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ABSTRACT

Segregation has been part of the cultural design of American society from the pre-industrial rural period to the present, post-industrial urban period. This paper, however, is concerned with learning within contemporary school settings. Ethnic segregation is one major type of group separation within American schools and within the society. Socioeconomic status, age, sex, religion, and physical or mental exceptionality are among the principal other group distinctions used to segregate groups in American society. Each ramifies profoundly into the organization of American schools--public and nonpublic, lower and higher systems, alike. Correlatives which are also used to segregate students and staffs include region of origin, mother tongue, dialect, and even life style. Among all of these, perhaps the only categorical distinction to be given a stronger emphasis within schools than within the society is imputed mental ability. Our purpose is to understand students--the social and educational forces that influence their learning within the school context. Therefore we narrow our attention to the kinds of segregation which are carried into classrooms in American schools, and to the kinds of cognitive skills that are conventionally recorded as school learning. (Author/JM)

# SEGREGATION AND SCHOOL LEARNING

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Draft of an Address Before the
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# SEGREGATION AND SCHOOL LEARNING

## Definitions

To the social scientist, the verb to segregate means to prevent, exclude, or minimize association between human groups by enforcing rules of selection which restrict the kinds and degrees of association that would otherwise occur.[1] Many social functions are served by segregation, but one of them is especially noteworthy: persons within segregated groups behave toward one another through status and role relations that usually take the superordinate-subordinate form.[2] Thus segregation exacts a social cost: all parties to the act of separation decrease their extent and quality of collectivity. The prospect for conflict increases as the prospect for cooperation declines, even though the conflict remains latent.

Segregation has been part of the cultural design of American society from the pre-industrial rural period to the present, post-industrial urban period. This paper, however, is concerned with learning within contemporary school settings. American schools reflect the segregative dimensions of the larger society. Sometimes they refract these dimensions. At

times they exaggerate them. Schools also evolve subcultural designs of their own. But they are mainly institutional creatures of the total society.

Ethnic segregation is one major type of group separation within American schools and within the society. Socioeconomic status (SES), sex, age, religion, and physical or mental exceptionality are among the principal other group distinctions used to segregate groups in American society. Each ramifies profoundly into the organization of American schools -- public and nonpublic, lower and higher systems, alike. Correlatives which are also used to segregate students and staffs include region of origin, mother tongue, dialect, and even life style (e.g., manner of dress and use of leisure). Among all of these, perhaps the only categorical distinction to be given a stronger emphasis within schools than within the society is imputed mental ability.

The question of segregation and learning within American schools is confounded by the fact that schools as settings are segregated in many ways and by many rules from home, work place, community, and the power environment of political institutions. This is not an evaluative statement, although it may be made into one. It is rather a description of one outcome of continual

specialization of the teaching act.[3] Because both school staffs and students are relatively isolated from the larger society, the effects of more direct types of segregation upon pupil learning become difficult to identify.

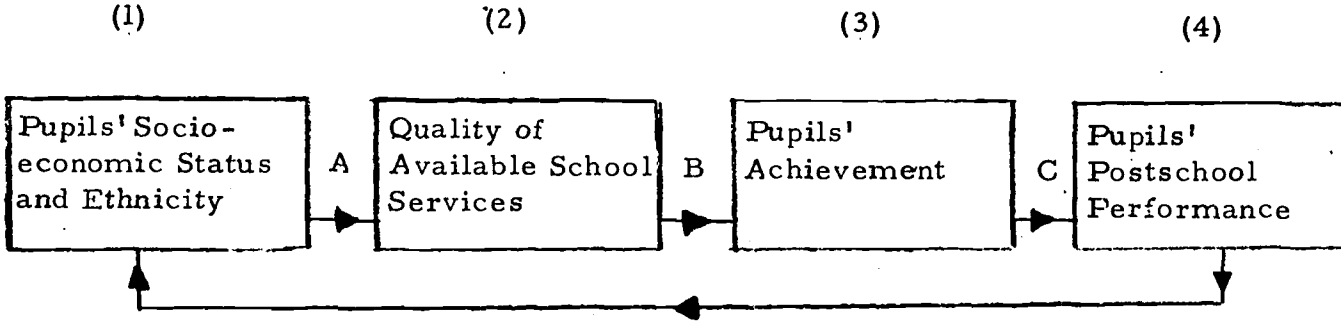
One learning outcome from the interaction of both kinds of segregation -- that of the school as a setting, and that due to the separation of staff and student groups -- can be stated this way: Students learn socially from the types and degrees of separation or isolation which surround them in the school setting. The curriculum of a school is not merely its program of didactic studies. The curriculum is also its social organization, its rules and functioning.[4] Schools therefore 'teach' the pecking order and the role expectations implied in their groupings. When these have poor fit to adult life in the society at large, miseducation occurs.

Neither this social learning nor many other sorts of learning are embodied in the conventional definition of academic achievement in America. School grading and achievement testing alike concentrate upon rates and levels of performance of selected cognitive skills. Social, emotional, aesthetic, and motor development are seldom measured; and only certain conventionally

acknowledged facets of cognition are appraised. Creativity, productivity, and mastery of tasks specific to instruction, together with aspects of learning styles, are often neglected.[5]

Model of Interpretation

Our purpose is to understand students -- the social and educational forces that influence their learning within the school context. Therefore, we shall narrow our attention to the kinds of segregation which are carried into classrooms in American schools, and to the kinds of cognitive skills that are conventionally recorded as school learning. Even within these confines, we need a model of interpretation as a guide. Our model is adapted from Guthrie and associates.[6] It looks like this:




Linkages A and B in the model assume that the quality of school services provided a pupil is related to his socioeconomic

status, and that lower-quality school services are associated with a pupil's lower status. Moreover, a relationship exists between the quality of school services and pupil achievement. Higher quality services are associated with higher levels of achievement. Finally, in Link C, post-school opportunities are related to in-school achievement in a positive, linear fashion.

This model has utility for the analysis of segregation effects. The limitation of the model is its distortion of empirical realities. For example, Link A is in reality at least ten times more influential for school achievement than is Link B.[7] The socioeconomic status (SES) of the student, measured in any number of ways, correlates with his achievement at the .40 coefficient level or above. School facilities, curriculum and instructional factors summed grossly as quality of available school services correlate with achievement at the .15 coefficient level or below. This declines when SES is controlled statistically.

This table, derived from the Coleman Report,[8] summarizes the differences in student verbal achievement accounted for by teacher characteristics, as against school variables and student environment or peer mix:

| Group | Grade 12 Teacher | Sch ol | Students | Grade 6 Teacher | School | Students |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Whites, North | 1.9 | 3.2 | 3.8 | 1.7 | 2.0 | 4.8 |
| Negroes, North | 4.3 | 6.7 | 8.9 | 2.2 | 2.7 | 4.9 |
| Puerto Ricans | 18.4 | 20.0 | 26.4 | 8.1 | 10.8 | 13.9 |

Coleman's school factor includes per pupil expenditures on staff, volumes per student in the school library, science laboratory facilities, extracurricular activities, school size, school location, and quality indicators of quality of curriculum.

The relative unimportance of these factors can be shown when the total variance accounted for by facilities and curricular measures for 12th grade Northern Negroes is shown as 3.1 percent, when student SES is held constant. For 6th grade Northern Negroes, it is less than one percent (.77 percent) and for 6th grade Northern whites, less than half of one percent (.32 percent).

Guthrie and associates summarize the findings from 17 of the best American and English studies of the B Link. They conclude from these that "there can be little doubt that schools can have an effect 'that is independent of the child's social environment.' In other words, schools do make a difference."[9] I have no doubt of the probable truth of that cautious conclusion, but the same studies also inform the deeper question of the magnitude

of the difference. They indicate that school facilities, services, and teaching combined do not make a tenth the difference in school learning that is made by the factors of SES, ethnicity, and student peer mix. School services could make a greater difference in the future, using different designs for schooling. This is a matter of educational faith and a call for cooperative invention.

Eth-Class Segregation

Ethnic and socioeconomic segregation often combine within the American school to influence achievement. Ethnic segregation in schools consists of a condition in which the ethnic composition of the community as a whole is not reflected in the ethnic composition of the school's student body or staff. There is no legal definition in the de facto case, but sociological studies lead me to conclude that the most meaningful definition is a community-based measure of ethnic composition.[10] If a community contains 20 percent black Americans and 80 percent white Americans, for example, any public school within that community with more than 40 percent black or less than 10 percent black students, is ethnically segregated by this definition.

SES refers to a combination of such objectifiable indicators as family income, parents' occupations, and formal educational attainment. It posits no firm social class structure but refers instead to the overall distribution within a community of what might be called life chances. The Coleman Report used the term "family background" and measured it by combining family mobility, parents' educational attainment, intactness of the family, size of family, and the presence of selected items in the home (e.g., TV, telephone, record player, refrigerator, automobile, vacuum cleaner, and reading matter). Additional subjective items included parents' interest in the child's schooling and parents' educational desires for their children.

This index accounted for 35.7 percent of the achievment differences among 6th grade Northern whites, 26.4 percent among 6th grade Northern Negroes, and 40.3 percent among 6th grade Puerto Ricans. No other factors alone or in total combination explained variance in pupil achievement as fully as did the index of "family background."

Ethnicity and SES should not be lumped mindlessly together, yet this lumping occurs at key points in our school model. For one point, ethnic minority children in America (particularly black,

Puerto Rican, Mexican-American, Indian, and Chinese-American) are predominantly lodged in the low SES group. The exceptions are vital. Each ethnic group includes a range of SES levels. This has often been ignored by many school segregationists and desegregationists alike. But the overlap is great. For a second point (that of the A Link in the model), school service disparities are often uniform, with poorer services going to ethnic minorities in the lower SES stratum. Minority group children from poor families attend school in older, larger, more crowded buildings. They have access to fewer laboratories and books, auditoriums and gymnasiums, and to fewer cafeterias and athletic playing fields. And, their teachers are generally less qualified professionally.[11]

Several studies have shown that SES and ethnicity each contributes separately to the school achievement of students.[12] The effect on achievement of segregating ethnic groups is thus noteworthy in its own right, as is the effect of socioeconomic segregation. In most American public school systems, however, the effects are multiplied by the residential patterning and by the distribution of school services. Ethnic and economic residential segregation dictate the student mix in any given neighborhood

school. The quality of services awaiting delivery compound this condition. Therefore, those who have opposed school desegregation because it seemed to them a superficial mixing of students within classrooms and little else, have neglected the historical strategy of the Civil Rights movement. This aimed at breaking the multiplier effects by equalizing the distribution of school services. As the school status quo had evolved around the combination of ethnic and SES pupil groupings, the movement began with changing the assignment of pupils.

There is no doubt that eth-class deprivations produce school achievement losses. These deprivations antecede the school situation. They are then compounded within schools by relative deprivations of services. In our model, Box 1 (SES) determines Box 3 (Ach.) in a powerful and direct way. Box 2 (School Services) reinforces this influence through segregation. Desegregation intervenes at Link A.

## Eth-Class Desegregation and School Learning

If ethnic and SES segregation reduce school learning, desegregation should enhance it. Research evidence in support of this proposition is abundant.[13] Three qualifications should be

placed on this generalization, however.

First, the enhancement through desegregation depends upon the quality of the desegregation plan and its implementation. Boardman found that a poor plan, poorly executed, decreased the school learning of all three student groups: those who were transferred; those who stayed behind; and those in the receiving schools.[14] A poor plan is easy to imagine. It is one mounted in haste, which neglects student needs and ignores teacher preparation. Similarly, I have shown that a naturally unsegregated neighborhood school, located on a residential eth-class boundary, may depress school learning.[15]

Second, the effect of planfully executed desegregation is substantial, yet limited. Some students of the process have estimated that the ceiling effect may be between 10 and 15 percent. This is considerable if compared to the generally negligible effects on achievement of such an alternative as compensatory programs of the kind fostered by Title I of federal aid. It may not be regarded as considerable when contrasted with the best results obtained in school experiments. In one the Center for Urban Education sponsored at low cost in P.S. 133 in Harlem, for example, the mean achievement gain exceeded 20 percent in two years.[16]

Third, in many large cities, school desegregation has never been attempted except in a very small, peicemeal, or experimental fashion.[17] Therefore, our fabric of evidence is spotty. After 18 years of majority inaction, big city minority leaders have gone in search of immediate alternatives. The most promising of these entails local community control and, through it, the redesign of school services to fit the learning needs of local children.[18] It is still too early to draw any conclusions about the measured effects of community control on school achievement. The desegregation approach, rusting from disuse in the big cities, will have to make room for this and other alternatives, however, if minority community self-determination is to be taken seriously as a valid facet of cultural pluralism.

School-Specific Segregation

American school systems segregate students by both exceptionality and by ability levels. This paper cannot deal analytically with sex, age, religions and other modes of segregation. We can only note that each type has a measurable, negative effect on the school achievement of some students. We can con-

clude by examining the two most common types of school-specific segregation, however, in order to etch in the nature of group separation as an influence. Here, our interest also stems from the fact that students are often segregated in the name of improved learning conditions.

Educable mentally retarded children in American schools are customarily segregated, although this term is not used. Educable retardates are assigned to 'special-class' or to 'regular-class' instruction, depending upon state and local regulations and resources. To the sociologist, the homogeneous grouping of educable retardates within separate classes or in separate schools is a type of segregation.

This practice has been increasingly common for 40 years. It has also been researched systematically for 40 years. A review of the findings reveals no evidence of an increase in academic achievement as a result of 'special-class' assignments.[19] Most studies find either no difference or a negative effect on achievement measures as a result of homogeneous grouping. A few of the same studies find small improvements in such indicators as social adjustment and self-concept resulting from homogeneous grouping. In spite of the evidence, states and localities continue

to commit heavy resources to the 'special-class' policy. The practice probably persists because it serves a variety of non-educational functions.

Intellectually gifted children have also been assigned to separate classes in American schools, although this did not become very common until the late 1950's. Several good studies indicate that enriched instruction and occasional special grouping stimulate the school learning of gifted students.[20] Only one of these studies concerns full time segregation of the gifted, and that research suggests that separate grouping at the junior high levels can, with careful programming, accelerate academic achievement substantially and enduringly.[21]

The most thorough studies of ability grouping of students by school achievement levels subsume the question of segregating the gifted students. These indicate that ability grouping has no significant effects on student achievement. In 1970. Heathers reviewed 50 studies on ability grouping and concluded that "no consistent effects have been found."[22] Again, ability grouping, which includes tracking at the secondary level, is an American school commonplace of no discernable learning value to students. It is a source of administrative convenience, staff satisfaction,

and parental support from those who are pleased by the "socially desirable" assignment of their children.

## Discussion and Conclusion

With the single possible exception of severely handicapped children and youth, no case can be made for the positive learning effects of any kind of categorical segregation. Moreover, we have summarized and cited powerful evidence in support of the case against segregation. This evidence could be extended to include the other types of segregation so common in our schools. For example, even the sex segregation of elementary school staffs -- with three out of four elementary schools in the nation's public systems having less than ten percent male teachers -- has negative effects on student achievement.[23]

Planful, well executed ethnic desegregation, moreover, has significant positive effects on student achievement. While these effects are not powerful enough to control fully other influences in the environment, they are much more powerful than the effects of compensatory education programs as these have been conducted during the years from 1966 to 1971.

A major objective of schooling in a democratic society is to open students to contact with teachers and other students who are drawn from a variety of social, economic, and racial backgrounds. When this openness is achieved planfully, it contributes to improved social learning, it increases social mobility, and it enhances academic achievement.

Placed against these ideals, the urban ghetto-based community school

> ...appears to be both socially divisive and anti-democratic. But blacks are frequently among the first to point out that the concept of the 'melting pot' has been a historical myth as far as black Americans are concerned...blacks presently live in a separate society, and neither legal remedies nor the putative good will of the white community ...give them housing, education, and other social activities in an integrated setting. In the particular case of city schools, it was not blacks who rejected integration; it was the large-city school boards representing a sizeable component of the white community...
>
> ...if we assume that a healthy American requires the full economic, political, and social integration of blacks and whites, the real question is how to achieve such a goal. Paradoxically, black cohesiveness appears to be a more effective strategy than any other existing alternative. The reason for its promise is a simple one. This society responds much more quickly to demands from powerful constituencies than it does to requests from weak ones, and black community is the basis for black political potency.[24]

Among urban ethnic minorities in America today, the best hope for significantly improved educational opportunity lies in the immediate and direct governance of community schools. This belief does not contradict the evidence concerning the bad effects of ethnic school segregation. It accepts that evidence and moves beyond it toward a solution that has ultimately greater prospect of realization and a greater impact upon school learning.

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