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Ethnic Integration and Interethnic Relations in Schools

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The integration of disadvantaged ethnic minorities and children with foreign, refugee and immigrant backgrounds is a key problem in educational policy and social research. The recent wave of refugees into Europe has once again made educational inclusion and structural hospitality a pressing issue for policymakers and practitioners, and also one educational research has a great social responsibility to engage with (De Haene, Neumann and Pataki, 2018). Existing research highlights that even successful integration policies and committed school-level efforts can have limited impact on social integration at the interpersonal, classroom level with few interethnic friendship relations. At the same time, as research has showed, inequalities and prejudices towards ethnic minorities continue to persist even in hospitable and inclusive school environments (Váradi, 2014). This thematic issue presents important contributions that explore these phenomena in different countries using various research methods, including qualitative and quantitative techniques. In addition to studies that provide deeper insight into ethnic integration in schools, some contributions also address policymaking and aim to compare proven recipes and good practices of integration and educational interventions aiming at decreasing persisting inequalities in academic achievement. In line with the general philosophy of *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, the thematic issue is a good example of multidisciplinary, comparative and critical thinking on ethnic integration in schools in different societies. The country-specific studies also contribute to our general scientific understanding of the nature and dynamics of ethnic integration among children of pre-adolescent and adolescent age.

This editorial first attempts to systematize different kinds of explanations for sustaining ethnic inequalities and the reasons behind the failure or limited effectiveness of integration in schools. Afterwards, preventive methods, possible interventions, and policy measures are discussed in light of these explanations. Subsequently, we address how and in which dimensions qualitative contributions in this thematic issue put these questions into new light, and finally we draw implications on how and what kind of explanations are supported by new quantitative results presented in this special issue.

1. *The problem and key explanations*

A persistent gap continues to exist at schools between the achievements and the opportunities of majority and disadvantaged ethnic minority students, and majority and immigrant students in countries all over the world. In Europe, the Roma constitute the poorest and most disadvantaged ethnic minority group. Their history has been characterized by separation, exclusion and sustained disadvantages (Hancock, 2002). The situation of Roma is different concerning many dimensions from the situation of newly arrived immigrants.¹ Differences in education are the most important factor for their later disadvantages at adult age (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2011a). Roma students bring along multiple disadvantages into school from home, but their disadvantages are reproduced or even accumulated during the years of education. They are more likely to drop out, repeat years, receive lower grades, and are less likely to study in tracks with high earning prospects (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2010; 2011b; Szalai, 2014). Several papers in this special issue focus on the integration of Roma students, but the suggested preventive and integration solutions also apply to various degrees to students belonging to other disadvantaged minorities and to children with an immigrant background. It is because the school in many contexts can be considered as an institution in which inequalities are reproduced (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1992; Rédai, 2019).

Following the studies of Coleman (1960; 1961; Downey and Condrón, 2016), the problem of ethnic segregation and its relation to unequal academic outcomes has received a wide attention both from social scientists and from policy makers. Several explanations have been identified to be responsible for the continued lack of integration in school and for the persistent gap in academic achievement between minority students and their majority peers (e.g. Messing, 2014; Schiff, 2014). In the following, we systematize the underlying mechanisms and causes of persisting inequalities and group them into five major types of explanations. These are centred on:

1. The institutional opportunity structure in school;
2. Differences in the family background with special focus on the socio-economic dimension;
3. Cultural differences, such as in language and conduct;
4. Differences in desires, beliefs, expectations, and aspirations;
5. Informal peer mechanisms of selection, influence, and exclusion.

First, the institutional opportunity structure in school (Walther et al., 2016) affects ethnic inequalities and integration in multiple ways. The curriculum, the daytime schedule, the offer and timing of extracurricular activities, weekend family days, requested contributions to class activities are all examples that could convert ethnic differences into educational disadvantage and might hinder ethnic integration, particularly if they require assets that are more difficult to attain for ethnic minority students and for their parents than for majority students.

¹ For a large-scale comparative investigation into the structural differences and similarities of the position, interethnic relations and educational opportunities of Roma and immigrant children in European education systems see Szalai and Schiff (2014) and Feischmidt (2011).

Moreover, early tracking, streaming and setting (within class groupings) are frequent in ethnically mixed schools and they likely increase inequalities (Horn et al., 2006; Kovai, 2011; Berényi, Berkovits and Erőss, 2008). Transitions between institutional levels are key phases in determining future educational trajectories, therefore study guidance practices and policies are vital aspects of institutional opportunity structures (See Kalalahti, 2019). It also matters how seating places are assigned in the classroom: either by self-selection or by teacher appointment, desk-mates are more likely to be from the same ethnicity (Keller and Takács, 2019; Radó and Takács, 2019). Similarly, the local context around the school plays a considerable role in integration and interethnic relations (Kruse and Kroneberg, 2019; Kruse, 2019). As ‘one cannot marry an Eskimo, if no Eskimo is around’ (Blau, 1987: 79), interethnic integration is unlikely in the case of socially or ethnically segregated educational systems. As residential segregation is persistent in most countries, even if between class and within school segregation has been mitigated, without external policy interventions, schools reproduce and further enhance socio-geographical segregation.

Second, a large literature in sociology and economics of education emphasize that one key mechanism responsible for the ethnic gap in education is the differential socio-economic background of students (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2011b; Papp Z., 2011). As on average, minority students are raised in families with less economic, cultural, and human capital than the majority society (Jæger and Møllegaard, 2017; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Jæger and Breen, 2016), they will not be able to keep up with majority students who can invest in extracurricular activities, prep courses and tuition, buy books, and have easier access to other resources related to the academic context.

Third, language use that is differentiating the ethnic minority groups also creates a barrier in academic achievement at school (Bernstein, 2003; White and Kaufman, 1997; Feischmidt, 2014). Discourses of sexuality and other sensitive topics might show even larger ethnic differences since they are discussed differently in different cultures (Rédai, 2019). Ethnographic studies highlighted how the gender roles and expectations of the Roma families are often in irresolvable conflict with the norms of regular school attendance and hence lead to early school leaving (Kovai, 2008).

Fourth, rational choice explanations in the sociology of education (e.g. Boudon, 1974) highlighted how systematic ethnic differences in desires, beliefs and expectations lead to ethnic differences in aspirations and achievement (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997), and to the reproduction of inequalities (Holm et al., 2019). These different expectations could even become internalized and lead to the emergence of oppositional cultures (Willis, 1977; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1978; 2004; Downey, 2008; Neményi and Vajda, 2014) and subcultural norms of intentionally decreasing performance (Coleman, 1960; 1961; Miller, 2002). In strong oppositional cultures, researchers described the phenomenon of ‘acting white’, suggesting that high-achieving minority students receive disapproval from their peers and get excluded (Ogbu, 2004; Fryer and Torelli, 2010). Other empirical studies, however, contradicted the predictions of the oppositional culture explanation and the acting white hypothesis among both African American and Roma students (e.g.

Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, 1998; Harris, 2011; Brüggemann, 2014; Habsz and Radó, 2018; Hajdu et al., 2019; Kisfalusi, 2018; Bocskor and Havelda, 2019).

Fifth, studies focusing on social psychology and social networks highlighted that friends strongly influence behaviour and attitudes. In school, friends' attitudes towards educational performance and their actual achievement may have a considerable impact on study aspirations (Raabe, Boda and Stadtfeld, 2019; Raabe and Wölfer, 2018; Fejes, 2019) as well as on school achievement (Coleman, 1960; 1961; Flashman, 2012; Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin, 2009; Rambaran et al., 2017; Stark et al., 2017). Peer influence creates an interesting problem in ethnically and socially mixed schools with ample opportunities for the forging of interethnic friendship ties. Even in these schools, friendship networks typically remain to a large extent segregated because friendship choice is governed by homophily (Boda and Néray, 2015; Joyner and Kao, 2000; Kruse et al., 2016; Leszczensky and Pink, 2019; McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001; Moody, 2001). Peer mechanisms of network segregation, popularity, acceptance, and exclusion all contribute to the fact that diversity does not necessarily imply cross-ethnic friendships in schools (Kisfalusi et al., 2020; Wittek et al., 2020; Bocskor and Havelda, 2019).

2. Key solutions

Educational research has long been occupied with proposing ways to overcome the ethnic gap in education and facilitate ethnic integration. New interventions have been designed, experimental programmes were run, and new policies were introduced. These integrating solutions directly respond to the dimensions that we have identified in the literature as relevant explanations for the ways in which schools convert social differences into educational inequalities. Hence, we can systematize these policies on the basis of which theoretical explanations they respond to as:

1. Institutional arrangements;
2. Student welfare programmes;
3. Cultural programmes, educating minority culture;
4. Motivational programs;
5. Peer interventions.

First, institutional arrangements are aimed at the adjustment of the opportunity structure in school. Different institutional arrangements have been tried out, such as preparatory classes (Steiner, 2019), specialized education programmes and teacher training programmes aiming to raise the participation of teachers with minority background and making the staff more multicultural (Fejős, 2019). In general, the main philosophy behind these policy programmes is to create new opportunities and positive learning environments for minority students while not decreasing the quality of education for majority students.

Second, based on a similar principle, student welfare programmes try to improve the socio-economic conditions of minority students. These programmes target child welfare (e.g. by providing free meals, free books, notebooks, etc.) with the objective of breaking the cycle of disadvantage accumulation, overcoming

family disadvantage and enhancing equity by targeted support or positive discrimination.

Third, it is important to emphasize that cultural differences do not need to be washed away. Related programmes do not try to erase minority culture, but acknowledging needs relating to language style and code differences and giving recognition to minority culture and language within the official curriculum; offering education on minority culture; allowing and facilitating cultural debates (Simonovits and Surányi, 2019); or facilitating the integration of qualified minority teachers (Fejős, 2019). In the latter case, policy interventions are necessary because even if minority teachers are employed in mixed schools, obstacles may hinder their career progress.

Fourth, research experiments have focused on improving the access to information on study options or improving the self-confidence of students when making their study choices. It has been evidenced that information campaigns aiming at influencing secondary school choice effectively increase the share of those opting for academic education tracks by 6–10 percentage points (Barone et al., 2017; Dinkelman and Martínez, 2014; Keller, Elwert and Takács, 2020).

Fifth, building on the research tradition developed from the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), it has been repeatedly demonstrated that cross-ethnic friendships lead to tolerant attitudes, lower level of stereotypes and higher inter-racial trust (Clotfelter, 2002; 2004; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006; 2008; Simonovits and Surányi, 2019). Experimental methods have been proposed and have tested ways how to reduce intergroup prejudice via peer mechanisms (Kende et al., 2017; Paluck and Green, 2009; Paluck, 2011; Simonovits and Surányi, 2019). These interventions attempted to facilitate tolerance, curiosity, and an open-minded atmosphere as well as peer acceptance, by rewarding ‘cultural’ dimensions of popularity (Bocskor and Havelda, 2019), activities related to minority culture (Simonovits and Surányi, 2019), increased contact, mentoring, and peer study support.

All these solutions have their challenges and every particular policy implemented requires careful design, experimental testing and evaluation. Some contributions to this special issue highlight examples of implemented programmes. The experience from and the impact of these programmes therefore do not only have a positive impact at the given context, but also reflect back on the social scientific theories concerning the ways of decreasing the ethnic gap, enforcing ethnic integration and tackling interethnic prejudice in schools.

3. Directions in qualitative research

The special issue presents three articles that primarily rely on qualitative methodology. Anna Fejős’s article explores the professional, biographical and identity narratives of qualified Roma primary school teachers in Hungary. The proportion of teachers self-identifying as Roma is extremely low in the Hungarian education system compared to the proportion of Roma in society. Fejős is interested in how Roma teachers who work in schools with a significant Roma intake think about their role as teachers and how they interact with Roma students

and parents. The explorative analysis identifies three types of minority teacher professional identities in the Hungarian context: the respected intellectual, typically older generation males with an established position within the local community; the caretaker, typically Roma females whose professional motives stem from a strong feeling of social responsibility and revolve around the incentive to help their community and lead by example; and the young professional, the new generation of Roma intellectuals who had recently started the profession and envisage the teaching profession as a calling. In the narratives about their relationship with students and parents, Roma teachers emphasized the ways in which their embodied knowledge and experience of being themselves Roma was being mobilised in their teaching practice. With great sensitivity, the article touches on vital issues of how young minority intellectuals navigate within institutions where the colour-blind understanding of interethnic coexistence is the norm.

Dorottya Rédei explores the relation of teachers and Roma students in the Hungarian school system. This Foucauldian feminist ethnographic study explores the intersectionality of class, ethnicity and gender in the vocational stream of a secondary school with special focus on the ways in which gendered sexuality discourses and practices reproduce social hierarchies in education. The paper highlights how from the lens of a middle class elitist majority teacher discourse on Roma girls' sexuality, Roma girls are being constituted as socially and intellectually inferior learner subjectivities. Among other examples, the analysis touches upon how Roma girls are conceived as having lower 'cultural levels' and how they constitute themselves in their narratives on a sexual abuse case committed by one of their teachers. The paper turns attention to an under-researched area barely tackled by national and institutional policies and points at the powerful roles of institutionalized gender stereotypes in shaping female minority educational trajectories.

In her ethnographic research study, Mira Kalalahti explores the ways in which interethnic interactions manifest in the study guidance and counselling programme of a Finnish comprehensive school. The analysis focuses on how interethnic classroom encounters shape the acculturation processes of immigrant students in a school that successfully operates with ethnically heterogeneous peer groups. The discussed ethnographic observations focus on two events, a study guidance session and a field-visit to an upper secondary school. Discussing the earlier event, Kalalahti explores how the students negotiate their ethnic and national backgrounds in the classroom, and by doing so, subjectively position themselves in the informal hierarchy of the classroom that is powerfully carved by wider society's ethnic belonging and prejudices. The study explores how these self- and external positionings ultimately guide immigrant and minority students' educational choices and aspirations. The analysis concentrates on the socio-spatial aspects of belonging, separation and social hierarchies. The discussion concludes with policy recommendations by which multi-ethnic classrooms could enhance bridging classroom social ties, positive interethnic encounters and a positive sense of belonging and acculturation.

4. New results in quantitative research

Borbála Simonovits and Ráchel Surányi combine qualitative and quantitative research methods to assess the impact of informal educational methodologies and tools on students' attitudes and knowledge about Jewish people and identity. The authors followed the classes of a secondary school in Budapest for three years using a quasi-experimental design. During this time period, students in the experimental group participated in various activities, debates, and discussions organized around the topic of Jewish identity. The analysis shows that the interventions changed students' views on how they perceive Jewishness and increased their knowledge on Jewish people and identity, but only to a limited extent. The authors stress the importance of informal educational methods in raising students' awareness on tolerance and minority cultures.

Ákos Bocskor and Anikó Havelda investigate the status dynamics among Roma and non-Roma Hungarian primary school students. They focus on the question how various characteristics and behaviours of students such as athleticism, school performance, aggression, or physical appearance are associated with their reputational status and acceptance within the peer group. Based on a longitudinal analysis of peer nominations they find that, in line with previous findings from other countries (e.g. Cillessen and Mayeux, 2004), being perceived as popular and being accepted by the peers are associated with different characteristics. Aggressive students, for instance, have a higher chance to be perceived as popular but a lower chance to be accepted in the peer group than students who are not aggressive. The authors also find ethnic differences in these associations: while being verbally aggressive contributes to the popularity of non-Roma students, it does not show a significant association among Roma students. In contrast to the predictions of oppositional culture theory and in line with previous Hungarian studies (Habsz and Radó, 2019; Hajdu et al., 2019), the study finds that higher school performance is associated with a higher level of acceptance among both Roma and non-Roma students.

Christine Steiner focuses on immigrant students' social relations in preparatory classes in Germany. Preparatory classes provide education to newly arrived immigrant students who do not speak the language of the host country. Analysing a survey conducted among newly arrived students she finds that immigrant students generally report having a positive relationship both with their classmates and teachers in the preparatory class and feel well at school. However, due to the lack of opportunity, students attending a preparatory class are less likely to have native friendships than students attending a regular class. Moreover, there is a significant gender gap in interethnic friendships: girls are less likely than boys to have native-born friends. The study also shows that friendships with native students can contribute to immigrant students' well-being.

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