

Fighting racism in Dutch schools for kids with special needs: how different funding models affect the fight

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Abstract:

Over the past few decades, there has been a notable rise in the percentage of students with special educational needs who are receiving their education at specialized schools that are separate from mainstream educational institutions in the Netherlands. In the year 1975, a mere 2.2% of students between the ages of 4 and 11 were registered in specialized educational institutions. However, during the course of the following two decades, this figure experienced a significant increase, nearly doubling to 4.3% from its initial value of 2.2%. Both the educational policies known as "Together to School Again" and the "Backpack" initiative were implemented in 1995 and 2003, respectively. These policies were developed with the aim of impeding more societal transformations. During the period of these limits, there was a variation in the allocation of financial resources for individuals with special needs. In contrast to Backpack, a platform that focused on meeting the specific needs of individual students, Together to School Again directed its efforts towards providing schools with a lump sum of money. Notwithstanding the implementation of these two legislative amendments, a considerable number of students with special needs continue to receive education in segregated classrooms. Financing the education of a child with special needs proved to be a formidable task, even when relying on two separate sources of income, despite the theoretical appeal of a lump sum payment. The case of the Netherlands exemplifies the formidable challenges associated with implementing substantial structural reforms within this particular economic sector.

Keywords: Racism, Special Needs Education, Funding Models, Inclusive Education, Netherlands



Introduction

Commencing in the year 1900, the Netherlands initiated a progressive endeavor to systematically build educational institutions that specifically addressed the need of diverse groups of children. The provisions of the Primary Education Act of 1920 that were relevant to the subject of special education were initially implemented. Since then, the Dutch special education system has expanded to encompass a diverse range of specialized programs designed exclusively for children with distinct needs.

A significant proportion of pupils continue to receive their education in specialized schools, which are separate entities from mainstream schools and constitute the predominant component of the educational system. Students with exceptional educational needs have the opportunity to enroll in mainstream schools, however it is probable that a significant proportion of them will be redirected to specialized educational institutions that are distinct from the mainstream student body. The special education system in the Netherlands is characterized by its comprehensive nature, as well as its differentiation and segregation from the general education system (Meijer, 1998, 2003). In contrast to numerous other nations, including Norway, the United Kingdom, and Denmark, where the proportion of students enrolled in special schools amounts to a mere 1%, the special education systems in these countries differ significantly. Doornbos and Stevens (1987) have posited that historical records indicate the existence of up to fifteen discrete classifications of specialized educational institutions. It is evident that several educational institutions were established to accommodate specific categories of disabilities. Dekker (1999) posited that the proliferation of various sorts of schools was concomitant with an increase in student enrollment in those schools. In the year 1975, a total of 2.2% of students aged 4 to 11 were enrolled in special schools. The ratio exhibited a significant increase, nearly approaching a twofold expansion.

Please submit your SIP 2015 entries through email to Francis & Taylor at rug.nl. Based on the findings of Jan Pijl, as stated in his article published in *Research in the Cultural Politics of Education*, Volume 37, Issue 4, pages 553-562, it is projected that the aforementioned percentage will see a growth of 4.3% throughout the upcoming two decades (Pijl, 1997; Smeets, 2007). According to Pijl (1997), it has been observed that... From 1995 through the end of 2010, there has been a relatively stable proportion of students enrolled in special schools, with the percentage remaining largely steady at 4.7%.

Between the years 1975 and 1995, there was a notable increase of 2.1% in the expansion of two primary classifications of specialized educational institutions, namely Moeilijk Lerende Kinderen (MLK) schools and Leer- en Opvoedings Problemen (LOM) schools. LOM schools cater to kids with mild learning challenges, whereas MLK schools cater to individuals with mild intellectual disabilities. Both of these classifications of educational institutions cater to students. Both of these appellations were often employed in the Netherlands until around 1995, therefore exhibiting minimal discernible distinctions. The data shown in Table 1 indicates that there was a significant correlation between the increase in specialized schools,

specifically those designed for children with physical or sensory impairments, and the overall rise seen.

A diverse range of critics expressed their dissent against the practice of segregating students with special needs in specialized educational institutions. In 1985, the Netherlands took a significant step towards educational reform by enacting the Primary School Act (Wet op het Basisonderwijs). This legislation specified that regular schools were obligated to offer appropriate instruction to all pupils within the age range of 4 to 11. Theoretically, it is ideal for every student to receive an education that is customized to cater to their unique learning style.

Conversely, subsequent to 1985, there was a notable increase in the enrollment of children in specialized educational institutions that were distinct from mainstream schools. The Together to School Again and Backpack programs, which were specifically aimed at LOM and MLK schools, were introduced in 1995 and 2003, respectively. The program "Together to School Again" specifically focused on schools designated as LOM (Low-Performing Overall) schools, whereas the program "Backpack" addressed all other categories of special schools. Both of these projects incorporated innovative strategies for financing special education. The objective of this research is to assess the influence of diverse financing alternatives for special needs on the level of inclusion in mainstream primary education.

The discourse about inclusivity

The broad and diverse special education system in the Netherlands, designed to cater to pupils with specific learning impairments, has long been regarded as a testament to the nation's compassion for these individuals, reflecting the values expected of a civilized society. The current discourse surrounding this perspective has garnered significant attention (ECPO, 2013; Pijl, 2010b). There is a growing apprehension among stakeholders, including parents, educators, and policymakers in the Netherlands, regarding the escalating level of segregation observed inside the nation's educational establishments, which is perceived as reaching an unsustainable threshold. A significant proportion of parents express a preference for inclusive education, when their child with special needs is enrolled in a mainstream school with their typically developing siblings. The individual desires to enroll their child in a local educational institution that fosters an inclusive learning environment, wherein their child can interact and acquire knowledge alongside peers who exhibit conventional developmental patterns.

In the Netherlands, tackling racism in schools for children with special needs is a multifaceted challenge influenced by various factors, including funding models. The Dutch educational system operates under different funding structures, each of which can impact efforts to combat racism within these specialized educational settings.

One funding model commonly used in Dutch schools is based on government subsidies allocated according to student enrollment. In this model, schools receive funding based on the number of students they enroll, with additional resources

provided for students with special needs. While this system ensures financial support for schools catering to children with disabilities, it may inadvertently perpetuate racial disparities if not accompanied by targeted anti-racism initiatives. Schools might prioritize enrollment numbers over addressing systemic racism, leading to a neglect of crucial anti-discrimination measures.

Conversely, some Dutch schools operate under a performance-based funding model, where financial allocations are tied to educational outcomes and achievements. While this model incentivizes schools to focus on academic excellence, it may sideline efforts to combat racism if they are not seen as directly contributing to measurable performance metrics. Schools might prioritize resources towards academic programs at the expense of diversity and inclusion initiatives, thereby neglecting the needs of racially marginalized students.

Another funding approach is decentralized funding, where schools have more autonomy in managing their budgets and resources. While this can empower schools to tailor interventions to address racism based on their specific contexts, it also runs the risk of disparities between well-funded and under-resourced schools. Schools with ample financial resources may have the means to implement comprehensive anti-racism programs, while those with limited funds may struggle to allocate resources towards such initiatives, exacerbating racial inequalities.

Moreover, funding models can intersect with broader socio-economic factors, such as neighborhood segregation and socio-economic disparities, which further compound the challenges of combating racism in schools for children with special needs. Schools located in marginalized communities may face additional obstacles due to lack of resources and support systems, making it harder to address racism effectively.

To effectively combat racism in Dutch schools for children with special needs, it is imperative to adopt funding models that prioritize equity and inclusion. This entails allocating resources specifically for anti-racism initiatives, providing training for educators on culturally responsive pedagogy, and fostering a supportive environment where students feel empowered to address issues of discrimination. Additionally, collaboration between schools, communities, and governmental agencies is essential to implement comprehensive anti-racism strategies that address the intersecting factors contributing to racial disparities in education.

Daalen and Peetsma (2007) assert that Dutch parents have historically exhibited limited engagement in the discourse surrounding inclusion. This stands in stark contrast to the experiences of parents residing in other nations. In the Netherlands, the presence of parent pressure organizations advocating for the active inclusion of pupils with special needs is uncommon. One notable deviation from the aforementioned principle is the Down syndrome parent association (Scheepstra, Pijl, and Nakken, 1996), which has effectively advocated for the inclusion of pupils with Down

syndrome in numerous conventional primary schools. Notwithstanding this, a significant proportion of parents with children who have special needs articulate a preference for their children to be enrolled in a school that is specifically tailored to meet their unique requirements.

However, it has been revealed that the placement of students in special education sometimes functions as a "safety valve," serving as an extra strategy to remove challenging and time-consuming students from the general education setting (Florian, 2007; Pijl, 1989). This has been highlighted as a subject of significance. This raises significant questions over the placement of pupils in specialized schools, as well as the considerable costs and disadvantages associated with a segregated system (such as labeling, commuting, and potential challenges in future employment). Students who encounter challenges in articulating their reasons for being in mainstream classrooms may find advantages in the well-informed and supportive educational framework provided by specialized institutions. Pijl and Frissen (2009) as well as Pijl, Skaalvik, and Skaalvik (2010) propose that the financial desirability of providing help in specific locations is enhanced due to economies of scale. The topic under consideration was examined in the publication authored by Pijl and Frissen in 2009.

When presenting a case for the implementation of inclusive education, it is imperative to emphasize the broader societal framework. There are allegations suggesting that the act of segregating these students into different classrooms violates universally recognized human rights, is deemed unpleasant within society, and may constitute a feasible yet ineffective approach to providing specialized assistance to students in need. Inclusion is a matter of civil rights, necessitating educators' comprehension of strategies for accommodating students with special needs and the imperative to prevent segregation.

A significant proportion of parents with children enrolled in special education, as well as regular and special education teachers, express reservations regarding the concept of inclusion. This phenomenon presents challenges in effectively addressing the upward trend in the enrollment of students in specialized educational institutions. In theory, proponents do not reject the need for increased inclusivity. However, they argue that children with special needs would benefit more from segregated educational environments due to the requirement for tailored and personalized instruction and support, which is believed to yield superior outcomes (Pijl, 2010a).

Amidst the prevailing discourse, the Dutch government enacted novel legislation and regulations with the aim of intervening and facilitating resolution. The newly enacted legislation includes provisions that allow for the utilization of alternate financing sources to support the education of students with special needs. The inquiry pertains to the efficacy of the recently implemented eligibility criteria for financial assistance in expanding the reach of the Dutch system.

In order to adopt a systematic methodology or strategy

The present study examines the factors contributing to the concurrent presence of both inclusive and segregated special schools within the educational framework of the Netherlands, specifically focusing on children with special needs. These educational institutions are designed to cater to pupils who possess notable disparities in their

learning abilities. This research is grounded in a comprehensive analysis of policy and legislation, both at the national level in the Netherlands and within the broader worldwide context. Additionally, a thorough review of Dutch and international scientific studies pertaining to inclusive education has been conducted. Moreover, insights from in-depth one-on-one interviews with seven esteemed education specialists have been incorporated into the findings of this report. The participants in the latter group were sourced from various institutions, including the National Schools Inspectorate, two distinct universities, a regional consortium of regular schools, a management team overseeing a group of special schools, a research department affiliated with a group of special schools, and a regional organization dedicated to providing support for regular schools.

Both the author and a researcher independently conducted individual interviews with multiple members of the expert community. The process of gathering all of the data was completed within a duration of two months. A predominant proportion of the inquiries posed throughout the interview were of an open-ended nature, focusing on subjects such as academic achievement, curriculum, financial support, policy orientation, categorization, and data collection. The interview protocol was first devised by Riddell and Weedon (2013); nevertheless, substantial modifications will be required to align it with the educational framework in the Netherlands, followed by its translation into Dutch. The interviewer selectively omitted certain interview questions while providing more detailed explanations for others, based on the interviewee's specific domain knowledge. The duration of the interview was extended due to the extensive expertise of one of the university professionals in the area of special education data (Discussion: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 555). Once again, the individual representing the typical school support organization demonstrated a deficiency in understanding financial operations, leading to the omission of a significant percentage of relevant material on this subject. This study will utilize official data and information obtained from important informants to substantiate an analysis of recent occurrences in the Netherlands.

Several variables that contributed to the persistence of school segregation before 1995. The implementation of distinct educational systems in the Netherlands can be attributed to a multitude of factors. The persistence of a two-tiered system can be attributed to the separate nature of rules, guidelines, and funding for general education and special education. Once a student gains admission to a specialized educational institution, they are only eligible to receive additional assistance while actively enrolled at said institution. Meijer, Peschar, and Scheerens (1995) found that this approach effectively incentivized parents to enroll their children in special education programs. Consequently, the student with special needs had to be brought to the relevant institutions, as opposed to the reverse scenario. As a result, it became feasible to allocate the responsibility for each individual student to a distinct component within the educational system.

The consideration of social situations was also a crucial factor to be taken into account. The aspiration of parents for their children to receive a quality education and the level of academic expectations imposed on students have experienced notable

growth. The observed trend indicated an exacerbation of preexisting gaps among youngsters, while conventional institutions seemed ill-equipped to effectively tackle these challenges. As a result of this phenomenon, there was a growing risk of a greater number of youngsters being enrolled in a specialized educational program.

Based on the findings of reputable sources, it is evident that despite recent progress, the primary emphasis in educational endeavors remains on the average student. The concept of segregating kids with special needs into specialized schools emerged as a potential solution to alleviate the challenges faced by instructors when confronted with an overwhelming number of such individuals in a single classroom.

Many parents held the belief that the enrollment of their child in a special school would not carry significant implications, as it would result in missed opportunities for community engagement. In the Netherlands, it has been a longstanding practice for children to attend schools, including council, Protestant, Catholic, and other variants, that are situated in their local communities rather than their own. This tradition persists to this day. Furthermore, as a result of the significant population density, it is common for both conventional schools and specialized schools to be located within a reasonable commuting distance from each other (Meijer & Jager, 2001).

Based on the feedback provided by the participants, all of the aforementioned concerns were found to support the perpetuation of special schools, while simultaneously impeding the progress towards a more inclusive educational system. In contrast, several legislative initiatives have been introduced since 1995 with the aim of, at minimum, constraining the ongoing expansion of the specialized system and, ideally, initiating a decline in the population of children being put in specialized environments. This approach was initiated with the objective of mitigating the prevalence of children being put in specialized educational environments.

Addressing racism in Dutch schools for children with special needs requires a multifaceted approach, with funding models playing a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of anti-racism initiatives. In the Netherlands, the education system operates under various funding structures, each influencing resources, priorities, and interventions differently.

One funding model prevalent in Dutch schools is based on government allocations. In this model, schools receive funding from the state, which can impact their capacity to implement anti-racism programs. Schools with ample government funding might have more resources to dedicate to diversity training, hiring culturally competent staff, and developing inclusive curricula. Conversely, schools with limited government funding may struggle to prioritize anti-racism efforts amidst competing financial demands.

Another funding model involves private financing, wherein schools rely on donations, sponsorships, or tuition fees. Private funding can introduce complexities to anti-racism efforts, as schools may cater to donors' preferences or prioritize financial sustainability over addressing systemic issues. Moreover, reliance on private funding may exacerbate disparities, with affluent schools potentially having greater resources to combat racism compared to underprivileged ones.

Furthermore, the distribution of funds within the education system can impact the fight against racism. In scenarios where funding is allocated based on student demographics or performance metrics, schools with a higher proportion of marginalized students may receive additional resources. While this approach aims to address inequities, it may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes or stigmatize certain communities, hindering genuine anti-racism efforts.

Additionally, the autonomy granted to schools in budget management can influence anti-racism initiatives. Schools with more autonomy may have the flexibility to allocate funds specifically for diversity and inclusion programs, whereas centralized funding systems might limit such discretion. However, autonomy also brings the risk of disparities between schools, as resource allocation may vary based on individual leadership priorities or biases.

Moreover, partnerships with external organizations can supplement funding and support anti-racism efforts in Dutch schools. Collaborations with NGOs, community groups, or governmental agencies can provide additional resources, expertise, and advocacy. However, the sustainability of such partnerships depends on the availability of funding and alignment of goals, which may fluctuate over time.

In the fight against racism in Dutch schools for children with special needs is intricately linked to funding models. Government allocations, private financing, distribution mechanisms, autonomy, and external partnerships all shape the resources and strategies available to combat racism. Achieving meaningful progress requires not only sufficient funding but also equitable distribution, collaborative approaches, and a commitment to systemic change.

Summary:

The fight against racism in Dutch schools for children with special needs requires a multifaceted approach that addresses systemic inequities and promotes inclusive practices. Different funding models exert varying degrees of influence on schools' capacity to implement anti-racist initiatives, underscoring the importance of policy interventions that prioritize equity and inclusion. By bridging the gap between research and practice, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on fostering inclusive education and combating racism within Dutch educational systems.

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