Controversy's Graveyard: The School of Education Classroom and Educational Policy Debate

Richard Hartsell & Susan B. Harden

Abstract

What is the role of teacher education classrooms in mediating educational controversy? In this paper, the authors argue schools of education approach educational controversies such as ability grouping and resegregation from a perspective that equates sublimation of controversy with progress. Although schools of education serve as conduits for educational policy, the pre-service teacher education curriculum often overlooks controversy and focuses exclusively on the technical and methodological aspects of teaching. Consequently, students rarely reflect on the existential consequences of educational policies and the role teachers play in both defining and helping students achieve a better life. The authors conclude teacher education classrooms should follow a more Kierkegaardian model towards controversy in which reflection and criticism of the dominant educational ideology are emphasized.

Keywords: *controversy; educational policy; schools of education*

In the political arena, a controversial bill is a piece of proposed legislation that elicits strong disagreement over the adoption of various courses of action. Regardless of the relative merits of these various courses of action, it is generally understood that a good way to kill the bill is to send it to a sub-committee. The implication is that the bureaucracy favors the status quo and that the best intentions of all sides of a controversy are limited by the inertia of social structures. Those who resist change know that institutions, rather than individuals, are often the mediators of policy and the primary actors in any controversy that surrounds a particular policy. While the general public appears keenly aware of the "do-nothing" nature of political bodies surrounding controversial issues in the current political climate, even practicing educators tend not to understand the role that schools of education play in mediating educational controversies. How do schools of education approach conflicting ideas within educational policy? In what ways do schools of education accept educational policies which are broadly enacted within society, even when those educational policies are defined as controversial or contested? And what does this institutional response imply about teacher education programs and corresponding teacher practices?

As social and cultural institutions, schools of education mediate contested educational policies through their policies, curriculum, and research -- consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly. With the current emphasis in education on technique and methodology for both pedagogy and lines of inquiry, it seems fair to question the degree to which schools of education mediate the educational equivalent of political controversy in the face of strong disagreement over the adoption of various educational policies and pedagogical practices.

Controversy and Progress

As with other cultural phenomena, controversy and the contested ideas it represents illuminate both the expressed and tacit values swirling within a culture.[1] What a particular culture at any given time deems controversial, as well as how it defines controversy shines a hard light into even the most hidden and least discussed corners of cultural values and mores. For example, controversial definitions of marriage have varied across generations contested around attributes of race and gender underscoring both changing racial and sexual mores within American society as well as a continuing evolution of the definition of equality.

Such positive examples of controversy reflecting a culture broadening of its definitions of diversity and equality nevertheless can give rise to the modern temptation of viewing the unfolding of history, including the evolution of all controversial issues, as moving toward a greater good. As Christopher Lasch notes, 18th century originators of modern liberal political and economic theory (such as Smith and Locke) defined notions of progress that went beyond the purely material or political to include intellectual and moral development as well. The modern belief in progress was conceived as being culturally all encompassing.[2] Controversy within such a framework tends to be viewed as promoting ever more refined and enlightened beliefs and courses of action within a culture. The trajectory of history and its accompanying controversies is always assumed to be upward with any deviance from this ascension assumed to be temporal or of no existential consequence.[3] Much of this positive connotation of controversy is reflected in Hegel's notion of opposing ideas being synthesized into higher, more complete expression of truths in an ever rising spiral toward greater understanding. [4] Viewed from the cultural perspective, such a belief implies a culture that is constantly moving, with the assistance of controversies, toward greater levels of rationality as well as more enlightened expressions of values.

This modern notion of the conflict of opposing ideas, controversy, as a part of an inexorable progression toward a higher, more enlightened level of cultural existence, however, can be misguided. The premise ignores the very real possibility that changes in what a culture considers controversial might indicate a *regression from* rather than a *progression towards* a higher level of cultural being. The quieting of a controversy does not necessarily imply a more rational or more just state of cultural existence despite the modern liberal tendency to view change, including the apparent resolution of controversies, as part of an overall progression toward higher material, political, and existential levels of being.

Recent changes in what American culture considers controversial in regard to educational policy provide some of the more illuminating examples of the problematic nature of associating the diminishment of a controversy, what Hegel called sublation, with progress. Nowhere is this phenomenon more apparent than in how schools of education and their pre-service teacher training

---

1. Michael W. Apple and Landon E. Beyer. "Social Evaluation of Curriculum," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* 4 (1984): 425-34.

2. Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991).

3. Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1997). Susan B. Harden and Richard Hartsell, R., "Transitional Disruption or End Times: Community Engagement 2.0 and the Apocalyptic Possibilities of MOOCs in Higher Education," in Scott Crabill & Dan Butin (eds.), *Civic Engagement 2.0? Provocations and Dialogues on the Future of the Civic in the Disrupted University* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2014): 73-81.

4. Frederick C. Beiser, *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

programs have come to deal with controversial, philosophically-rooted pedagogical issues such as ability grouping and resegregation.

Kierkegaard and the Philosopher's Task

Soren Kierkegaard, once wrote that he saw his life's work, the work of a philosopher, as an attempt to make life more difficult for his readers.[5] In an emerging modern and rational world dedicated to making individuals' lives easier (more convenient, more efficient, more comfortable), Kierkegaard viewed his purpose, and by extension the purpose of philosophy, as making life a bit more difficult for the individual. Particularly, Kierkegaard sought to instill in his readers a type of reflection which focused on the existential consequences of the choices we make—the ways in which our choices affect our lives and by extension the lives of others and society in general. Importantly, this desire to create existential angst in his readers was not merely a reaction against the unexamined life; it was also a reaction to the ideology, what Kierkegaard would label the "idolatry," of modernity of which the concept of progress is an integral aspect.

As conceptualized by Kierkegaard, modernity was an ideology which singularly elevates materialism, convenience, efficiency, and other typical measures of progress to a godlike status that demands powerful rejoinders. Kierkegaard saw his role as providing such counterpoint. By asking individuals to focus their reflection on the existential consequences of their choices rather than on typical yardsticks of progress such as efficiency, convenience, and even rationality, Kierkegaard sought to interject individual human life, with all its accompanying existential contradictions and complications, back into the discussion of truth and meaning. As his famous critique of Hegel suggests, Kierkegaard believed that Hegel accounted for everything in his philosophical system except what it means to be a human being who lives and dies.[6] It was Kierkegaard's desire to stimulate a particular type of reflection that privileges the immediate, the human, the specific, and the affective consequences of the choices made by individuals and by extension by communities and societies. If controversy is seen as one means to stimulate such reflection, then Kierkegaard's definition of controversy could be projected to privilege those public disputes which have immediate and obvious existential impacts on individuals.

From Kierkegaard's perspective of the philosopher as someone who complicates life, who makes it more difficult, the role of educational philosophy in teacher education programs can be viewed in sharp contrast to the majority of the teacher education curriculum which emphasizes the technical and methodological aspects of teaching. Rather than seeking to make teachers' lives easier by schooling them in the various the techniques, methods, and policies they will be required to follow, the teacher education curriculum, at least as Kierkegaard might conceive it, should focus on making teachers' professional lives more difficult: more difficult to give grades, to rank students, to teach a highly prescribed curriculum, to view good teaching as entirely quantifiable, or to create learning goals devoid of subjectivity. In short, one role of teacher education in general, and the educational philosophy aspect of teacher education in particular, should be to make it harder for pre-service teachers to perform without reflection many of the tasks they will be asked to perform in the modern public school classroom. To follow the lines of Kierkegaard's model for philosophy, educational philosophy in teacher education programs should attempt to create a sense

5. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

6. Ibid.

of *dis ease* within teachers to the dominant educational ideology and its basis in liberal economic and political theory.

In order to fulfill this role, educational foundations courses taught from a critical pedagogy perspective for pre-service teachers have often focused on the philosophical, social, and cultural implications embedded in various sides of pedagogical controversies. In such courses, controversy provides the fertile ground out of which pre-service teachers can develop the ability to reflect both broadly and critically on an educational practice or policy. Thoughtful examination of educational controversies allows for reflection on the philosophical and moral as well as the pedagogical implications of adopting one practice over another. The role of controversy in the teacher education curriculum can assist in helping pre-service teachers shift the basis of their reflections from typical practitioner concerns such as how to deliver content more efficiently or produce higher measurable outcomes to concerns that focus on the affective existential consequences of teacher actions or pedagogical policies on the students in the classroom. Following Kierkegaard's model, the focus of reflection for pre-service teachers, particularly reflection stimulated by educational controversies, should be on how students are to be treated and taught in order to achieve more meaningful school experiences for students and by extension a more just society for all. That such reflection could call forth in pre-service teachers profoundly unsettling insights that explore the idea the classroom can be an unjust place in itself would only reinforce in Kierkegaard's eyes the necessity for a focus on educational controversies in teacher education curricula.

The assumption made by prescribing such a role for educational controversies in pre-service teacher education is that differing courses of action called for by different sides of an educational controversy not only have pedagogical consequences but also existential and societal consequences. Adopting one of the particular courses of action offered by an educational controversy has repercussions that go beyond purely pedagogical consequences such as what content is taught or how it is organized and presented. Rather, the consequences directly extend to quality of students' and teachers' individual lives as well as to the type of society schools aspire to create. Pull on the thread of controversy, in this view, and that thread should not only unravel the stitches directly connected to it but also every other stitch in the garment.

Defining Controversy Down

Admittedly, this is a high bar for the notion of educational controversy. For example, what is at present one of the most hotly debated topics in education—the acceptance or rejection of Common Core in favor of state produced curricula and standardized testing -- would not fully meet the criteria for a controversy that promotes Kierkegaard-inspired reflection because the differing policy alternatives lack any meaningful distinction as it relates to the existential concerns of the students in the classroom. Admittedly the issue of whether to accept or reject Common Core has numerous social and pedagogical implications such as local control of schools, specific curriculum content, and the normative basis for assessment. Nevertheless, although there would be differing social and pedagogical consequences for adopting or rejecting Common Core, those consequences would probably not be immediately and specifically reflected in the existential lives of students, or teachers, in the classroom. The quality of the inner life of students, the meaningfulness of the school experience for individuals, or the values reflected by the institution of education are largely unaffected by which argument prevails in the Common Core dispute. Whether curriculum standards, and the ensuing testing regimen, are created at the state or national level has little effect on the lived experiences of students and teachers in schools and does not substantively change the

type of society envisioned as the ultimate goal of schooling. In essence, the Common Core controversy does not have enough existential meat on its bones to promote the type of reflection in which pre-service teachers experience the angst, the *dis ease*, Kierkegaard held forth as the goal of philosophy in a modern world convinced of the inevitability of progress. The debate between proponents and opponents of Common Core is thus not so much a controversy in education out of which multiple veins of philosophical and ethical implications can be mined so much as it is an argument over which Caesar, the local or the national, shall be rendered unto. As such, it is an unlikely means to help pre-service teachers develop the critical insight and moral awareness necessary to question the modern liberal world's present incarnation of education with its belief in progress through increasing effective and efficient testing regimes.

If a Kierkegaardian notion of a controversy in education centers on the extent to which pedagogical debates have implications that extend beyond curriculum content or methodological practices, then the repository for controversy in teacher education programs has historically been educational foundations classes, specifically to the extent these classes confront the social, cultural, and ethical implications of specific pedagogical practices. Only in classes that deal with such consequential implications for pedagogical choices can students achieve Kierkegaard's goal of having their professional lives made more difficult for them. However, as the influence of educational philosophy has waned in teacher education programs, crowded out logistically by yet another course on methodology or management and ideologically by school districts clamoring for teachers subservient to the neoliberal approach to educational reform, the opportunities for pre-service teachers to delve into the social, cultural, and political consequences of educational policies have declined. The obvious irony of this process is that far from being progenitors of ongoing pedagogical debate created by educational controversies, schools of education serve primarily as conduits of existing educational policies whose origins in controversy have long since faded into the haze of the dominant ideology's policy mandates. Rather than deconstructing educational policies and the pedagogical philosophies out of which they arrive, including the effects these policies may have on the existential lives of individuals or on the social consequences for a culture, schools of education are far more likely to reify existing educational policies. Consequently, any debate or speculation on an educational policy or practice that goes beyond the practical pedagogical merits to the philosophical underpinnings or the existential consequences of the policy or practice [anything that might create Kierkegaardian ethical doubt] is thwarted by the assumption that any controversy which may be implicit within the policy has long since been settled. The discussion that follows outlines two controversies in education with both pedagogical and societal implications which schools of education presently tend to treat as non-controversies (ability grouping and resegregation). Yet these two controversies overflow with precisely the type of existential consequences for students that could promote the reflection Kierkegaard viewed as the purpose of philosophy. It would appear then that at least for these two issues schools of education have abandoned the notion of making at least part of their pre-service students' professional lives more difficult and have created at least the de facto assumption that the controversies surrounding ability grouping and resegregation have been overcome.

The Ability Grouping Controversy

One such historical educational controversy that appears on the surface at least to have been laid to rest within pre-service teacher professional programs is the debate over the pedagog-

ical practice of ability grouping; variations of which are alternatively known as tracking or streaming. The historical antecedents of the poles in the debate over this practice are approximately one hundred years old and can be found in two statements of practice released by the fledgling National Education Association barely twenty-five years apart. In 1893, the NEA stated that every subject should not only be taught to all students but also taught in similar ways. However, by 1918 the NEA suggested that different academic tracks, with different courses and methods, be offered in secondary schools. Originally, there were two lines of argument supporting such a policy about-face, both of which were rooted in Progressivism. First, following Progressivism's emphasis on the life-adjustment function of schooling, it was argued that three different tracks (academic, vocational, and general) corresponding to students' differing post-secondary aptitudes and plans (for example: college, carpentry, or secretarial work) would create a schooling experience that was more relevant to students' lives and more efficient of societal resources in the face of an exponentially growing number of students. The second argument suggested students learn better, as well as become more socially comfortable, in settings where they are surrounded by classmates of similar abilities. Although this second argument obviously intersected the argument for schools creating different tracks for different expected life experiences, the second argument was originally thought to be less of a reason for schools to adopt the homogenous grouping of students as accepted pedagogical policy.[7]

Homogenous grouping of secondary school students was readily accepted by early 20th century educators because of the historical convergence of three factors: the rising tide of immigration; the corresponding growth in the size of schools; and the introduction of scientific intelligence testing. Increasing numbers of first generation students, as well as expanding immigration patterns that included poorer Mediterranean and eastern European countries, meant that educators needed an efficient and convenient way to organize instruction to large numbers of students with highly diverse backgrounds and ability levels.[8] Tracking provided the most obvious effective answer to such an organizational problem, and the widespread acceptance within the psychological academic community of the emerging field of individual intelligence testing resolved the issue of how to place students appropriately and fairly into the various tracks.[9] The pragmatism of social efficiency co-mingled with the empiricism of science to form an argument for tracking that was largely unchallenged for most of the first half of the twentieth century. Tracking, in short, was a relatively non-controversial pedagogical practice for the first four decades of its existence. What debate there was centered on its instructional efficacy—whether it enhanced learning among the various tracked groups—and not upon a more holistic examination of its existential or societal consequences.

Interestingly, however, by mid-century the two basic arguments for tracking had switched positions of importance with the belief tracking enhanced all students' possibilities for learning becoming dominant and the rationale of tracking for post-secondary expectations receding into the background. Such a switch corresponded with a move in the 1950s toward a more generalized academic curriculum for all students, as opposed to differentiated curricula based on students'

7. James A. Nicholson, *What Research Says about Ability Grouping and Academic Achievement* (1998). Available at http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED426129.

8. Samuel Lucus, *Tracking Inequality: Stratification and Mobility in American High Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999).

9. Sarah Mondale and Sarah B. Patton, eds., *School: The Story of American Public Education* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

vocational expectations.[10] Students' perceived abilities became the overt rationale for placing students in homogenous groups. In essence, students were grouped into stratified but similar classes *because* of their academic abilities rather than their varying abilities and curricula merely being thought of as corresponding to their differing vocational destinations.

Despite this reversal of the primary rationale for tracking or ability grouping, as it tended to be labeled after the change in rationale, the evidence for the efficiency of ability grouping as a basic instructional practice was at best inconclusive. In a meta-analysis of the effects on students during the first half century of tracking, Findley and Bryan[11] concluded that ability grouping showed in a narrow majority of studies a slight improvement in student achievement for students at the very top of the academic ability hierarchy; however, for students tracked into groups of average or below average academic ability levels, a majority of studies demonstrated unfavorable effects on student learning with the most unfavorable effects tending to occur within the lowest ability level groups. The inconclusive evidence for the overall effectiveness of tracking and the more conclusive evidence regarding the detrimental effect of tracking on lower level students intersected with the push to desegregate schools brought about by Brown to lay the foundation for the pedagogical debate over ability grouping to morph into a full-blown educational controversy with obvious individual and societal ramifications. Opponents of tracking began to argue in the 1960s that despite inconclusive evidence for its impact on learning, the reliance on ability grouping as an instructional practice was being doubled down on by many school districts in an attempt to keep schools segregated, albeit from inside with highly segregated classes as opposed to completely segregated schools. Braddock,[12] for example, found high levels of racial and ethnic disparity in ability groups with white and Asian students being highly overrepresented in high ability classes and African-American and Latino students being even more overrepresented in low ability level classes. Additionally, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are significantly more likely to be placed in lower ability level tracks reflecting the complex interplay between race and economic status reflected in American culture at large. Most troubling of all is the data which suggests that once placed in a track students are far more likely than not to remain in the same track for the entirety of their secondary schooling experience.[13] At least part of the explanation for such rigidity is the well-documented tendency for students in lower tracks to receive poorer quality classroom experiences in at least two respects. First, better teachers (or at least teachers with higher degrees and more experience) tend to gravitate toward higher track classes. Second, class activities in lower ranked tracks focus on drill and rote memorization[14] while students in higher tracks are asked to perform more higher-order thinking activities such as critical analysis and class discussion. Racial discrepancies combined with lower quality instruction and little mobility between tracks have led prominent educators such as Kozol[15] to suggest that tracking is simply the latest

10. Lucas, *Tracking Inequality*.

11. Warren Findley & Mirian Bryan, *Ability grouping: 1970, Status, Impact, and Alternatives* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1971).

12. Henry J. Braddock, "Tracking: Implications for Student Race-ethnic Subgroups," Report No. 1 (Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED325600, 1990).

13. Jeannie Oakes, "Two cities' Tracking and Within-school Segregation," *Teachers College Record*, 96 (1995): 681-690.

14. Cynthia Evans, "Access, Equality, and Intelligence: Another Look at Tracking," *English Journal*, 84(8) (1995): 63-65.

15. Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequities: Children in America's Schools* (New York: Crown, 1991).

and most effective legal means to racially segregate students and insure a continuing underclass of poor Americans that is disproportionately comprised of people of color.

The changing contours of the debate over tracking—from a focus primarily on the effects on student learning to a concern for the social justice and individual rights implications of tracking—suggest dramatically raised stakes for the outcome of the debate and the decision to continue or reduce the practice of tracking. The implications spill out of the classroom-oriented questions centered on tracking's effectiveness as a tool for increasing achievement and into society at large with possible consequences that stab at the heart of some of American culture's most deeply processed values such as individual equality and opportunity. This rising awareness of such possible consequences for individual rights and societal values because of ability grouping spawned a "detracking" movement that appeared in the literature during the late 1980s. As its name suggests, this movement sought to return most classrooms to a heterogeneous mixture of student abilities. Importantly, the vast majority of authors who advocated detracking did not seek to reinstate the 1893 NEA directive that all students should be taught the same curriculum in a similar manner.[16] Rather, detracking sought to restore a mixture of academic ability levels to all classrooms even if curricula were tailored somewhat to students' post-secondary expectations. In particular, detracking advocates sought to reverse the downward creep ability grouping had made from secondary schools into middle schools and even lower where no appeal to the post-secondary needs of students could be made.[17] At least judged by its appearances in educational literature, the detracking movement gained prominence during the 1990s and then tended to peak in the early 2000s with fewer than half the number of academic journal articles appearing between 2010 and 2015 than appeared between 2000 and 2005.

Regardless of the present state in the ebb and flow of the detracking debate, the consideration of specific consequences for society and individuals the debate can bring to ability grouping makes the choice to track students one where pre-service teachers can and should feel the existential weight of the choice. From the perspective of Kierkegaard's charge to the philosopher to make life more difficult, the practice of ability grouping offers great possibilities for pre-service teachers to expand their consciousness regarding the magnitude of consequences pedagogical practices can have. Regardless of whether these students have any choice as in-service teachers regarding the extent to which they are required to participate in widespread ability grouping, it is imperative they are confronted with the possible consequences tracking can have on society and individuals. Only then, to paraphrase Kierkegaard, will they be able to develop the moral conscience that will make their lives as teachers at once both more difficult and more authentic.

The evolution of the debate over tracking and ability grouping from a methodological debate over the efficacy of a specific pedagogical practice to a moral debate over the existential consequences of the practice raises the issue to the level of educational controversy, even when considered against the high bar of a Kierkegaard-inspired definition of educational controversy. Implicit in this definition of controversy is the notion that the choices presented by the controversy can create the guilt and anguish Kierkegaard suggests is always present in an engaged moral life. If pre-service teachers are presented with the full range of the consequences to the widespread use of ability grouping, it is far more unlikely they will be able to participate in the practice, even if required to do so, without a twinge of conscience over the relative cost and benefit of tracking.

16. James Mallery & Janet Mallery, "The American Legacy of Ability Grouping: Tracking Reconsidered," *Multicultural Education*, 7(1) (1999): 13-15.

17. Alan Graubard, "Progressive Education and the Tracking Debate," *Radical Teacher*, 70 (2004): 32-39.

Whether or not pre-service teachers develop such a conscience largely depends on the extent to which they are exposed by their teacher education programs to the full measure of the ability grouping controversy. The extent to which widespread ability grouping is presented to pre-service teacher education students as having specific existential and societal ramifications (i.e. as an educational controversy instead of as debate over instructional methodology), is precisely the extent to which these students are likely to develop what could be called a pedagogical conscience: a full appreciation for the effect choices made by states, districts, and classroom teachers can have on the lives of individuals and on the nature of society.

There is little evidence to suggest, however, that pre-service teachers are presently developing such a pedagogical conscience through an examination of the controversy surrounding ability grouping and tracking as part of their teacher education programs. What evidence exists tends to be anecdotal or circumstantial, for the academic literature is sparse regarding connections between teacher preparation programs and the ability grouping controversy. Of the approximately seventy-five articles in the EBSCO education database that in any way link ability grouping and teacher education, the vast majority deal with ability grouping as it relates to special education or to programs for the gifted and talented. Only three articles[18] deal specifically with widespread ability grouping as a topic undertaken in teacher education programs. Moreover, only one of these three[19] deals with the full range of individual and societal consequences that define ability grouping as an educational controversy, and this article focuses on tracking in the Australian national school system and teacher education programs in Australia. The evidence for pre-service teachers being confronted with the ability grouping controversy is similarly thin in regard to textbook publication. A quick survey of five of the most-widely used textbooks in "Introduction to Education" or "Educational Foundations" courses—the courses in which discussions of the widespread use of tracking are most likely to be found in teacher education programs—finds fewer than a dozen pages devoted to ability grouping and tracking[20]. And once again, the vast majority of the limited material focuses on the instructional consequences of tracking and ignores the existential consequences. In short, textbooks for pre-service teachers as well as the academic literature related to the content of teacher education programs seem to suggest that ability grouping, to the extent that it is even discussed within pre-service programs, is dealt with as a methodological concern and not as an educational controversy.

The Resegregation Controversy

The resegregation of many public schools during the last decade is another issue that rises to the level of an educational controversy, even when educational controversy is narrowly defined

18. Rachel Lotan, "Teaching Teachers to Build Equitable Classrooms," *Theory Into Practice*, 45(1) (2006): 32-39; Maika Watanabe, "Lessons from a Teacher Inquiry Group about Tracking: Perceived Student Choice in Course-taking and its Implication for Detracking Reform," *Teachers College Record,* 109(9) (2007): 2136-2170; Tasha Riley, "Deciding Factors: Do Factors Beyond Achievement Influence Teachers' Student Placement Decisions?" *Journal of Education for Teaching,* 40(1) (2014): 94-96.

19. Riley, "Deciding Factors," 94-96.

20. Allan C. Ornstein, Daniel U. Levine, & Gerry Gutek, *Foundations of Education, 11th Edition* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2010); James A. Johnson, Diann L. Musial, Gene E. Hall, & Donna M. Gollnick, *Foundations of American Education: Becoming Effective Teachers in Challenging Times, 16th Edition* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2013); Richard Arends, *Learning to Teach* (Dubuque, IA: McGraw Hill Education, 2014); Don Kauchak & Paul Eggen, *Introduction to Teaching: Becoming a Professional, 5th Edition* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2013); L. Dean Webb, Arlene Metha, & K. Forbis Jordan, *Foundations of American Education, 7th Edition* (Boston, MA: Pear-son, 2010).

as an issue whose consequences directly spill over into the lives of individuals and the values of society. As education controversies are measured, the debate regarding the education of non-white children and the corresponding policy of how segregation or integration is mediated in public schools might be considered the pinnacle controversy in American educational policy. The controversy dominated the social consciousness of the nation in the 20th century and race was the primary identifier for how American society organized schools. The 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling is widely considered one of the most transformational educational and societal decisions in American history and brought with it massive policy changes. But as we entered the 21st century, the controversy quieted and the national focus shifted from integration to accountability. Correspondingly, teacher education programs seemed to be complicit, intentionally or unintentionally, in the cultural decision to put aside integration as a national priority. Segregation may be the starkest of examples of how schools of education are institutions where controversies go to die.

For the first sixty years of the 20th century, the controversy surrounding segregation was commonly discussed through the devastating legal claim of "separate but equal." The Supreme Court's landmark 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that outlawed school segregation, the 1964 *Civil Rights Act*, and 1968 Supreme Court ruling in *Green v. County Board of New Kent County* dramatically and rightly shifted the dominant argument to "separate is inherently unequal." In the sixty years since the *Brown* decision, the controversy of school integration and the benefits of policy have been closely studied by education researchers and the findings in terms of demographics and outcomes are significant.

Prior to 1954 in seventeen states, largely located in the south, there were virtually no racially integrated schools. With help of the 1964 *Civil Rights Act* and Supreme Court rulings supporting desegregation in 1968 and 1973, most schools were integrated to some degree by the early 1970's. Since forced integration, forty years of educational research has shown that desegregation dramatically improved long-run outcomes for black students specifically in educational and occupational attainment [high school graduation rates, higher wages, job status, annual family income, lower incidence of poverty], college quality, reduced probability of incarceration, and improved health. Desegregation policies narrowed black-white gaps in per-pupil spending and led to smaller class sizes for black students.[21]

However in the last decade, racial isolation has been exacerbated by demographic shifts, judicial rulings, and accountability policies. Since 1968, the country has experienced profound demographic shifts in public school student populations: white enrollment has declined 28%, black enrollment has increased 19%, and Latino enrollment has grown by almost 500%. These phenomena mirror national population trends. In absolute terms, whites comprised 80% of all public school students in 1968 but barely hold a majority in 2011. Currently, Latinos make up the second largest demographic category of public school students nationwide and largest category in the Western region[22]. While white populations still control the vast majority of power and wealth, demograph-ically the country is becoming browner and it is projected that whites will hold minority status by mid-century. Consequently, the parameters regarding the controver-

21. Rucker C. Johnson, "Long-run Impacts of School Desegregation and School Quality on Adult Attainment," working paper, *National Bureau of Economic Research*, 2010, *http://www.nber.org/papers/w16664.*

22. Gary Orfield, Erica Frankenberg, Jongyeon Ee, & John Kuscera, "Brown at 60: Great Progress, a Long Retreat and an Uncertain Future," *The Civil Rights Project*, May 15, 2014, http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/brown-at-60-great-progress-a-long-retreat-and-an-uncertain-future.

sy of integration have developed beyond the bi-racial definitions of segregation in the Civil Rights Era to include a multicultural reality led by the high growth of Latino populations.

The momentum driving progress slowed as the Supreme Court put forward a string of decisions ending desegregation plans in the years from 1991-2007. Under court ordered desegregation after *Brown*, the percent of black students in majority white schools peaked at 43.5% in 1988. As a result of the court-ordered deregulation, the southern region has experienced a regression toward more segregation as school assignment plans could no longer assign students based on race. While the demographics of our communities are more diverse than in 1968, persistent racism and classism in neighborhood housing patterns created a return to highly homogenous neighborhood schools. In 2011, the percentage of black students in majority white schools was 23.2% which approximated the level of integration in 1968. Currently, more than one in three black students attends hyper-segregated [91-100%] minority schools in the South.[23]

The timing of the waves of immigration in the 1990's and the rapid growth in Latino birthrates have led to an 495% increase in Latino students between 1968 and 2011, compared to a 28% decline in white enrollment and a 19% increase in black enrollment. Because of the changing judicial climate away from desegregation, the majority of Latino students have not experienced the dramatic benefits of integration when compared to black populations. As a result, Latino students currently experience the high levels in group isolation, second only to white students in the level of in-group isolation, and have the lowest exposure to white students nationally.[24]

The resegregation of our schools also has direct connections to the increase in income equality and the inequitable distribution of resources. This was the same argument put forward in the Civil Rights Era: separate is not equal. In hyper-segregated schools with 91-100% black and Latino students, half of this subset is low-income. In a country founded on white privilege which concentrates power and wealth in the hands of whites, there is a correlation of poverty and racial concentration. Since the advent of public schooling, majority white schools are extremely more likely to be middle-class or wealthy schools and integration did very little to change racist and classist neighborhood housing patterns underlying school assignment. What integration did do is to provide access to the educational benefits of the middle class including experienced teachers, rigorous and diverse courses, more educational materials, and enriched experiences.

Similar to the plight of Latino students and despite the overwhelming educational research showcasing the benefits, the integration and diversity achieved in the majority of public schools between 1968 and 2000 has not been mirrored in public teacher education programs which remain predominately white.[25] Blaming policies like salaries and racially biased admission tests needed to maintain teacher quality, teacher preparation programs have largely failed in their efforts to recruit and thereby diversify teacher education programs.[26] Appearing powerless to address racial isolation within their own programs, teacher preparation accrediting bodies have responded by turning away from the controversy and turning toward methods and accountability standards as strategies to deliver the diversity outcomes lost to resegregation. For example, *The*

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Richard H. Milner, "But Good Intentions Are Not Enough: Doing What's Necessary to Teach for Diversity," in *White Teachers/ Diverse Classrooms*, ed. Julie G. Landsman and Chance Lewis (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2011): 56-77.

26. Rachel Ragland, "Advancing Diversity in the Teaching Workforce: Three Initiatives Working Toward Solutions," Webinar, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, November 17, 2015, https://secure.aacte.org/apps/rl/resource.php?resid=570&ref=rl.

Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation standards for teacher preparation programs include practices mandating that "the teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards,"[27] even though neither the pre-service teachers themselves nor their future classrooms will be diverse places.

In adhering to such standards, teacher education programs are reflecting a broader national policy shift in addressing the controversial issue of how to educate non-white students from regulations mandating diverse schools to regulations mandating accountability and efficiency, ignoring the moral and cultural implications as well as the research. Beginning in the mid-1980's as the Supreme Court and policy makers began dismantling the legal framework supporting desegregation and waves of immigration began to take hold, racial isolation in schools returned and the corresponding progressive outcomes for non-white children stalled. Championing a neoliberal ideology utilizing market mechanisms like competition and accountability rather than desegregation became the dominant strategy to educate non-white children as enacted by the flagship legislation of *No Child Left Behind* in 2002. The effect of this ideological shift was to move the focus of the controversy away from the cultural factors that create racial isolation, like racism and the legacy of racism, and toward the performance of the school system. Practically, as this policy rippled its way into teacher preparation curricula, programs braced themselves for educating pre-service teachers for an impossible task of shouldering the consequences of resegregation. The focus became about teacher quality [raising admission standards, graduation and certification requirements] and improved methods. And the controversy about integration as the dominant strategy to educate non-white children died.

As with ability grouping, the absence of controversy within teacher education programs over the resegregation issue is evidenced by what tends to be missing from textbooks and research literature. Although the majority of the most used Introduction to Education texts discuss pre-Brown school segregation and post-Brown attempts at integration, only two provide even a cursory mention of the *de facto* resegregation of public schools that has occurred during the past decade. Moreover, although there is significant amount of research on the recent resegregation of public schools (85 articles in the EBSCO Education Database since 1995), none of this research pursues the ramifications resegregation has for pre-service teacher education.

Teaching without Controversy

Suggesting that the controversial nature of issues such as ability grouping and the resegregation of public schools is completely ignored within schools of education pre-service teacher training programs is perhaps an overstatement. Nevertheless, given the deeply consequential and existential nature of the choices presented by these controversies—for individuals, communities, and cultures—it remains reasonable to suggest that the present discussion within teacher training programs surrounding ability grouping and segregation is muted at best. That the controversial nature of these practices remains for the most part outside the curricular walls of pre-service teacher education presents questions both in terms of why this phenomenon occurs and what some of its professional practice implications for graduates of teacher education programs might be. Although outside the boundaries of this inquiry, it is reasonable to speculate that the absence of

27. The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, "CAEP Standards," February 13, 2015, file:///C:/Users/Inspiration/Downloads/caep-2013-accreditation-standards.pdf.

controversy within teacher training programs is at least partially the result of public education's neoliberal inspired focus on quantifiable accountability as the primary means of driving school progress. As teachers, schools, and districts are increasingly faced with punitive consequences for not meeting narrowly-defined measurable objectives, concepts of teaching have unsurprisingly narrowed to focus on the specific metrics that serve to define teaching effectiveness.

Such changes inevitably manifest in pre-service teacher education programs as programs mold their curricula to state certification mandates and employer desires that privilege the technocratic, methodological aspects of teaching assumed to produce more effective and more efficient teaching (i.e. greater knowledge transfer at less cost). In this process, controversy tends to be left out in the cold. Within professional program curricula, classes that focus on methodology and quantifiable assessment supplant classes in educational foundations and philosophy, areas of study more conducive to discussions of pedagogical controversies. Despite mission statements to the contrary, the foci of emphasis in professional training programs become less concerned with the reverberation of pedagogical issues within the lives of students and the values of society and more concerned with the maximization of scores on quantifiable student assessments. Questions surrounding the intersection of schooling with the lives of individuals and the well-being of society are replaced with inside-baseball pseudo controversies such as common core or state standards, phonetics or whole language, and new math or math fundamentals. What is deemed controversial remains within the realm of technical questions of how to increase student performance and rarely ventures into questions surrounding the purpose of schooling or what the individual and societal consequences of various pedagogical choices are. Such a controversy free zone within teacher education programs may or may not produce practicing teachers who are able to maximize student performance, and by extension progress in education, as measured by quantifiable assessments. What it most assuredly does not help mold are teachers capable of critically reflecting on the existential consequences of the institution of education and the role teachers play in both defining and helping students achieve a better life.