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Editorial: Persistent inequality in urban educational organizations – current issues and possible solutions

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Persistent inequality in urban educational organizations – current issues and possible solutions

In urban settings, educational inequality remains a tenacious challenge. This Research Topic explores the complexities of urban educational organizations, untangling the entrenched issues while offering innovative solutions to mitigate these disparities. Our collective understanding of educational inequality has evolved, and we acknowledge its roots in systemic and situational factors (Smeplass et al., 2023a). Policymakers globally grapple with these persistent inequalities, which manifest in ever-evolving forms (Pfeffer, 2008; Lamont and Pierson, 2019; Corral-Granados et al., 2023a).

For decades, scholars have explored how organizations adapt to their environments, often through superficial compliance to external expectations, a concept known as “decoupling” (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). In the context of education, this suggests that studying educational inequality requires a nuanced approach that considers the complex organizational dimensions of these disparities. By doing so, we can better understand how inequalities manifest in various forms and contexts and develop more effective strategies to address them (Smeplass et al., 2023b). Educational disparities are shaped by various factors inside and surrounding schools (Oppedisano and Turati, 2015; Trinidad, 2019). This is one of the modern welfare paradoxes, the gap between our policy ideals of inclusive education and the results in the field of practice (Corral-Granados et al., 2023b). Over the years, worldwide urban segregation in urban contexts has created specific inequalities. Spatial segregation is suffered in big cities due to social class, ethnicity, gender, and disability social divisions in educational settings, and it can have severe consequences for the individual child in both the short- and long term.

In this Research Topic, we have encouraged scholars to investigate empirically and further theorize why educational inequality in urban contexts still prevails, regardless of the implementation of explicit policy goals of social inclusion and educational equity. Why do we fail to prevent new inequalities? How come existing knowledge on inequality is not enough to foster change, and what are the challenges experienced by educational organizations?

We seek to expand the empirical basis for investigation and theoretical understanding of inequality-producing processes as they manifest in current educational arrangements in large cities around the globe. Contributions describe a case from various educational stages such as early years, primary and secondary education and vocational education.

Moreover, this Research Topic actively sought contributions encompassing a broad spectrum of research methodologies. We welcomed articles grounded in narrative and systematic reviews, in-depth case studies, and both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The goal was to foster a comprehensive understanding by integrating diverse perspectives that offer new insights into the organizational mechanisms underpinning educational inequality. This approach enriches our knowledge base and challenges existing theoretical assumptions, paving the way for innovative solutions in addressing these persistent disparities. In response to our call, the following five articles that have been selected for this Research Topic are introduced and summarized in the following section. First of all, scholars have identified challenges from the key respondents, families with children with special needs and those families with immigrant backgrounds. [Kaplan and Celik](#) have developed a literature review and have analyzed 27 articles based on the experiences of families with South Asian backgrounds and with children with disabilities critical to the educational pedagogies implemented in schools in urban areas in the UK. The scholars pointed out how challenges related to religion influence the interpretation of disability, how shared culture shapes a negative perception of having a child with disabilities by the community and professionals and the role of language and communication barriers. Furthermore, [Banerjee and Bhattacharya](#) have analyzed through 177 in-depth interviews of the second generation of Asian Indian students (high school, undergraduates, and graduates) parents and teachers in the USA the effects of familiar and socioeconomic background on tracking influences—the pressure and the Indian identity increment the sense of discrimination by microaggressions in tracking journeys losing their sense of belonging in their school communities.

Three other articles from this Research Topic described strategies and projects that decrease inequality at urban schools. In the [Cabral-Gouveia et al.](#) article, authors have developed a systematic review of efficient School-based interventions, including 27 studies based on urban school interventions to reduce the achievement gap of those collectives such as those coming from a lower socioeconomic status (SES) or any racialized condition. Scholars have pointed out compensation strategies, such as working on reading, writing and comprehension abilities and school subjects' focused interventions to improve minorities' and lower SES students' learning skills. Other beneficial initiatives include whole-school such as the “Building Assets, Reducing Risks” (BARR) program promoted by the state and community-based projects by the Minnesota Government or the Upward Bound and Talent Search from the US Department of Education. In connection, [Strijbos and Engels](#) proposed a democratic school culture drawing in democratic values in 30 urban schools affecting Dutch-speaking Belgian secondary education students living in urban areas. The authors pointed out that Fair teacher support, discussion opportunities, and peer acceptance are the most influential in deliberative competence development, tolerance, curiosity and empathy. In urban schools, those parameters are scored lower than in non-urban schools. Still, positive student experiences with reasonable support from teachers and opportunities for debate can compensate for the inadequacy of deliberative competencies. [Corral-Granados et al. \(2023a\)](#) stated that innovative pedagogies implemented at the international baccalaureate (IB) program, and

finally, programs that deal with the psycho-social consequences of racism and discrimination. The authors concluded that it is needed longitudinal designs and mixed methods studies and consider a contextual perspective instead of a one-size-fits-all approach. [Fernández-Larragueta et al.](#) have innovative solutions and programs coordinating schools, educational communities and governments. The authors have interviewed 29 leaders participating in an initial teaching education program on Mayan community education designed by the collaboration among international and local universities to cater to the needs of the indigenous Maya communities living in Alta Verapaz (Guatemala) through actions developed to sensitize teachers to children's reality. The valuable aspect of this program was the collaboration through work- a network between the universities (University of Almeria, Spain and University of San Carlos, Guatemala)- trainers, and students.

A recurring theme across these studies is the critical importance of resource coordination and effective communication among different organizational levels, including students. Particularly noteworthy is the active participation of students in research teams, contributing valuable insights into the development of discriminatory practices and the dynamics of inequality. This inclusion enriches the research and underscores the importance of student voices in shaping educational policies and practices. In conclusion, this Research Topic has brought together various multidisciplinary and international researchers, offering a kaleidoscope of perspectives on how to analyse educational inequality by showcasing state-of-the-art research from diverse organizational actors, including students, academic staff, and a review of the existing literature, we gain a comprehensive understanding of this complex issue.

Moreover, this Research Topic highlights the role of culture as a fundamental element in understanding and addressing students' needs. By considering cultural contexts, we can develop more nuanced and practical strategies to tackle educational disparities. This approach acknowledges the diversity of student experiences and ensures that solutions are tailored to address the unique challenges faced by different student populations.

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