarding ethnic school segregation are focused on improving equal opportunities for ethnic-minority pupils within the boundaries set by the specific national educational policies.

Professionals influencing change

Looking at how professionals influence change in education touches upon the dynamics of structure and agency. On the one hand, professionals are

regarded as the primary institutional agents of our time, shaping and changing institutions in modern society (Scott 2008). This view on professionals is driven by the idea that professionals are specialists on a given topic, such as education. They therefore possess specific, “value-neutral” scientific knowledge and expertise, providing them with authority, status and legitimacy when dealing with related issues (Fischer 1993, 168). The idea of professionals as change-makers *par excellence* is furthermore enhanced by the basic assumption that the system in which professionals work encourages knowledge and competition among its members, allowing for “processes promoting change and innovation” (Scott 2008, 223). Professionals’ expert knowledge in combination with a framework that stimulates change thus amounts to agency translated in their ability to “rightfully” act upon situations in order to make a difference (Zanoni and Janssens 2007, 1376).

Having the ability to act upon a situation does not automatically lead to making a difference. Professionals, despite their agency, can encounter obstacles on an organizational level as organizations are part of complex institutional structures (Greenwood and Meyer 2008, 263). These structures, in part regulated by the state, not only enable actions, but also constrain them (Fleming and Spicer 2014, 265). A change-inhibiting structure may be found in the tendency of organizations and entire organizational fields to resemble each other. This “isomorphism” filters out differences, forcing both institutions and the people within them to act alike (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 149–152). In this environment, change is directed towards “sameness”, both within organizations and the larger field in which these organizations operate. This sameness among people and organizations creates a “pool of almost interchangeable individuals who occupy similar positions across a range of organizations and possess a similarity of orientation and disposition that may override variations in traditions and control that might otherwise shape organization behavior” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 152). In other words, change and innovation that might originate from a diverse workforce are curbed because of the tendency to create homogeneity (Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013). And indeed, professionals have been accused of “perpetuating the social injustices plaguing modern Western societies” (Fischer 1993, 169; Levay 2010) by holding back change and innovation in defence of the status quo.

The tendency towards sameness in organizations is something second-generation professionals also face due to their ethnic background, which often differs from most of their colleagues. They therefore find themselves juggling various identity aspects at work, striving to maintain their professional identity in order to fit in, without compromising their ethnic identity or religious beliefs (Waldring, Crul, and Ghorashi 2014). This juggling of sameness and difference is something that seems to come naturally to the second generation. The second generation, simply because of the fact that they have

grown up knowing and experiencing different cultures, “are more aware than most people that they have a choice” (Kasinitz et al. 2009, 21) when it comes to identity aspects and ways of doing things, and this awareness can be seen as a second-generation advantage as it enables second-generation professionals to draw on multiple frames of reference (Kasinitz et al. 2009, 356). This has made second-generation professionals both aware of the pull of isomorphism in organizations and skilled at subtly maintaining their difference while still fitting in as competent professionals (Waldring, Crul, and Ghorashi 2014, 84).

Second-generation professionals are part of a larger social system, shaped by organizational and field structures which may not always allow them much room to manoeuvre. Simultaneously, because of their position of expertise and authority within the system, whereby they demonstrate both awareness of the tendency towards sameness and the ability to juggle this tendency with their ethnic or religious difference, they are also the contemporary shapers of societal institutions, able to assert their influence on behalf of change in the various contexts in which they move. This interplay between agency and structure will be central to the analysis of how second-generation professionals in the education sector deal with a specific educational matter: ethnic school segregation.

Ethnic school segregation

Ethnic school segregation in this article refers to a state of affairs whereby there is an uneven ethnic distribution of pupils across schools. Ethnic school segregation therefore implies that ethnic diversity among pupils in schools is lacking, or more specifically, that schools are imbalanced in terms of the composition of native-parentage pupils and pupils with an ethnic-minority background. However, the presence of this condition of unequal distribution does not solely account for the fact that ethnic school segregation is a recurring issue on many a political agenda, as well as a subject of continuing debate in many new migration countries. What matters is that “[t]he notion of segregation implies negative consequences for individuals clustered in particular schools” (OECD 2010, 195), leading to differences in the quality of schools and opportunities available to pupils (Gramberg 1998), and mirroring divisions rooted in society (Beach and Sernhede 2011, 259).

One particular societal division effecting ethnic school segregation is residential segregation. Residential and ethnic school segregation are entangled and should be thought of as interrelated processes (Denton 1996). This entwinement of residential and ethnic school segregation can be found in Sweden, France and – to a lesser extent – the Netherlands. All three countries have residential segregation with high-density ethnic-minority suburbs. Sweden and

France in particular share an educational policy of neighbourhood schools. In Sweden, many ethnic-minority children grow up in the more impoverished and ethnically segregated suburbs of Stockholm, which are “characterize[d] as socially vulnerable” (Beach and Sernhede 2011, 260). In France, residential and school segregation along ethnic lines are strongly related due to the strictly state-organized and regulated system (OECD 2010, 196), benefitting the upper classes in French society when residential segregation coincides with other divisions, such as that between the rich and the poor in society (Lehman-Frisch 2009). In the Netherlands, parental choice also leads to ethnic school segregation in mixed neighbourhoods. Schools with a high concentration of immigrant children are automatically perceived as being backward, sparking “white flight” (Gramberg 1998, 547; OECD 2010, 202). Furthermore, the existence of denominational schools which bear a religious (and thereby sometimes ethnic) signature (Karsten et al. 2006; Maussen and Vermeulen 2015) also enhances ethnic segregation.

The entanglement of residential segregation, parental choice and denominational schools with ethnic school segregation not only leads to a lack of social interaction between pupils of ethnic-minority and ethnic-majority backgrounds, it also leads to ethnic-minority pupils in the suburbs experiencing “a feeling of being outside of normal society, stigmatized and inside a school system that fails to make a difference” (Beach and Sernhede 2011, 264). Ethnic segregation across schools thus points to power imbalances in society (Denton 1996), whereby spatial separateness is often associated with “socio-cultural, economic, financial, political and judicial exclusion of the deprived segments of society” (Smets and Salman 2008, 1308). This interplay of multiple social issues is why New and Merry (2014) argue that taking ethnic diversity in schools as a proxy for educational justice is too much of a simplification. The intricacy of ethnic school segregation makes it a “wicked problem” (Rittel and Webber 1973). Wicked problems are part of social systems (Southgate, Reynolds, and Howley 2013, 15) and demonstrate a discrepancy between a factual situation and a desired situation. Typically, they are composed of multiple social issues and characterized by a lack of consensus among various stakeholders about what the desired situation actually looks like. A wicked problem therefore has no solution. It runs in vicious circles as an intractable problem, resulting only in temporary and imperfect outcomes (Fischer 1993, 172–173).

The wicked problem of ethnic school segregation means that professionals are not only dealing with ethnic school segregation, but are facing more large-scale, embedded inequalities that might stretch beyond their professional expertise and authority. Their ability to act is therefore limited because of the multiple and complex structures within which they have to manoeuvre.

Methodology of the ELITES project

The ELITES project

The ELITES¹ project is a comparative qualitative study among highly educated second-generation people with parents from Turkey. For the purpose of this article, I focused on second-generation professionals working in the education sector in Sweden (Stockholm), France (Paris) and the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague).

The respondents

In this article, I will focus on twenty-five respondents (thirteen men and twelve women) working in the education sector. The study consists of interviews, of which six were conducted in Stockholm, six in Paris and thirteen in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague in 2013. As the interviews were carried out simultaneously in all three countries by different interviewers, a semi-structured questionnaire was used. This allowed the interviewers to stick to the topics that needed to be addressed, while leaving space for the respondents to elaborate on topics or introduce new themes that had not yet been included in the questionnaire (Gilbert 2008, 247; Gomm 2008, 229).

The respondents had either been born in the migration country, or raised there from early childhood: therefore, they had all gone through the migration country school system from primary level onwards. All respondents have parents who came from Turkey. To meet the objectives of the ELITES project, that is to focus on upward mobility processes of the second generation across different national contexts, I selected respondents with predominantly low-educated parents.

Sampling

The respondents occupied divergent functions within the education sector. I aimed to obtain occupational variation in the sample in order to explore the sector as broadly as possible. However, there are differences in professional variation per country. In Sweden and the Netherlands, there is ample diversity among the respondents. There are respondents who work with pupils on a daily basis as teachers, school principals, and directors of homework organizations or self-organizations related to education. But there are also respondents who are not in direct or daily contact with pupils. These respondents work as school board members in an advisory role, local or national civil servants, or as trade union professionals.

There was less variation in occupational status among the French respondents, most of whom were teachers. This touches upon issues of sampling and finding respondents holding influential positions in the sector. The fact that it

proved difficult in the Paris region to find respondents other than teachers might point to the fact that in France the second generation has not climbed the career ladder to the extent of the respondents in the other countries. Another reason might be – as one of the French respondents pointed out – that advancing beyond the teaching profession, for instance to becoming a teacher inspector, a principal or director may actually limit opportunities to exert influence and implement change.

Most respondents were initially found by searching the internet, using keywords related to “education”, “second generation”, “Turkish”, “Turkish education organization” and combinations of these keywords. In addition to searching the internet, snowballing was also used to find respondents.

The analysis of influence and change

An issue-focused analysis was employed in this article, whereby respondents conveyed information and the researcher learnt about specific issues (Weiss 1994, 154). The issues that form the basis of the analysis in this article are influence and change in the education sector. Although twenty-five interviews were initially used for the analysis, some respondents contributed more to the analysis, others less, as the focus of the article shifted towards ethnic school segregation in relation to influence and change.

An issue-focused analysis runs through four stages (Weiss 1994, 158–162). The first stage consists of coding the interviews. This was done on the basis of a code-book, and designed according to the topics listed in the questionnaire and themes that came up during the interviews. The qualitative computer programme “Atlas.ti” was used for coding. The second step was sorting the data. For the purpose of this article, all codes that were linked to respondents talking about influence and change were selected and read several times, in an attempt to distil possible patterns in answers among the respondents. Thirdly, there was “local integration”. I tried to gain a broad picture of what the interviews were portraying in general, and more specifically in terms of influence and change. This broad picture was consequently narrowed down during the fourth and final stage of the analysis, resulting in an “inclusive integration” of the material, focusing influence and change around one specific theme that had come up during the interviews in all three countries: ethnic school segregation. This topic turned out to be an important motive for change. Consequently, the analysis section below deals with ethnic school segregation as the topic around which influence and change in the education sector are centred.

Analysis

Some of the structural features of the education sector in Sweden, France and the Netherlands – such as residential segregation in combination with a

policy that obliges children to attend neighbourhood schools; the policy of free school choice (resulting in “white flight”) and the existence of denominational schools – all lead to different forms of ethnic school segregation. Moreover, ethnic school segregation runs as an important theme throughout the interviews conducted in Sweden, France and the Netherlands. In all three countries ethnic school segregation is considered to cause the most disadvantage to ethnic-minority children (OECD 2010), and is therefore viewed as a negative aspect of the sector, signalling educational inequalities that counter the meritocratic ideal.

Second-generation professionals employ various opportunities for change regarding ethnic school segregation. In the analysis, I will focus on how second-generation professionals working in the education sector in Sweden, France and the Netherlands deal with ethnic school segregation and the consequences thereof on an individual (micro) level, an organizational (meso) level, and sometimes even on a societal (macro) level.

Macro-level practices of change

Opportunities for change at the societal (macro) level, which would lead to the abolition of ethnic school segregation, seem out of reach for most of the second-generation professionals. Even one of the respondents in Sweden, who occupied the position of Minister of Schools and was fully aware of the problem of ethnic school segregation, focused his attempts to implement change on the negative effects of ethnic school segregation in the suburbs instead of targeting the phenomenon of ethnic school segregation directly:

When I became Minister of Schools, I saw that we had schools where a lot of the pupils came from homes with no tradition of education. I introduced a programme that targeted 100 schools in the country. Husby [ethnic-minority suburb in Stockholm – IW] school was one of them. We used government funds to try to reduce the inequality of education (...). (President of government education committee, male, Stockholm)

This quote shows that instead of focusing on changes aimed at making schools more mixed, policies were directed towards giving highly segregated schools more funding. This choice highlights the political boundaries that limit the possibility to effect change regarding ethnic school segregation, even when one is working within the administration. Ethnically mixed schools require a political solution to the relationship between neighbourhood schools and residential segregation, for which political consensus is hard to obtain. This turns ethnic school segregation into a wicked problem for which a more fundamental solution seems out of reach (Rittel and Webber 1973). At the same time, providing extra funding for ethnically segregated schools in the suburbs is a macro-level attempt to counter educational

injustices related to ethnic school segregation (Beach and Sernhede 2011). This approach circumvents the wicked problem by not taking the mixing of ethnic-minority and native-parentage pupils as the only proxy for countering the negative effects of ethnic school segregation (New and Merry 2014).

Meso-level and micro-level practices of change

Similar to Sweden, where the political support is lacking to mix schools through state policies, most emphasis in the Netherlands is placed on improving the performance of ethnically segregated schools. One particular feature of the Dutch education sector – the existence of denominational schools – not only causes ethnic school segregation (Karsten et al. 2006; Maussen and Vermeulen 2015), but also provides special opportunities. Denominational schools can be founded by citizens who share a specific educational objective. This unique option to establish a denominational school allows parents and education professionals to rally together to set up a school that meets the specific needs of their children.

This school was founded through a collaboration between [school board] and [foundation] here in Rotterdam. The foundation arose out of a national university student organization which had been established in 1995 by Turkish students who were providing homework classes and doing mentoring projects with Turkish school kids. (...) The foundation was mostly active in the big cities. Therefore you could find our foundation in every city with a university. This went on for a couple of years. At one point, sometime around the year 2000, parents started asking whether the foundation could set up a school. We started examining the possibilities, but it's difficult to start a school from scratch. We talked to the then Minister of Education and she advised us to collaborate with an existing school board. This collaboration started in 2006. Because the foundation was so well known among Turkish parents, most of the kids who enrolled were of Turkish origin. (Principal High School, male, Rotterdam)

Establishing a school can result in a predominantly ethnic-minority school, thereby perpetuating ethnic school segregation. However, it also offers the opportunity to take the school's quality of education into one's own hands and to provide a tailor-made curriculum that can improve the performance of ethnic-minority pupils, thereby facilitating educational change and countering the negative effects of ethnic school segregation. Aiming to provide a tailor-made curriculum could also counter the assumption that equates ethnically segregated schools with poor performance and help to overcome the societal stigma that now plagues and therefore perpetuates the existence of ethnically segregated schools (Gramberg 1998, 563).

The same principal highlights how his position of influence within the school allowed him to adjust the school curriculum when the majority of the pupils were lagging behind in a certain subject:

In terms of “black” and “white” schools, we are a black school. (...) And looking at the composition, most of the pupils are of Turkish descent. This is slowly changing, but in the past, we had almost only pupils of Turkish descent. (...) We deal with pupils who lag behind in Dutch language skills. Their primary school test scores for maths are good, but language scores are poor. (...) So, for instance, looking at their Dutch language skills, we test our pupils when they enter the first year. In September or October, we test them. Then it becomes obvious that our pupils are lagging behind in the Dutch language, especially their vocabulary. (...) In the end we manage, through an adjusted policy, to improve their Dutch language skills (...). We’ve adjusted our curriculum to this. Pupils get five hours of Dutch language classes in their first year here. That’s a lot. (...) Ordinarily, pupils get only three hours. But these extra hours are necessary for our pupils. (Principal of High School, male, Rotterdam)

What appears to set this second-generation professional apart regarding his practice of change is his ability to navigate the Dutch education system. He knows where the opportunities and difficulties lie, and which network contacts to seek out. At the same time, he is also aware of what extra attention is necessary to give the children the education they need. This awareness comes partly from the close connection that he has with Turkish-Dutch parents and their children.

Different organizational (meso) level practices of change come from homework organizations operating outside the school system. Such organizations are active in the Netherlands, France and Sweden. In all three countries, homework organizations recognize that the regular education system does not always provide the best opportunities for ethnic-minority students, leaving gaps for homework organizations to fill:

In fact, we fulfil an additional function. People come to us to provide activities instead of going to mainstream institutions. Sometimes this causes some friction with mainstream institutions, as we’re closing a gap that should really be closed by the regular education sector. In that way we sometimes make a statement by saying: “look, this is what you should be doing”. (...) But we have seen and noticed this gap, and we’re closing it now. (President of a network of a homework organization, male, Amsterdam)

There are so many ethnic-minority children, but where are they? They have chosen to work instead of studying. After school, they immediately start work. When you ask them what they do, they either work at the airport, in construction or they are electricians. I’m not saying this because there is anything wrong with these jobs. They can become electricians, but why not electrical engineers instead? Why not construction engineers? It is not because they don’t have the potential. It is only because these children aren’t given proper advice. Since this is the situation, I became involved [with the homework organization – IW]. (...) There was a need. (...) It’s about setting an example, motivating them and helping them to achieve a good place in society, to become someone beneficial for society, no matter whether they are Turks, French, or Arabs. (President of a homework organization, male, Paris)

Both quotes demonstrate an ambition to contribute to the advancement of ethnic-minority children in society. The activities employed by the homework organizations are mostly aimed at the individual (micro) level, empowering students by helping them with their homework and keeping them off the streets and occupied with their school work. Yet, the open critique of the sector by the Dutch second-generation professional shows an attempt to engage the sector on an organizational (meso) level to join him in his efforts to close the educational gap that ethnic-minority pupils experience.

In Sweden, a homework organization was founded by a respondent who recognized that many ethnic-minority youth grow up segregated in the suburbs in an environment that is generally lacking any “culture of education”. Consequently, they may have little self-confidence regarding their abilities and potential when it comes to education (Beach and Sernhede 2011). He tries to teach these children about the importance of education, not only by organizing help with homework, but also by spending time with them outside school, trying to enlarge and enrich their environment:

In every suburb I see a lot of things that you maybe would not see here in the city and downtown. (...) A lot of suburb kids don't go out and see how Stockholm is, for example. (...) They think their suburb is the only place, for example. And that is a problem that I and the other volunteers will change. (...) The mentoring is not only about education mentoring, but also about spare-time mentoring (...). (Founder and president of a homework organization, male, Stockholm)

This quote shows that ethnic school segregation is only one part of a bigger and more complex situation, whereby children growing up in impoverished suburbs are faced with multiple issues and problems that stretch beyond the school environment. By establishing a homework organization, the respondent is trying to counteract the effects of ethnic school segregation by exposing the students to a different environment. This can be seen as an individual (micro) level attempt to effect change. However, as self-organizations in Swedish society participate in public life as legitimate stakeholders (Soysal 1994), this might lead to opportunities to exert influence beyond the children who attend this homework organization. It may, for example, be possible to act at the organizational (meso) level by striking up alliances with other self-organizations and through becoming a discussion partner at the local political level.

It is in France – with its centralized and highly regulated school system – that it seems most difficult for professionals in the education sector to influence or change ethnic school segregation and the negative effects thereof at either the societal (macro) or organizational (meso) level (Greenwood and Meyer 2008; Fleming and Spicer 2014). Residential segregation and the national policy of neighbourhood schools are all but impossible to tackle,

while setting up a state-funded school is not an option and self-organizations do not hold the same legitimate positions that they occupy in Sweden. Although the strict French system is mostly a limiting factor for change, it does enable a clear pathway up the career ladder through a system of exams. One of our respondents plays by the rules of the game by sitting these exams in order to reach a higher position within the sector as this would give him more scope to motivate students to do well in school:

Let me tell you about my project for the future: I would like to either advance to the position of a director or an inspector. (...) I can motivate the students who I am in touch with to succeed, but what about the other teachers and the other students? Therefore, in the coming years I will work in that direction. (...) And after a while I will definitely climb to that step. I will prepare and advance, prepare and advance. This is the goal. (Vocational teacher/team leader, male, Paris)

Having grown up in France, he knows the requirements for career advancement in the education sector, and he not only applies this knowledge to better his own career, he deliberately makes use of the established system of exams to broaden his scope of influence so that he can target some of the negative aspects of ethnic school segregation, such as a lack of motivation among students because they feel that their ethnically segregated schools are not providing them with the best opportunities for learning (OECD 2010). By using the possibilities offered by the French education system, he manages to employ an organizational (meso) level practice of change to mitigate the negative effects of ethnic school segregation.

Advancing through the system as a way to counter the negative effects of ethnic school segregation is a very individual strategy and offers only limited possibilities for exerting influence. This limitation is recognized by most of the French second-generation professionals. They are predominantly teachers, and they actually perceive climbing the career ladder as a way of reducing their influence. Although this may seem paradoxical, this stance is related to the strict structures that make up the French education system, curbing influence even at higher levels within the system.

Actually, I think the teachers are at the key positions, and only after them, come the directors and inspectors. When a teacher takes good care of the class, then the whole school is managed well. (Teacher-inspector, female, Paris)

Sometimes the Ministry decides: "Let's introduce this lesson". But they have absolutely no idea, or only a vague idea of whether it's possible or how it would be taught. In other words, they impose things without consulting the sector. (Teacher-inspector, female, Paris)

The majority of the teachers therefore try to find ways within their present position to bring about change, stating that their influence is greatest in the classroom, dealing with children. Moreover, they use the presence of

ethnic school segregation in French society to optimize their opportunities to effect change. They do this through deliberately teaching in public, suburban schools with many ethnic-minority pupils. They use their time in these schools to counteract the negative outcomes of ethnic school segregation by serving the pupils as much as they can, unlike some other teachers who see working in a suburban school merely as a stepping stone in their career:

I want to stay in the 93 [Parisian suburb – IW], because I want to help this student population. (...) Because what happens in this educational environment is that because you can obtain points by working with difficult youth, many young professors just want to get these points and then leave. Once they have obtained their points, they are gone. (Vocational teacher, female, Paris)

I work in a school situated in a suburb. There are Turks, Kurds, Arabs and Africans, as well as many young people from India and Pakistan. (...) Our school is viewed, both by directors and teachers, only as a bridge that allows them to switch to another school. When you think about that ... staying here actually is ... Some of my pupils from seven years ago, they still write to me, we became friends and we're still in touch. (...) When I think about my pupils, I tell myself that I have to contribute. If not, I would be running away, escaping. (Teacher, female, Paris)

Second-generation professionals are attempting to make a difference for their pupils by staying in these suburban schools. This difference is mostly on an individual (micro) level, aimed at the empowerment and emancipation of pupils, as the rigid structures of the sector offer little scope for more. But as Beach and Sernhede (2011, 269–270) argue, schools should at least challenge the situation in which ethnic-minority pupils feel marginalized in schools. If schools fail to develop a critical attitude towards the system that forces teachers out of the suburban schools, they are at least partly responsible for not providing the same educational opportunities for their ethnic-minority pupils as the opportunities that are present in schools outside of the suburbs, thereby producing and reproducing inequalities in society (Beach and Sernhede 2011, 259) and perpetuating social injustices (Fischer 1993). The second-generation professionals seem aware of this responsibility. Not only do they manage to avoid the pull of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), which makes other education professionals act alike by treating their time in a suburban school as a phase. Instead, the second-generation professionals deliberately stay on as teachers in ethnically segregated schools, attempting to make the most of their time in front of the classroom to mitigate the negative effects of ethnic school segregation.

Conclusion

Second-generation professionals working in influential positions in the education sector in Sweden, France and the Netherlands see ethnic school

segregation as problematic because it bears a social stigma (Gramberg 1998) and can lead to different (and sometimes poorer) school experiences for children attending predominantly ethnically segregated schools (OECD 2010; Beach and Sernhede 2011). They therefore want to make a change. But as ethnic school segregation in all three countries is entangled with other structural inequalities in society, such as residential segregation in combination with neighbourhood schools in Sweden and France (and to some extent in the Netherlands); parental choice leading to “white flight”, and the existence of denominational schools in the Netherlands (Denton 1996; Gramberg 1998; Oberti 2007; Beach and Sernhede 2011), it can be seen as a wicked problem (Rittel and Webber 1973), which requires political power and unanimity to resolve. As the second-generation education professionals in this article are not politicians, finding a solution to tackle ethnic school segregation is difficult.

The influence that professionals can assert in the matter of ethnic school segregation is thus curbed in all three countries by the entanglement of politics and education, which creates fixed and hard-to-change structures within the sector (Greenwood and Meyer 2008; Fleming and Spicer 2014). Moreover, the multiple layers of societal inequalities, which together make up the wicked problem of ethnic school segregation, also limit the second-generation professionals working in education. They are faced with issues that are an obvious and prominent part of why ethnic school segregation exists (Denton 1996; Southgate, Reynolds, and Howley 2013), but that are simultaneously beyond their professional reach.

Partly because these second-generation professionals are familiar with different social systems (Kasinitz et al. 2009, 354) they are building bridges between the specific needs of ethnic-minority pupils and school organizations. Sensitive to the needs of pupils, they refuse to accept ethnic school segregation as a given. Despite structural challenges, second-generation professionals in the education sector employ various strategies vis-à-vis ethnic school segregation. These strategies are based on these professionals’ awareness of opportunities for influencing change *within* the structures of their respective education sector, in combination with their specific knowledge of and connection to the challenges that are faced by pupils in ethnically segregated schools.

The practices of change of second-generation professionals in Sweden, France and the Netherlands are predominantly aimed at the individual (micro) level and sometimes, where possible, at the organizational (meso) level. At both levels, professionals do not directly target ethnic school segregation, but focus on countering negative outcomes for pupils in ethnically segregated schools by empowering them on an individual basis and via organizations. These countering strategies are partially shaped by the national-specific structural limitations and opportunities posed by the

sector in the different countries, and by the interlocking mechanisms that make ethnic school segregation a wicked problem in all three countries.

Strategies at the individual (micro) level show the least variation between the countries, as they are mainly directed towards giving the best education possible and ensuring that pupils in ethnically segregated schools experience a sense of empowerment and emancipation. These practices are especially salient in France, where the education sector is most strictly organized and regulated and where most respondents feel that their best shot at change is at the individual (micro) level. But individual (micro) level strategies are also the most common practice in Sweden and the Netherlands, followed in both countries by different organization (meso) level strategies. These organization-level approaches vary as they are directly bound to differing structural aspects within the countries. In Sweden, the establishment of a self-organization, such as a homework organization, is a viable way to not only reach pupils, but to participate in civil society as a legitimate stakeholder (Soysal 1994). Whereas in the Netherlands, the opportunity to establish a school not only provides possibilities to create a tailor-made curriculum, but also widens the scope of influence by potentially changing the assumption that an ethnically segregated school is synonymous with poor performance (Gramberg 1998). Strategies at the societal (macro) level are virtually absent in all three countries, as professionals realize that going beyond the structures is not a realistic and feasible option without political power and support.

The wicked problem of ethnic school segregation is not being resolved by the second-generation professionals working in the education sector. However, their strategies on the micro- and meso-level are leading to small-scale, but focused and targeted practices of change. These practices of change are guided by the specific opportunities offered by the national context, and they form attempts to moderate the negative effects of ethnic school segregation for pupils in ethnically segregated schools. As such, these second-generation professionals manage to resist the pull of isomorphism by refusing to see ethnic school segregation as an unsolvable problem requiring radical solutions that will only lead to legal and practical problems for which no stakeholder wishes to take responsibility (Karsten et al. 2006, 242). Instead, second-generation professionals are using their knowledge of the field in combination with their dedication to ethnic-minority pupils to push for changes which are less radical, but which aim to counter inequalities in ethnically segregated schools.

Note

1. For a thorough discussion of the ELITES project, as well as for more information on the respondents, the reader is referred to the Introduction of this special issue.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions for the paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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