

Separate but Unequal: Common Educational Policies and Practices that Separate African American Students from Mainstream Learning Environments

A Forward

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Sixty years after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case, school segregation still continues to systematically manifest within public schools. School tracking, homogenous district zoning, and school property tax laws are only a few of the separatist methods used within 21st century learning environments (Beese & Liang, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010; Kozol, 2005; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, and Joubert, 2010; Mickleson, 2001). Mickleson (2001) found that within Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, African American students were disproportionately tracked in lower-level classes. Furthermore, within this same urban district, nearly 25 percent of low-income schools or schools servicing primarily African American students had fewer human and material resources (2001). In addition, school property tax laws have also been found to racially exclude students from essential material resources. Besse and Liang (2010) and Darling-Hammond (2010) found that in comparison to other industrialized nations,

the United States is currently disproportionately allocating more funds to suburban or affluent schools. Through these structural impediments, most public schools still fail to be holistically integrated. Despite over six decades of proverbial desegregation, true integration is still suggestively a utopian ideal for urban students.

Yet, there is one additional exclusionary practice that has reached substantial national attention within the last two decades – school discipline. Some of the most striking policies that remain arbitrarily ignored are school discipline policies and discipline reform. In 2014, President Obama mirrored the sentiments of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and urged school districts to revisit their punitive discipline policies (Goldfarb, 2014). This is one of the most paramount issues of student separation, because many suspended or expelled students are extracted from mainstream learning environments and fail to receive adequate instruction (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010;



Souza, 2005). Researchers have recently researched how discipline policies specifically impact students on the basis of race. Jawanza Kunjufu (2002) and Lewis, Butler, Bonner, and Joubert (2010) found that African American students, specifically African American males, were disproportionately suspended from school, which resulted in missed instructional time. These policies have direct racial implications due to the noticeable differences in suspension rates between racial groups. For example, in 2012 one in six African American students were suspended; with some local districts reportedly as high as sixty-six percent (Schott Foundation, 2012). When considering African American students only comprise sixteen percent of the total public school population, these statistics are startling (Schott Foundation, 2012). In addition, in all but one state, African

Americans outnumber their White counterparts in school suspensions and expulsions (Schott Foundation, 2014). These school policies inadvertently cultivate environments of exclusion and isolation (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010; Kunjufu, 2002; Lewis et. al, 2010).

This second volume of the Urban Education Research and Policy Annuals examines how topics of separation, segregation, marginality, and dissonance are still key issues within school settings. Each of the articles featured in this volume explores topics of segregation, similar to the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education case. The highlighted findings of each of these articles suggest that segregation – in its varying forms – is still a valid topic of discussion within education.

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Editor

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