

Chapter 14

Divided Cities—Divided Schools? School Segregation and the Role of Needs-Based Resource Allocation in Finland



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Abstract For a long time, Finland stood out in international pupil assessments with a rare combination of excellent overall performance and a high level of equality. However, recent PISA studies point to both deteriorating learning outcomes and increasing importance of pupils' social background for their learning outcomes in Finland. In addition, strongly increasing socio-economic and ethnic residential segregation in many Finnish cities has had a marked effect on schools since residential patterns are a central factor in school segregation and over one third of Finnish school children live in larger cities. The growing differences between the student intakes of schools have led to strongly diverging learning outcomes and learning conditions between schools in Finland. Urban segregation has therefore become a key question for educational equality and Finnish educational policies. In this chapter, we scrutinise the ways in which school segregation is related to societal and spatial differentiation in the Finnish urban context and how this relationship is further reflected in the differentiation of the schools' educational outcomes. Moreover, we analyse the existing needs-based resourcing responses and their effectiveness. Our empirical material is focused on the city of Helsinki, as it is currently the only city with a systematic needs-based resource allocation policy. Our chapter illustrates that the traditional egalitarian and universal "same level for all" approach of the education system in Finland seems increasingly unable to overcome the growing differences in a segregating Finnish society. To compensate for children's unequal starting positions and the increasingly divergent learning and social conditions between schools, the Finnish education system needs stronger support mechanisms that systematically allocate resources towards the individual needs of schools.

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In the first PISA assessment in 2000, Finland stood out with its excellent educational outcomes. The lowest quartile of learners outscored their international peers by an average of almost 80 points, or two years of education. In this and following years, the particularly outstanding quality in Finland's PISA success was a rare combination of excellent overall performance and high level of equality. However, more recent PISA results point to deteriorating learning outcomes and growing differences between pupils. While outcomes of all groups have declined somewhat, a worrying trend is that the largest drop is amongst the learners with the lowest scores. Moreover, the learning gaps between higher and lower socio-economic status (SES) pupils have increased.¹

These growing inequalities in Finland's education system seem to be strongly related to growing social and spatial differentiation in Finnish society. Since the mid-1970s, social inequality has increased significantly in most countries of the Global North—also in the egalitarian Finnish welfare state. According to a recent study on the state of inequality in Finland, while wealth inequality had already grown before the global financial crisis of 2007–08, income disparities have started to increase in recent years as well. These socio-economic disparities are increasingly reflected in other social dimensions, such as in education or health.²

As social inequality tends to translate into spatial inequality, the increasing levels of social polarisation have become clearly visible in numerous cities around the world. Residential segregation—the unequal distribution of different social groups across the city—is on the rise.³ This is also true for many cities in Finland, where socio-economic and ethnic disparities between residential areas have clearly increased since the 1990s.⁴ This development is driven by growing social inequalities in Finland's society, rapid population growth in large urban areas, significant changes in the labour market, and increasing ethnic diversity.

Where children live still largely determines where they go to school. This is even true in cities with free school choice⁵ but is particularly strong in education systems with geographic school catchment areas, as in Finnish cities. Since school segregation—the unequal distribution of children of different social and ethnic backgrounds across schools—strongly resembles residential patterns,⁶ socio-spatial polarisation has become a key question for educational equality and education policies.⁷ Consequently, the question arises whether the Finnish education system's traditionally held interpretation of an egalitarian model as a “same for all” approach is still capable to overcome and compensate for the growing differences of an increasingly segregating society.

In this chapter, we analyse the ways in which school segregation is related to societal and spatial differentiation in Finnish cities and scrutinise how this relationship is further reflected in the differentiation of schools' educational outcomes. We seek to draw particular attention to urban areas. This is because educational disadvantage has traditionally been located in rural regions in Finland in the national discourse. We then analyse the needs-based resourcing models in the city of Helsinki and at the national level—both being responses to the observed challenges by supporting disadvantaged schools.⁸ This chapter fills a gap in previous perspectives on educational

inequality in Finland where declining equality has neither been linked systematically to urban development at the national, institutional scale, nor connected to the scrutiny of needs-based resourcing as a new approach in Finland's egalitarian educational framework. On an international level, our contribution is to uncover the ways in which the egalitarian educational system in Finland is challenged by a similar dynamic of segregation observed in other countries. We therefore aim to shed new light on a country that has been, and still is, associated with a high level of educational equality and excellence.

Our empirical material is mainly focused on the city of Helsinki. Being the largest city in Finland, Helsinki is one of the most segregated urban environments, with neighbourhoods and schools representing both ends of the national socio-economic and ethnic spectrum on zip-code and school catchment area level.⁹ Helsinki was also the first city to implement a needs-based school resourcing policy, and is still the only city in Finland where this approach is implemented in a systematic way, using segregation indicators.¹⁰ However, since the spatial dynamics are very similar across Finnish cities, our findings are similarly relevant for other urban contexts in the country. We focus on segregation in urban schools, which house a large and growing share of all pupils in Finland.¹¹

Cumulative Decline in Helsinki's Neighbourhoods and Schools

In its report on "Divided Cities", the OECD raised concerns about the increasing levels of residential segregation in urban areas and the potential negative consequences on individuals, institutions, and societies.¹² In both political and academic discourses, residential segregation is expected to reduce social mobility and thus to limit life chances of those living in these segregated areas.¹³ Being closely related to segregation in schools, residential segregation also constitutes an important factor, often overlooked, shaping equality in education. Although segregation levels in most European cities are still lower than in other world regions, they have been growing over recent decades.¹⁴ This trend can also be observed in Finland.¹⁵

While segregation used to be very low in most cities in Finland after WWII when egalitarian housing and strong social policies played an important part in the building of the welfare state, the economic downturn in the 1990s in Finland resulted in the spatial concentration of growing unemployment and decreasing income in certain neighbourhoods.¹⁶ Later, economic growth did not even out the spatial patterns, but rather exacerbated growing gaps between neighbourhoods through faster growth in already well-off urban neighbourhoods. With increasing immigration since the mid-1990s and many immigrant groups facing challenges in entering the Finnish labour market, rising levels of ethnic segregation added to the already existing residential segregation.¹⁷

Over the last 10 years, these trends have continued in Finland and ethnic segregation in particular has risen markedly.¹⁸ Even in the capital city Helsinki, with its strong policy of social mixing producing a balanced mix of different tenure types in housing construction, housing policies have not been able to ward off the growing gaps in terms of education and income levels between neighbourhoods. Consequently, Helsinki's socio-spatial segregation levels nowadays correspond to those of many other Nordic and European cities. Some well-off areas in Helsinki show five times the number of highly educated adults and three times the annual income of the poorest ones.¹⁹ Moreover, as in other countries, children tend to live even more segregated lives. While the segregation index between the highest and lowest income deciles for the whole population is currently 0.4, the corresponding figure for children living in high- and low-SES households is over 0.5. Consequently, while around 40% of the Helsinki population would have to move to achieve a complete population mix, over 50% of households with children would need to. The difference is similar for segregation of adults and children with non-Finnish and Finnish backgrounds.²⁰

As in other (European) cities, different dimensions of segregation tend to overlap in certain Helsinki neighbourhoods.²¹ While indicators of social privilege, such as higher levels of educational attainment, income, and employment, accumulate in some neighbourhoods, different aspects of disadvantage pile up in others. In other words, segregation results in patterns where those neighbourhoods in Helsinki facing challenges resulting from low levels of adult education are the same ones that are confronted with socio-economic and labour market related challenges. Moreover, socio-economic dimensions often overlap with race and ethnicity. Since ethnic minorities in Helsinki tend to have a lower SES, they are disproportionately represented in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

As the development of socio-spatial inequalities is increasingly reflected in Helsinki's school system, a better understanding of this interconnectedness has become "crucial for understanding the socio-spatial mechanisms behind social reproduction and intergenerational social mobility".²² This is particularly so because school segregation does not only reflect existing social and spatial inequalities but also contributes to maintaining and exacerbating those.²³ One relevant dimension of the problem is that segregated schools can produce different *conditions of learning* reproducing unequal educational outcomes. International research has shown that while mixed schools can positively affect the performance of low-SES pupils,²⁴ negative consequences exceeding the effects of pupils' individual characteristics can arise when the schools' student composition becomes severely disadvantaged.²⁵ These consequences are possible for Helsinki considering that schools located in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods face challenges produced by a combination of socio-economic disadvantage, low levels of adult education, social problems of families, and the integration of high proportions of pupils with a foreign mother tongue. Another dimension is that schools additionally offer a *setting for social interaction* where children can learn to deal with social and ethnic diversity.²⁶ Segregated schools in combination with segregation in Helsinki's neighbourhoods can therefore contribute to a growing disconnection between children's social realities. This can be

a risk for social integration and cohesion and can therefore undermine the egalitarian idea behind Finland's welfare state and society.

Increasing School Segregation and Growing Educational Gaps in Helsinki

The learning outcomes of 15-year-old schoolchildren in Finland have been decreasing throughout the past two decades. The particularly worrying trends are that this decline appears to be stronger among lower-SES pupils and that the results in the lowest learning outcome deciles have weakened faster than in the best ones.²⁷ In other words, while the learning outcomes of the best performing pupils have remained roughly as good as they were, or declined only a little, the results of the poorest performing pupils have weakened significantly. At the same time, pupils' socio-economic and linguistic family backgrounds have become stronger in predicting educational performance since they are connected increasingly to educational attainment. The learning outcomes of pupils with an immigration background in Finland are clearly weaker than those of pupils with a Finnish or Swedish mother tongue, and this gap has grown significantly even by international standards.²⁸ Thus, while for a long time Finland's education system has been able to minimise the impact of individual characteristics on learning outcomes—or to compensate for them—this is no longer the case.²⁹

However, the decline of learning outcomes and the growing education gaps between different social and ethnic groups are not equally distributed across the country and different types of neighbourhoods and schools but have a clear spatial dynamic. While the learning gap between the lowest and highest decile of schools corresponded to one year of education (40 points in PISA evaluation) in 2000, it increased to over 2.5 years of education (over 100 points) in 2018. The majority of those schools with the weakest and declining results are located in socio-economically and ethnically challenged areas.³⁰ While educational disadvantage in Finland has traditionally been located in rural regions with declining population and relatively low educational levels among the adult population, the schools characterised by the highest levels of social and economic disadvantage are increasingly located in urban areas, mainly in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods in urban fringes. Even though the exact reason for the overall decline in educational outcomes in Finland has not yet been explained convincingly, it has become clear that the growing gaps between schools are at least partly due to rising levels of school segregation.

School segregation is predominantly an urban phenomenon and particularly shaped by residential segregation in cities. As over 70% of pupils in Finland live in urban areas, and over one third in larger cities over 100,000 inhabitants, Finland's education landscape is generally becoming more urban. Moreover, over 50% of all Finnish pupils with immigrant backgrounds live in the Helsinki Capital Region³¹—in the cities of Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa—where the average school catchment area

population already corresponds to the average size of a Finnish municipality. Since the socio-spatial developments in Finland's cities increasingly shape the country's educational outcomes and equality, the growing levels of residential segregation and their tremendous effects on school segregation have become a nationally important question for education.³²

The growing gaps between schools in Finland demonstrate that providing a universal level of resources and a consistent quality of education to all pupils does not automatically guarantee a universally high level of educational outcomes. Therefore, the question arises how educational and urban policies can and should react to the increasing polarisation between both neighbourhoods and schools and the persistent patterns of spatial concentrations of educational disadvantage. Both in the fields of urban development and education, there already have been numerous attempts to combat segregation by actively trying to promote social and ethnic mix. In particular in education, these attempts have mostly not been able to fully counteract the ongoing processes of segregation. Consequently, another line of policies has focused on alleviating the consequences of school segregation by allocating additional resources systematically towards the individual needs of schools. This approach is also increasingly used in Finnish cities and will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Needs-Based Funding in a Universalist Welfare State? School Segregation and Targeted Funding Schemes in Helsinki

As a reaction to the growing differences between urban schools, the idea of targeted funding has found its way into the Finnish education sector mainly over the last two decades. Needs-based funding, or weighted funding, is internationally widespread and perhaps one of the key concepts to support equality in learning.³³ It is used in several other countries including The Netherlands, Germany, France and Canada, where it is strongly linked to the existing achievement gaps between pupils from different social backgrounds and/or foreign mother tongue, and, consequently, between schools that disproportionately serve these pupils.³⁴ Needs-based funding is thus based on the idea that equal learning opportunities at schools with high proportions of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds cannot be achieved with financial equality, but require the allocation of additional resources systematically assessed by the individual needs of schools.³⁵ Additional resources are therefore intended to compensate for some schools' context-specific disadvantages. Needs-based funding might not only alleviate the negative effects of school segregation, but might even be successful in addressing its causes, for instance, by increasing the popularity of a school in parents' school choices once that school is provided with more resources.³⁶

In Finland, targeted funding in education has traditionally not featured strongly. The interpretation of the egalitarian ideal of educational equality has included a strongly Universalist principle of having the same curriculum in all schools and

providing every school with the same public funding to both ensure equal academic institutional quality and to keep institutional variation between schools as low as possible. In principle, the level of funding has been assessed by the number of pupils in each school, with further individual allocations for pupils with special needs or Finnish as a second language. Nevertheless, additional funding has been allocated nationally since the 2000s in Finland. The latest funding scheme initiated by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture covered 74 million Euro annually and was distributed as part of the so-called “Right to Learn” (“*Oikeus oppia*”) programme to municipalities.³⁷ Municipalities have been able to apply for and channel this funding to schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Additionally, some but only a few municipalities in Finland, such as the cities of Helsinki and Vantaa, have implemented their own targeted funding schemes.

The first municipal needs-based funding scheme was started in the late 1990s by the city of Helsinki and was renewed in 2009.³⁸ It is based on a systematic and research-based approach that seeks to assess the starting point of schools to achieve good learning outcomes by taking their specific school segregation factors into account. Initially only used in comprehensive schools, it was recently expanded to early childhood education. The additional funding is generally not earmarked so that schools and day-care centres can decide how to best use it themselves.³⁹

The needs-based funding in Helsinki aims to support schools and early childhood education without tying financial support to current performance, as measured by test scores, in order that schools with improved learning outcomes are not penalised by reduced access to support. In order to model the school’s ability to produce good learning outcomes without school’s own activities affecting support, the current calculation model is based on an index combining several area-based characteristics proven to correlate with school performance. From a statistical point of view, the model therefore aims to predict a school’s learning outcomes by using variables describing its segregation of pupil composition.⁴⁰ These variables are: (a) the share of adult population with only basic education in the catchment area; (b) the average annual income in the catchment area; (c) the share of foreign-language (non-native Finnish or Swedish speakers) pupils in school; and (d) the popularity or rejection of school in school choices (measured by the number of pupils who leave the catchment area compared to the number of pupils in the local school coming from outside the catchment area). To allocate the extra resources, each school’s index is multiplied by the number of pupils in the school.⁴¹

A study analysing the weighted funding policy’s effects on pupils’ educational outcomes in Helsinki points to a highly favourable impact on secondary school transition outcomes.⁴² It illustrates significant improvements such as reduced dropout rates after middle school and increased likelihood that students will attend the academic track of upper-secondary school. The impacts are particularly large for male natively Finnish speaking pupils and female pupils from an immigrant background. By using data on pupil applications to secondary education as well as performance in academic and non-academic courses, the study also allows for more insights into the underlying mechanisms of these improvements. It reveals that the improved results are not only based on academic coursework; there is also improvement in non-academic subjects

since high school acceptances for immigrant pupils is mostly driven “by increased or better targeted applications to high school instead of improved academic performance”.⁴³ Overall, the study indicates that targeted funding schemes can support the improvement of educational outcomes significantly in the schools where resources are allocated, particularly for pupils from recent immigrant backgrounds and those who are natively Finnish speaking who would not otherwise achieve as well.

How successful and effective needs-based resource allocation in education can be—and how urgently it is needed—is additionally demonstrated by further programmes the city of Helsinki initiated to support schools and early childhood education in challenging contexts. As part of the city’s “Development Plan for Immigrant Education” (“*Maahanmuuttajien kasvatuksen ja koulutuksen kehittämissuunnitelma*” (MAKE)), the so-called ‘multilingual tutor’ model seeks to give extra support to 45 day-care centres, primary and upper secondary schools with a comparatively high share of pupils with an immigrant background. In these day-care centres and schools, 18 multilingual tutors were hired to support the inclusion and well-being of such pupils and their families, for instance by supporting the pupils’ development of both Finnish and their own mother tongue, helping them in planning their studies, providing parents with information about the Finnish education system, and facilitating home-school collaboration.⁴⁴ Although unsuitable for detecting a direct statistical correlation between the programme and recent developments, a recent evaluation of the programme points to lower rates of unauthorised absences and school dropouts among pupils with immigrant background at those schools or day-care centres with multilingual tutors. Moreover, interviews with staff members, parents, and children have revealed additional benefits, such as improvements in staff cultural skills, fewer school conflicts, better school-home collaborations, parents’ increased knowledge about the Finnish education system, and the multilingual tutors’ important role as role models for immigrant children.⁴⁵

Challenges of the Current Needs-Based Funding Scheme

Due to the complexity of governance and educational systems, the appropriateness of targeted funding mechanisms and the provisions for use depend on the needs of the pupil population and the educational context, including the existing capacities of schools and school systems to meet those needs.⁴⁶ As a result, mechanisms of supplementary funding vary considerably across countries. Differences include the amount of funding, the identification of target groups, and whether or not weights are added to the primary funding formula or are allocated solely as additional funding.⁴⁷

Comparing the targeted funding scheme in Helsinki with those in other countries, several differences as well as potential shortfalls become visible.⁴⁸ One very crucial aspect refers to the *available data necessary to assess school specific needs for additional funding*. While a systematic assessment and monitoring of school funding and neighbourhood or catchment area factors has not been done in Finland, an early study covering at least a few Finnish municipalities revealed that the overall funding

for schools is only marginally linked to increasing levels of inequality and school segregation.⁴⁹ However, to compensate for unequal starting conditions in schools, identify school-specific needs, and target additional funding more effectively, an assessment system including school-specific composition characteristics is required. This is an ongoing debate in other countries with needs-based funding schemes as well. Yet in contrast to some of those countries, data on pupils' family background has not been made available in Finland at the local level, although it does exist.

A second potential shortcoming of the current model refers to the *level of targeted funding and its subsequent effectiveness*. Due to structural differences in the funding of educational systems, a direct comparison between countries is difficult. The most significant difference is that in some countries, such as the Netherlands, needs-based funding is not used as additional support scheme for selected schools. Rather, pupil weights are already added as part of the primary funding of schools.⁵⁰ As a result, schools with high proportions of weighted pupils have access to substantially more resources than schools with few weighted pupils—the highly weighted schools have 57% more teachers per pupil on average and almost twice as many additional support staff per teacher.⁵¹ In contrast, the 2.5 million Euros the city of Helsinki spent in 2019⁵² for weighted funding seem to be relatively modest, although they are complemented with several more million Euros from the Finnish Government. Moreover, the amount of needs-based funding in Helsinki varies tremendously between the selected schools, ranging between €5000 annually per school up to €300,000. While in most countries, supplementary funding is spent on additional staff (e.g., to lower class sizes, to provide for socio-emotional and family support, or to allow pupils with migrant backgrounds to catch up with their language and academic work⁵³), this hardly seems possible for many schools in Helsinki considering the limited funding.

A third aspect refers to the *financial stability of funding*. As demonstrated earlier, the patterns of school segregation are relatively stable. In other words, those catchment areas or schools that are now at the low end of the income distribution or education level have been in the lowest segments in relative terms for several decades.⁵⁴ Since educational disadvantage seems to be associated with strong path dependency, schools require a stable funding scheme that is assessed regularly. The need for a long-term and predictable additional support system is also emphasised in interviews with several school and early childhood education actors.⁵⁵

Last but not least, it is important to consider the *efficient use of targeted funding*. Current research indicates that additional funding in Helsinki, where sufficient, is predominantly used for additional classroom assistants.⁵⁶ However, a systematic assessment of the use of the targeted funding has not been made so far. Deeper insights into the mechanisms through which the policy operates in different schools as well as how it is interpreted, carried out, and used are therefore still limited. Although school principals and day-care centre managers have enough competence in identifying the needs of their own units, information on best practice and research-based monitoring of operating models for the use of additional resources would bring valuable information.⁵⁷ For instance, if additional funding is sufficient to hire additional staff, the question arises whether schools use the additional staff in a targeted manner to compensate for the starting disadvantages of individual pupils.⁵⁸

International experiences with weighted funding illustrate that many schools have probably not yet developed the capacity to serve socially, linguistically, and culturally diverse pupils effectively.⁵⁹

Conclusion: Finland's Universalist System Requires Targeted Support to Combat the Effects of Segregation

After years in which Finland stood out in international pupil assessments with a rare combination of excellent overall performance and a high level of equality, the recent evaluations show a rather worrying development. Our findings reveal three simultaneous trends that together pose a significant challenge to comprehensive schooling in Finland: (1) worsening social inequalities; (2) the increasing significance of pupils' social background for their learning outcomes,⁶⁰ and (3) growing socio-spatial differentiations in many cities across Finland. In other words, while pupils' social and educational starting points are becoming more unequal and growing residential segregation has led to an increased differentiation of student intakes in schools, the significance of these individual background factors for pupils' learning outcomes has been growing throughout recent decades.

The growing differences between the schools' socio-economic and ethnic compositions have been leading to strongly diverging learning outcomes and conditions. These gaps are growing predominantly in urban areas, where the socio-economic differences between neighbourhoods already exceed the differences between municipalities in the whole country. Since residential and school segregation are interlinked strongly, school segregation levels in Finnish cities are increasing. Residential segregation thus presents what could be called an urban paradox of education: while urban regions are generally characterised with high levels of economic success and educational well-being, they simultaneously 'host' the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods with concentrations of educational disadvantage.⁶¹ Since the vast majority of children and young people in Finland live in urban areas, with most of the immigrant-background school-age children living even more concentrated in the capital region, increasing levels of school segregation are a question of national importance. Challenges of educational equality, including particularly immigrant groups' access to the education system and labour market in Finland, can therefore be only solved in cities.

For decades, when compared internationally, the strength of the education system in Finland has been the high and stable institutional quality of both early childhood education and care and basic education. While there were no major differences in quality between schools, the system seemed to be able to minimise the impact of individual characteristics on pupils' learning outcomes. In times of low inequality and segregation levels and a socially and ethnically comparatively homogenous society, the Finnish system has therefore proven to be successful in producing equal results. It was not only good in producing high overall educational outcomes, but also in

ensuring a high level of educational equality. However, Finnish society has been changing in recent decades; its increasing diversity combined with growing social and socio-spatial inequalities seems to challenge the education system in a way that segregates the everyday life of school communities, the burden experienced by staff, and the learning outcomes of pupils. The egalitarian and universal “one size fits all” approach of the education system in Finland seems to be increasingly unable to overcome the growing differences in a segregating society. This demonstrates that even a highly egalitarian, Universalist system is not shielded from the effects of societal and spatial segregation, but is rather challenged by it in a very similar dynamic as observed in many other countries.

To compensate for children’s unequal starting positions and the increasingly divergent learning condition between schools, the education system needs stronger support mechanisms that deliberately allocate more resources to schools in more socially challenging contexts. Since various factors of social and educational inequality (such as learning difficulties, multi-faceted social problems, language or other challenges exacerbating home-school cooperation) accumulate in some schools and day-care centres, it is difficult for teachers to focus on high-quality pedagogy unless there are enough skilled staff and other support measures to meet these school-specific needs. Moreover, due to the COVID-19 pandemic’s unequal repercussions on families, and, subsequently, on schools, it is likely that the polarisation between children and schools has intensified further.⁶² According to a recent government report, the most vulnerable children and young people in Finland were hit hardest by the financial and social burden of the pandemic.⁶³ On a spatial level, this means that the neighbourhoods already most fraught before the pandemic might be the ones worst affected by it as well. The current pandemic situation has therefore likely intensified the extent to which schools in these areas need additional resources.

The first evaluation of the needs-based funding scheme in Helsinki points to its favourable effects on pupils’ learning outcomes, despite some important weaknesses, such as the data availability and the financial scale of the funding. needs-based funding in Helsinki is supported by additional targeted support systems, such as the multilingual language tutors. The programme’s first evaluation illustrates that focusing solely on learning outcomes and grades when assessing educational programmes distorts the view of other positive effects. The evaluation results reveal how significant the multilingual tutors are to levelling the playing field in which schools operate, and enabling conditions in schools and early childhood education that are fundamental to preparing the foundation for pupils’ successful learning. Considering the close relationship between neighbourhood and school segregation and reputation,⁶⁴ the results illustrate the need to pay additional attention to what is happening outside schools.

Considering (middle-class) parents’ socially selective school choices that are predominantly led by concerns about the schools’ social and ethnic composition (see Bernelius and Kosunen in this book), it becomes clear that high-quality comprehensive education alone is not enough to protect urban schools from negative spirals. The choices of both families and pupils⁶⁵ contribute to a further differentiation between and within schools in the bigger cities in Finland. Consequently, they feed into a

multi-domain vicious cycle of segregation, deprivation, and inequality, in which segregation in one domain of life feeds into other domains.⁶⁶ It seems that vicious circles of segregation are only likely to grow if affected schools do not receive adequate support. Targeted resource allocation schemes to disadvantaged schools are therefore an important means to counteract this risk.

Notes

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- While using the term “disadvantage”, we are aware of the fine line between raising the necessary attention towards the challenges schools with a high proportion of students whose home background hampers their educational progress on the one hand and contributing to the reproduction of stigmatising labels on the other. However, schools are not attended by average students in terms of their readiness to learn (including emotional, physical, social, and financial dimensions). To pretend they are would incorrectly imply that some students’ lower educational outcomes are entirely a result of the schools’ failure. We therefore agree with Thrupp’s and Lupton’s (2006) argument that using completely neutral terms is rather even counterproductive. “Failing to recognise the ‘messy detail’ of school populations ... effectively screens out the need of students who are from working class, minority or indigenous group backgrounds” and makes it more likely that those schools “will be treated as deficient, failing, and not worthy of support in a system geared to the needs of ‘typical’ or ‘normal’

- students” (p. 319). Rather than taking up a deficit perspective, we thus try to pay attention to the particular challenges some schools face when referring to them as being ‘disadvantaged’.
9. Bernelius 2013, op. cit.
 10. Ibid.
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