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FROM A BLACK TO A MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL: HOW TO MOVE TO A SYSTEM STRATEGY?

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This article discusses the strategy change process of a school in the Flemish part of Belgium with almost exclusively Moroccan or Turkish immigrant children. Due to a desegregation policy, the so-called black schools¹ are confronted with an imposed strategic change by the educational authorities. In order to survive, they need to redefine their strategy in such a way that they will attract not only minority but also Flemish children.

The purpose of the study is to identify and understand the type of strategy and actions that enables the emergence a multicultural school. The findings are the result of an action-research conducted in a black school from October 1995 until now. As theoretical background, we rely on strategic management and desegregation literature. We first discuss different types of strategies and ways of to desegregate by relating them to the conceptual framework of content, process and context (Pettigrew, 1990). Based upon these insights, we suggest a system strategy in which content, process and context are intertwined. Second, we present the case study and discuss the different interventions oriented towards establishing such a system strategy. Our interventions were focused on the design of an educational concept and the involvement of different stakeholders in order to take a holistic and system approach. We conclude by interpreting the interventions in terms of their degree of desegregation and integrativeness at content, process as well as context level.

Theoretical Background

Conducting theoretically sound and practically useful research on change means exploring content, process and context together with their interconnections

¹ A black school is a school with a high proportion of immigrant children, descendents of Moroccan and Turkish guest laborers.

through time (Pettigrew, 1990; 1992). The content of a change refers to the particular areas of transformation under examination. The process of change refers to the actions, reactions, and interactions from the various parties. Context includes both the outer context including the economic, social, political, and sectoral environment, and the inner context referring to features of the structural, cultural and political environment through which ideas for change proceed (Pettigrew, 1990). We use this framework to discuss the different types of strategies and ways of desegregation as found in strategic management literature and educational policy.

Types of Strategies: From Rational Planning to System Strategy

Strategic management literature has traditionally focused on the content of strategy formulation assuming that the process is deliberate. A process perspective on the other hand has been emphasizing the emergent properties of a strategy formation. Finally, emphasis on the context has moved the attention towards a system type of strategy.

Rational Planning. Traditionally, one has drawn a distinction between strategy content and the organizational processes by which such strategy content was determined. This distinction was characterized by the difference between strategy formulation and strategy implementation (Schendel, 1992). The actual formulation of the content of strategy or the competitive advantage is the dominant theme within the 'classical' approach on strategy. In this approach, one has stressed that competitive advantage as supreme goal of the organization can only be achieved by rational, top-down planning. So, the classical perspective has paid the most attention to the formulation of strategies in a deliberate way: coming from a conscious, rationalistic

decision-making process, fully expressed, made explicit and articulated, with a separation of strategy formulation from its implementation.

Emergent Strategies. Some scholars like Mintzberg and Waters (1985) have argued that it is unlikely to find any perfectly deliberate strategies in practice and have shifted the attention towards the emergent properties of strategy or the process side. Whereas deliberate strategy is characterized by rational planning, direction and control - getting desired things done - a strategy can also be characterized by more or less emergent properties. Strategies can be partly deliberate and partly emergent, because leadership controls process aspects of strategy, leaving content aspects to other actors: these strategies originate in process (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

Strategies are even more emergent when actors in the organization converge on the same theme without the need for any central direction or control. It grows out of the mutual adjustment among different actors, as they learn from each other and from their various responses to the environment and thereby find a common pattern that works for them. The convergence is not driven by the intentions of a central management but just evolves through the results of a host of individual actions (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Therefore, strategy emerges in action, strategy formulation and implementation inextricably allied in a continuous process of mutual adjustment (Whittington, 1993).

While these emergent strategies acknowledge the artificial dichotomy between content and process of the strategy, they seem to ignore the context in which the design of the strategy takes place. The type of strategy that takes into account not only process alongside content but also recognizes context is the system strategy (Whittington, 1993).

System Strategy. To involve context in strategy formulation calls for a more 'holistic' approach that transcends the content-process frame of reference. What Whittington (1993) labels the 'systemic' perspective is a view on strategy that actively brings in context by emphasizing how strategic goals and processes are shaped by the social systems in which they are embedded; by factors such as national culture, ethnicity, religion and gender. The processes of strategy formation reflect not just organizational micro-politics but the institutional interests of broader society and the rationalities of the locally dominant social groups.

We take this systemic view on strategy formation but stress that content and process are not only shaped by the context in which they are embedded but that context is enacted by multiple groups of people. Following Weick (1969), environments do not determine because they are the creations of the actors themselves. Or as Weick (1969) stated: 'Rather than talking about adapting to an external environment, it may be more correct to argue that organizing consists of adapting to an enacted environment, an environment which is *constituted* by the actions of interdependent human actors.' We consider the various stakeholders (suppliers, competitors, market, local and national community) as creating the system of an organization, and move towards an appreciation of systemic interdependence (Morgan, 1986).

Ways to Desegregate: From Compulsory to Voluntary Desegregation

Schools do not only teach youngsters knowledge, they also socialize them according the values of their society. This means that not only parents are involved in education but also government since they shape the educational systems according to their principles and believes. Modern education systems are generally based on two

principles: equality and freedom. Equality stands for equal opportunities to receive good education. Freedom of education means that every parent is allowed to raise his/her children in a way he or she prefers. Public authority has operationalised these two principles in different ways. For instance, the American, Italian and French authorities consider public schools to be neutral and issues like religion the responsibility of parents. In these systems, there are often private schools that do not depend on public funding. Another way of operationalizing these principles is found in Belgium or the Netherlands where public authority subsidizes any school that meets certain quality standards. These schools can be based on religion (catholic schools, jewish schools) or method (Steiner, Freinet, Montessori). For different, mostly historical reasons public authorities have emphasized more equality than freedom of education or vice versa, reflecting the basic principles and needs of society.

While education is one of the means to enhance qualification, economic and social participation in society, it is also the reflection of society and bears in itself the inconsequences and inequalities of society. In most modern multicultural societies, schools have been and still are segregating minority children from the indigenous white children by assigning them to separate schools and refusing access to other schools. Racial or ethnic segregation nevertheless is a clear violation of the principle of equal treatment. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that segregation is disadvantageous for minority children in terms of educational achievement and social participation (Fase, 1994; Glenn & de Jong 1996). Research on racial desegregation on the other hand has found important long terms gains for pupils academically as well as socially (de Jong, 1996). For all those reasons, ethnic or racial segregation is generally considered as discriminatory. However, unofficial or de facto segregation continues and reflects a sociological reality (Glenn & de Jong, 1996). At this point it

is necessary to make a distinction between voluntary and involuntary segregation. Minority, mostly recently immigrated groups sometimes prefer segregated education. Most of them chose over time to integrate in the mainstream educational provisions, sometimes with additional support for home language and culture (Glenn & de Jong, 1996; Fase, 1994). Unvoluntary segregation, on the other hand, is caused by two factors: residential segregation of minorities and white flight by the majority. Residential segregation is the consequence of price differences on the housing-market. But segregation is almost always higher in schools than in the neighbourhoods they are situated (Tesser et al., 1995). This difference is the consequence of white children being withdrawn from schools when a certain percentage of minority children is enrolled in these schools. Research shows that highly educated parents often withdraw their children for fear of quality-loss (Tesser et al., 1995). White flight is considered a direct cause, whereas residential segregation is only an indirect cause. White flight is also an social cause, residential segregation is a logistic cause.

In moving towards desegregation, one can distinguish between two types of oppositional choices. The first type concerns the character of desegregation: compulsory versus voluntary. Compulsory desegregation inevitably has a coercive character and must therefore be sustained by legal provisions. It occurs in countries where discrimination has a legal character as in the United States or more recently South-Africa. In this case, the principle of equality is stressed more than that of freedom of choice. When freedom of choice is put on the foreplan, desegregation can only be voluntary. Parents are free to send there children to their school of choice. Inevitably the stress is put on equal access to all schools rather than spreading pupils over schools. The second oppositional choice relates to the educational system: do schools compete for students or not. Competitive schools form a school market

system in which schools try to differentiate from each other in terms of curriculum and achievement. Non-competitive schools work from a common (core) curriculum and stress much more equal treatment, equal opportunity and the principle of non-discrimination among pupils. These two choices lead us to four different ways of desegregation (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Bussing. A first desegregation way is compulsory desegregation towards non-competitive schools. This top-down, authoritative approach designs pupils to schools in order to obtain a racial or ethnic population mix. This desegregation way occurred in the U.S. by court orders and ‘bussing’ pupils to schools that were racially or ethnically not correctly mixed. Here, it is the context of the school that determines the actions undertaken to desegregate. However, this approach resulted in a strong white flight from parents moving to other districts, hereby forming ethnically and socially homogeneous districts. This evolution forced the educational authorities to enable more differentiation between schools in the same district (i.e. the so-called charter schools in the U.S.).

Controlled choice. Differentiation between schools combined with compulsory desegregation brings us to a second way of desegregation. The context is not any more the sole determinant factor since schools stress their content and differentiate themselves from other schools in order to influence parental school choice. However, parental choice remains limited to expressing a preference for a number of schools, eventually in a certain order. Assignment is done by the

educational authorities in function of the ethnic mix of the school population. This approach is called 'controlled choice'.

Neighborhood schools. A third way to desegregate occurs when non-competitive schools are confronted with a voluntary desegregation. Schools are not assigned but chosen by parents within the limits of the district. Besides context, the main emphasis of the change is on the process. Since schools offer the same curriculum, the content is no reason for school change. The only way to differentiate themselves from others is based on the process-side. Parental choice forces schools to take into account the parents' point of view and urges teachers to pay more attention to the way the program is implemented. This approach is called the neighborhood approach. School composition is thought of as reflecting the existing and established neighborhoods. Dependent on the social and ethnic composition of the neighborhoods, this approach only leads to a marginal desegregation. It is the most neutral and causes the least reaction from parents and neighborhoods.

Magnet schools. A fourth way to desegregate combines competitive schools with parental choice. Here context (ethnic composition), process (school choice), and content (differentiation) meet. Parents are completely free to choose a school and schools can differentiate from each other. Research shows that parents choose mostly in terms of quality, next to distance and a safe route to school and value orientation (Tesser et al., 1995). As quality is difficult to define, parents often choose a school in terms of the social or ethnic composition of the school. This often leads to segregation. Schools that want to desegregate will try to attract pupils by offering parents a clear choice in terms of alternatives on curriculum, school organisation and instruction methods. These schools are called magnet schools.

Conclusion

Strategies to become a multicultural school can take different forms. Given the educational system in Belgium of having competitive schools combined with parental choice, the most optimal way to desegregate seems to become a magnet school. Such a way of desegregating means schools differentiating themselves on content by offering a different educational concept, managing the process of education by interacting with other parties especially parents, and influencing the context by identifying their recruitment area beyond their immediate socially and ethnically stratified neighborhood. In terms of a strategy, this implies a system approach in which content, process and context are intertwined. This framework guided the action research. Before intervening towards this holistic way of strategy formation, our first step was to identify the initial school strategy.

The Strategy of A Black School: Emergent and Ego-centric

In order to understand the societal context of black schools, we briefly present the situation of the black schools in the Flemish educational system and actions taking by the government to facilitate integration of minority children. We then describe the black school in this study followed by our first intervention oriented towards discovering its initial strategy.

Black Schools in The Flemish Educational System

Since the end of the Second World War, Belgium has been a country of immigration of people from Southern Europe, Turkey, Morocco, former African Belgian colonies, central and eastern Europe. Of the ten million inhabitants, one million do not have the Belgian nationality. In Flanders, the Dutch speaking region of

Belgium, 10% of pupils in the Flemish education system are of non-Flemish origin. The majority of these non-Flemish pupils are concentrated in the urban areas, with different immigrant communities being concentrated within specific areas of the cities. The local schools in such areas reflect a higher proportion of non-Flemish pupils. This is a demographic factor which has led to segregation of schools: approximately 100 schools out of 2,400 in Flanders consists of 80% of non-Flemish pupils. Within the entire primary school sector 50% of non-Flemish pupils are educationally retarded. On average, they are 4 to 5 times more likely to stay down a class than their Flemish peers. Another reason behind the concentration of non-Flemish children in some black schools is the removal of Flemish children to schools which are entirely of predominantly Flemish ('white flight'). Flemish parents, exercising the freedom of school choice, prefer schools where the issue of the educational under-achievement of non-Flemish children has not become apparent. Since educational qualification plays a very important role in the Flemish society, the integration of non-Flemish pupils into the education system is seen as a necessary condition towards the integration of minorities in the local communities and the wider society. In May 1991, the Flemish Government decided to increase the educational facilities to schools with at least 10% migrant pupils in order to reduce the educational handicap and to advance integration. Within this educational priority policy (EPP), black schools can apply for additional teaching periods and support from a special educational advisor. In order to receive this support, they need to describe their specific actions oriented towards intercultural and language education, prevention and solution of learning difficulties in cooperation with educational guidance centre (EGC), school community work (the obligation for the school to collaborate with a social welfare centre) together with the local migrant organization. The result was a

more adapted and professional approach of schools and a shift from black schools to schools with more moderate percentages of minority children. However, the situation of black schools remained the same, as it was confronted with a loss of its best pupils.

In 1993, the Flemish minister of education together with the educational associations declared a non-discrimination policy in order to further facilitate the integration of the minority children in the Flemish society. The two objectives of the policy are: a more conscious attitude with respect to discrimination in schools, and the realisation of an admission policy as a way to establish a proportional presence of migrant pupils in all schools of a community. The implementation of the Non-discrimination Charter is a matter for the local community. A local agreement is worked out in negotiation among the organizing authorities of the schools to implement the admission policy. Furthermore, in order to stimulate this policy, the government offers additional resources to those black schools that are able to redefine their strategy according to the non-discrimination policy. If schools want to apply for these resources, they need to design an action plan in which they specify their concrete actions in order to realise the set goal of having more than 50% Flemish pupils over the next 5 years. Since all other types of funds and resources are shrinking for the migrant schools (due to a decrease in the number of pupils), they are forced to apply for these extra resources.

In order to assist black schools, the Flemish government has been investing in research on reformulating strategies for black schools. This study is the result of an action research done in a black school over a period from October 1995 until now.

Black School

The black school in our study is a Belgian catholic school, offering pre-school and primary school education, located in a city near Brussels. Immigration in this city grew in the seventies with as a consequence a growing segregation of schools. At the same time, some white schools were faced with decreasing pupil enrollments due to a decline in pupil population. This was the case for the school in this study who under threat of closure welcomed non-Flemish children in order to stay open. In October 1995, the school has about 70 pupils between 3 and 6 (early childhood education) and about 100 between 6 and 12 years old (primary education), the latter being 100% of non-Flemish origin. Their parents are all first wave immigrants, mainly from Morocco and Turkey, like most of the families in the school's neighborhood.

As part of the negotiated local agreement in this city, all schools are required to have a specific percentage of non-Flemish children. The city adopts the basic principle that school population should reflect the demographic spread in the existing and established community. So, the implementation of the Non-discrimination Charter through the local agreement follows the neighborhood approach as a way to desegregate. However, the speed of implementation of these requirements depends on the parents themselves. The establishment of not only a lower but also an upper limit of about 30% for the entrance of minority children, is a way to meet the concerns of indigenous parents, reassuring them that the 'white' schools will stay sufficiently 'white' so that their children will not end up in a black school. As far as encouraging non-Flemish pupils to predominantly Flemish schools, this approach in the city has worked. Not only Flemish parents take their children away from black schools ('white' flight), also non-Flemish parents look for schools with a majority of Flemish pupils because they too believe that these schools have a better status and apply higher

standards towards quality of education ('black' flight). However, schools with high concentrations of non-Flemish pupils are failing to attract Flemish pupils.

During our first contact with the school, the principal emphasized that the Non-discrimination Charter and the implementation through the local agreement has led to a feeling of powerlessness across the whole school. She herself and the teachers had no idea how to realize the goal of the charter and furthermore they didn't understand why they needed to redefine their strategy. The charter was a slap in the face, a sign of disrespect by the government. During the last years, the black schools were the only schools willing to educate minority children and they had developed their own competences to deal with the specific learning needs of those children . After years of taking care, the school felt being punished as the government had denied them reason for existence. The Non-discrimination Charter was further criticized by the fact that the implementation focused in particular on the change of black schools and less on the admittance policy of the 'white' schools. The latter ones had in the past systematically denied the access of minority children into their school in order to sustain their image and prestige of an elite and high quality school. Those who did accept a small number of minority children seemed not to be able to deal successfully with the specific learning needs of the minority children. As a consequence - so they stated -, most minority children dropped out of these schools, returning back to the black schools or to a special school for children with learning disabilities. Besides this feeling of disrespect and punishment, the school felt powerlessness because of the nature of the local neighborhood. They stated that the number of Flemish children in the immediate school environment is so limited that the school sees no possibility to attract more than 50% Flemish children. The school principal stated this feeling of powerlessness as follows:

“After years of trying to do the best as possible for our children, our survival is endangered. We experience a ‘loss feeling’. Our main concern is: will the children be better off somewhere else? Moreover, the nature of the local community and the ‘white flight’ of Belgian children to schools in the suburbs are factors that will make it very hard for us to attract Belgian pupils.”

This experience of loss, accuse and threat from the environment was an obstacle for the school’s capacity to create a new vision and strategic plan for the future. The school seemed to be trapped in a spiral of defensive reactions and feelings of powerlessness which inhibited any move into concrete action. At that moment, we defined our task as breaking the school out of their current frame and generating positive energy to design a new strategy. A first step in our intervention was to create a self-description of the school in order to increase the school’s awareness of their own competences.

Self-Description of the Black School

The self-description of the school was generated from the perspectives of both internal and external stakeholders. The internal perspective is based upon one day of observation in the school, interviews with the principal and organising authorities, and a group interview with the 15 teachers. The external perspective is based upon interviews with the EPP-advisor, P.M.S. centre (a local independent institution which provides assistance to pupils and parents in the form of identifying, preventing and endeavoring to resolve education problems), the immigrants association aiming for the integration of immigrants in the local community and the multicultural coordinator of the city.

The school team itself described themselves as a strong supportive and creative team. The teachers together with the principal form a highly cohesive group.

Communication is open and informal. They support each other when there is a problem in a particular classroom and they jointly search for solutions. The school team also describes itself as being flexible and innovative with respect to their didactic approaches. Required handbooks are transformed and adapted to the level and interests of the minority pupil. They experiment on a continuous basis with self-developed didactic methods and they constantly exchange their experiences with each other. In their educational approach, they emphasize experiential-based learning, visual expression, creativity, sports and music.

This self-description of being a supportive and innovative team is seen as two necessary conditions for the realization of the school's goal. The school team formulates her strategy in function of the minority children:

“ Our task is to take care of children that didn't choose themselves to live in this society by giving them adjusted education that consists of didactic (cognitive knowledge) as well as pedagogic (behavioral rules, hygiene, discipline, regularity) elements.”

“The school has to adjust herself to the children, not the other way around.”

Translating this internal self-description to the strategic orientation of the school, the content of the school's strategy is focused on the minority children, their own specific needs, interests, and abilities. The process of strategy is one of discovery or recognition in action. Formulation and implementation is being entangled in a continuous, formative, adaptive process. The school's strategy, ways in which they give education adjusted to the minority children by experimentation and building of specific competences, emerges in small steps at the bottom of the organization in an unstructured manner. It grows out of mutual adjustment among teachers and principal, as they learn from each other and thereby find a common pattern that works for them (Mintzberg, 1985). So, the process of this strategic decision-making is not encapsulated in some 'grand plan', but is entrenched in school team's 'causal maps',

'routines' and 'standard operating procedures' that emerge as a result of compromise shaped by prevailing organizational culture. This processualist perspective (Whittington, 1993) on strategy formulation is recognized as a way people try to simplify and order a world too complex and chaotic for them to understand, not as a driving force cascading down the organization. Their surrounding context is like a threat to which they have to defend themselves. Because they experience this complexity of different stakeholders' interests in the organization (educational counselors, neighborhood, immigrants association, local community, other schools in town, government...) and feel not able to respond to this environment in a proactive way, they have an inward reflex towards the process of developing distinctive competencies that are necessary to give adjusted education to a homogeneous group of children. The way in which they present themselves to the local community doesn't reflect any big message or long-term strategic plan either. The metaphor and the image they use in the local paper to represent their school is one of "We're keeping it cool" (see Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

On the other hand, the perception of the school by the external stakeholders revealed a different description of the school's goal orientation, the supportive climate and the school team's innovativeness. While the school team formulates her strategy as taking care of migrant pupils and offering them adjusted education so that nobody drops out of the educational system, the external parties state that:

"The school operates according to a colonial model, with a patronizing attitude and a directive style applying strict rules. Their expectations of the minority children are systematically low."

The strong support of being a close team, supported by a democratic leadership of the principal, is perceived by the outside parties as:

“a closed community with a very particular climate and a dominant autocratic leadership. There is not an open regime in the schools. Teachers implicitly obey to the principal and are not allowed to give their own view. In fact, she indoctrinates the school team, having it firmly in her grasp.”

The development of the school’s own expertise concerning didactic and pedagogic issues, is seen as:

“The building of an impermeable shield around the school.”

“As external advisor you don’t feel accepted when trying to give your advice and contribution. The school is very skeptical about all types of external advice as they fear loss of ground.”

“The teachers and the principal don’t put their own identity into question and are looking only for partners that confirm their way of working.”

From this, we see evidence to conclude that their practices typologize the school as an ‘egocentric organization’ (Morgan, 1986) that overemphasizes the importance of herself, distorting the understanding of the wider context in which she operates. In the following figure, we diagram a contextual analysis as an alternative way of representing the school, by revealing the pattern of relations that create and sustain her self-identity in an egocentric way.

Insert Figure 3 about here

We see that many of the links are deviation-amplifying. For example, the implementation of the Non-discrimination Charter is focused on the single organization i.e. a black school, by which the school team becomes even more occupys with itself (1). They are afraid to lose pupils not being able to attract Flemish pupils. They stick to their actual strategy of taking care of minority children

and looking for partners who confirm it. They are convinced that the behavior of minority children is different from other children, which makes the school different from other schools and strengthens her self-identity (2). The role of the school in the community is also confirmed through the implementation of the local city agreement which has set targets of specific % of non-Flemish pupils in all schools in order to reflect the demographic spread within the city. This has encouraged non-Flemish pupils to go to predominantly Flemish schools ('black flight'). However, failures of black schools to attract Flemish pupils has led to the assumption that such schools, like the school our study, cannot be desegregated. This assumption is further confirmed by the experience of lack of mobility (4) (people prefer to send their children to the nearest school) and the concentration of the majority of immigrants in the city center. Until the provision of housing (5) ensures a greater demographic mix within the city, it would appear that the high concentration of non-Flemish pupils will be accepted. The school uses these factors as an excuse to stay the way she is. Furthermore, the negotiations among organizing authorities of the different schools do not encourage the school to attract Flemish pupils. Organizing authorities of other schools seem to defend their own interests: as long as minority children are welcome in the only school in town with 100% non-Flemish pupils, they will not come to their own schools (6) which means that these schools do not risk to lose quality and status in the eyes of the Flemish parents. The last illustration of the loops of mutual causality that sustain the identity of the school, comes from the perception of various stakeholders that are giving advice and support (Educational Priority Policy, P.M.S. Center, Immigrants Association, University). For example the counselor in EPP (7) tries to make the school aware of other identities by giving examples of other school

systems he has experiences with. The school, however, rejects his advice and shows defensive reactions, which makes the awareness of her identity even more strong.

Because of this distorted understanding of the school's functioning in her wider context, she cannot be proactive in a *systemic* sense. In enacting and dealing with the environment in a egocentric way, they do not understand their own complexity and the numerous recursive loops on which they depend for their very existence. This requires that the school acquires a new way of thinking about the circular system of relations to which they belong and the mechanisms of positive and negative feedback that shape the dynamics of the system (Maruyama,1963). The school's strategic management calls for an understanding and shaping of this context.

Towards a System Strategy

In our next interventions, we tried to move the school from her emergent and egocentric functioning towards a system strategy in which the school is more able to shape content, process and context in a way that would facilitate desegregation. Central in our interventions was the focus on the design of a high quality educational concept as well as the involvement of different stakeholders. More specific, our interventions were directed towards 1) increasing the school's awareness of their own competences, 2) creating new options by taking the school outside their own system, and 3) designing and implementing the new educational concept together with different stakeholders.

Awareness of Own Competences

In a meeting with the school principal, teachers, organizing authorities and one of the educational counselors (an external stakeholder), we confronted the school with

the description by the external stakeholders. Initially, they showed no surprise by the statements of the external parties:

“What we hear now is something we’ve been knowing for a long time!”

Then they started to defend themselves towards us and the external party who was present. They told us stories about the behaviors of the minority children, how they are different from Belgian children, and how therefore their school needs to be different from other schools. Their reactions showed the fixed notion they had of who they are and their determination to sustain and even impose that identity on others:

“An example of our uniqueness is that we have the time and space to offer ‘pleasant’ activities like birthday parties, a lot of sports and recreation activities. Because the children don’t have the capacities to follow the imposed teaching plans, we limit ourselves to the basic subjects. In other schools, there is a lot of pressure due to the teaching program so they have no time for the more ‘agreeable’ side of school life.

Also our teachers are special. Because the children permanently need structuration, you always have to pay attention, you can never be relaxed and you’re always pushed to the limit. If you would employ in our school someone from another, say Flemish school, he or she wouldn’t stay for more than a week.”

Our reactions were one of recognition of their concerns towards the minority children and appreciation of their developed competences in order to address the specific children’s needs and interests. We pointed also towards the recognition of their educational skills as expressed by the external stakeholders. We then tried to bring the discussion to another level of communication and started to talk about the philosophy of the Non-discrimination Charter instead of the concrete implementation goals of attracting Flemish children. The philosophy of the Non-discrimination Charter is oriented towards the integration of the minority children into the Flemish society by offering them the opportunity to receive high quality education in a mixed cultural group. We further emphasized that this goal of integration can not be

achieved by one single organization e.g. the strategic change of a black school, but only by the collaboration of all parties involved. We acknowledged that integration of minorities into the Flemish society is not only the responsibility of the black schools since their success will also depend on the actions of other white schools, the educational counselors, Flemish and minority parents, the city's policy, etc. However, we stressed the role the school could play in achieving this goal and realistically needed to play in order to ensure its survival. We emphasized that their knowledge about the black children and their developed educational approaches were major skills and assets as starting ground for a new strategy.

In summary, we stressed the underlying philosophy of the Non-discrimination Charter by pointing towards the necessity of offering high quality education for both Flemish and minority children and the need to recognize their interdependence with and collaboration with the other parties that belong to the wider system. At the end of the meeting, the school team asked for some time to rethink this all over and expressed their uncertainty of what this new strategy in terms of facilitating integrating by high quality education might look like. Therefore, our next intervention step was to help them to explore examples of schools which tried to realize such a strategy together with the necessary conditions.

Identifying a New Strategy by Exploring Other Systems

In order to break through the self-centeredness of the school and to offer them other options, we looked for examples of schools that were more or less successful in attracting a mixed group of children by formulating a strategy based upon a educational/pedagogical concept. We told them the 'success story' of a previous

black school and gave the school team the assignment to visit other previous black schools that were reformulating and redesigning their strategy.

During the next meeting with the school principal, all teachers, the organizing authorities, and the educational counselor, we presented the story and insights of our visit to a previous black school and our interview with the school principal. In this success story, two conditions seemed to be necessary. The school had designed a new pedagogic concept. This pedagogical plan was further created through participation of different parties (local community, parents, ...).

The example of this school was different from the situation of our school but sufficiently related so the school team could start to see an other way of working. After our story, they became enthusiastic and wanted to visit other examples themselves. We sent them out to other schools together with interview questions focused on two major topics e.g. the nature and development of the pedagogic concept, and the involvement of other external parties into the school. The purpose of this 'data generation' was to help the school to rethink their own strategy by coming into contact with another system.

The goal of the following meeting was to identify a new pedagogical concept based upon their experiences in the other schools but linked to their own educational competences. As preparation for the meeting, we asked the teachers to report on the school they had visited as well as to select those elements that may be of interests for a new strategy. During the meeting, the elements of interests were written down on papers and hung to the walls. The conversation became chaotic and energetic bringing the discussion not only about 'what was happening in the other schools' but also started to envision 'what might be possible for our school in the future'. At the end of the meeting, we gave them the task to create a blueprint of a new pedagogic

plan based upon the best of what they had found in the other schools linked to the strengths and possibilities of their own system.

The result was a pedagogical concept oriented towards experiential based learning with five pillars which are religious and multicultural, quality, , creativity and music, sports and project work. For instance, the religious and multicultural pillar implies that in catechism and through various projects in other lessons, teachers want to build respect for different cultures and their religions. Or the last pillar focuses on doing project work on a theme that is identified by the children and worked on in different classes for a whole semester.

Designing and Implementing the New Strategy by Involving External Stakeholders

After the identification of the pedagogical blue-print, our intervention was focused on involving external stakeholders into the further design and implementation. In order to organize the work, three teams of teachers were formed with the following responsibilities e.g. 1) working out of the new pedagogic plan, 2) the creation of a broad platform with different stakeholders, and 3) the search for financial resources. We emphasized that our goal was to create a new school identity based upon high quality of education with the involvement of external stakeholders rather than attracting Flemish children. Framing the latter as an objective would be perceived by the school team as not being realistic

The pedagogical team worked further on the implementation of the blue-print. Together with the whole school team, they created a new metaphor in order to express its pedagogical concept. The school team chooses 'the air balloon' as new name and logo with the balloon referring to their pedagogical philosophy e.g. looking for experiences to learn from, and the sandbags being the different external parties that

must help the balloon to stay in the air and see the world from different perspectives. They also paid attention to the integration and congruence with other actions, taken within the framework of the educational priority policy. For example, the obligation for the school to collaborate with a social welfare centre to improve relations between neighborhood, parents and pupils (school community work) fits in the objective of developing a network of different stakeholders around the school.

The team on external networking has been focusing its efforts on engaging Flemish organizations into the realization of pedagogical projects, and on establishing collaborative initiatives with the local neighborhood committee and other schools outside their immediate environment. For example, the local theater school and liberal arts school are willing to cooperate in educational projects on creativity. The local neighborhood committee has asked the school to take care of the Christmas decoration for the local community. The school has also set up a collaborative agreement with a centre for orphaned children, mainly of Eastern European origin.

The financial team has been organizing initiatives to collect following the same philosophy of establishing contacts with Flemish external parties. In contrast to previous initiatives that were focused on the minority community in the neighborhood, the school now tries to organize initiatives that are linked to Flemish events or associations.

The school has been working like that since March 1996. Every two to three months, we have coordination meetings consisting of members of the three different teams, the school principal, the organizing authorities, and the educational counselor. In September 1996, the government administration approved the school's action plan and received additional teaching resources. This school year of 1996-1997 is seen as a transition year during which teachers can implement the pedagogical concepts in the

classroom and one can work further on establishing collaborative contacts in the local community. In April 1997, the school will present its new pedagogical identity to the local community. Folders are created and a press conference is being organized. The impact of all this is still an open question. But even if the outcome in terms of attracting Flemish children will be limited, the school's capability to engage in a dialogue with external parties has definitely grown.

Discussion and Conclusion

During this action research in a black school, our interventions were oriented towards becoming a magnet school as a way to desegregate. The school's initial strategy however indicated a strong egocentric organization with a distorted understanding of her wider context. Through an emergent strategy of developing distinctive and specialized competences, the black school had identified her goal as taking care of the minority children. This self-description together with the distorted relations with external stakeholders has put the black school in a strong segregation mode, making desegregation a mission impossible. The first step was therefore to de-block the relationship with the wider context by confronting the school with a description given by the external stakeholders. After making the school aware of the consequences of their segregated approach, our next interventions were oriented towards the content and process side of strategy formation towards a magnet school. While the school had developed specific competences to educate minority children, they needed to reformulate their educational curriculum in order to differentiate and attract a heterogeneous population. Working on this reformulation could take place by taking the school outside her own system and showing examples of other black schools on their way to a magnet school. Besides the strategy content, the school is

also working on the process side. Since parents have a free choice in sending their children to school, the school also needs to work on their relationship with external parties who are parents and possible clients. In creating a network of different stakeholders, the schools starts to work on relations with Flemish organizations and the neighborhood committee.

At this moment, the results of this action research have been reframing, confidence building, reformulation of the educational curriculum, and first steps of establishing a network. However, the way to desegregation and the building of a multicultural school is still far to go, at the content, process as well as context level.

At the content level, a multicultural school means not only desegregation but offering integrated education. Within the racial integration literature, one has made a distinction between desegregation and integration after it was found that resegregation frequently occurred within desegregated schools through tracking, grouping practices, special education referrals, or disciplinary action. Desegregation is therefore used to describe the situation in which minority and majority pupils are physically together in a school or classroom, whereas integration is reserved for a social situation marked by mutual respect and equal dignity in an atmosphere of acceptance and encouragement of distinctive cultural patterns (de Jong, 1996). Therefore, going from desegregation to integration means a shift from a pure instrumental mix of children to offering a quality educational project. Integrated education means formulating and implementing an educational project in which heterogeneity itself has a function. Quality of education then will not be derived from indirect indicators like social composition but will need to become visible by more direct indicators.

In order to offer integrated education to all pupils, it seems that the school's strategy at the process level also needs to be characterized by an integrated approach.

Given the parental choice, a multicultural school will need to involve parents and other external parties into the implementation of the school curriculum and the school organization. In this study, the school's relationship with her external stakeholders is still one of segregation and compartmentalization. At this moment, she is talking to different white indigenous organizations but leaves out the minority parents. The basic question is one of bridging the differences between the different segregated parties. The school will need to find a way to bring together the current minority parents and potential white parents so desegregation also happens at the process side.

At the context level, multicultural schools are faced with redefining their market. Segregation has come from segmentation of the market, with specialisation of the educational offer and a white flight as consequences. This market segmentation or residential segregation has led to the myth of mobility. Black schools believe their potential clients can come only from their neighborhood e.g. minority parents. In order to become a multicultural school, a school will need to redefine its market, from a segregated market of different neighborhoods to an integrated local community.

In general, becoming a multicultural school would mean developing a sense of ownership among the school, the parents and the local community. This sense of ownership means a sense of shared responsibility among different stakeholders for the integrated education of all pupils, minority and indigenous. It means taking the needs of children as starting point, from which a need for integration and quality education follow. The challenge for us, researchers, is to start building on this sense of ownership by creating those conditions in which the different stakeholders can begin to share experience and expertise, and to increase their understanding of all pupils' needs.

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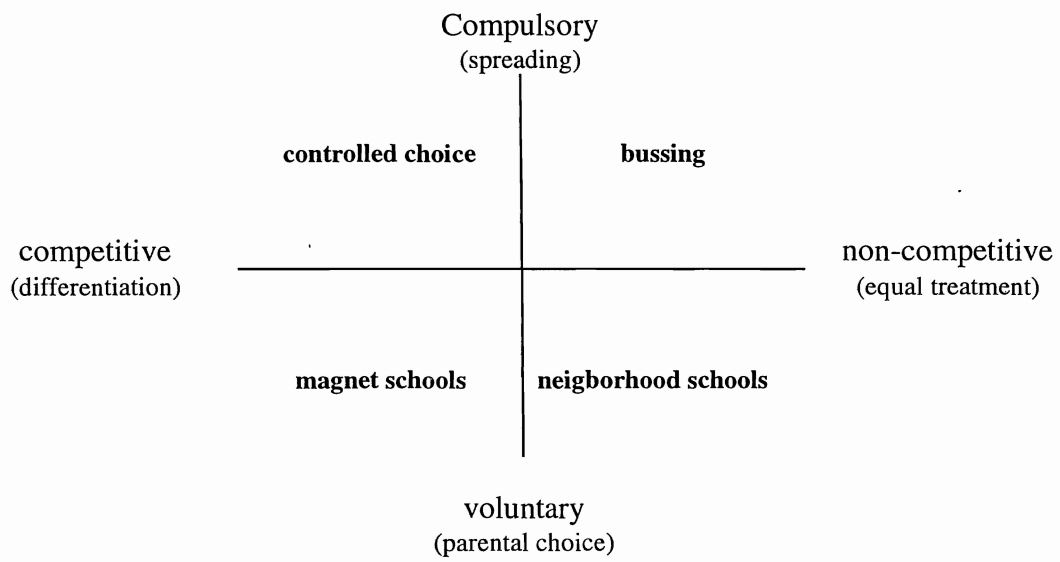



Figure 1 : four different ways of desegregation

Wij maken het tof!



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Figure 2 : metaphor

- > Signifies positive feedback relations where more leads to more and less leads to less
- > Signifies negative feedback relations where changes in one direction are associated with changes in the opposite direction

Figure 3 : Pattern of positive and negative feedback relations

