

Book review: all through the town: the school bus as educational technology

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Introduction

School buses not only provide safe transportation for children on their daily commute to and from school, but also facilitate access to education regardless of their location or income, making them eligible. Consolidating student transportation, not only reduces traffic and pollution, but it has historically also played a key role in desegregating schools after *Brown v. Board*. The humble yellow school buses remains a cornerstone of communities and kid-friendly transportation systems nationwide because it promotes shared learning experiences and can help build a sense of community among a diverse student body. According to the author, busing technology has exerted a significant impact on the lives of children in America throughout history. By examining the study of the historical and contemporary forces behind this innovative device, we can get a new picture of how technology functions in our society today and ask ourselves who developed this device.

Content summary

This book is divided into four chapters after the introduction. In Chapter 1, the early busing programs encountered significant resistance from integrate-averse

white communities as they attempted to dismantle the entrenched system of racially segregated public education. Despite the long-term benefits of busing for black students' academic and professional outcomes, busing also caused significant short-term hardships due to hostility in predominantly white schools. Moreover, busing decimated the number of black teachers, severely damaging an important source of cultural understanding and role models. As a result of weakened enforcement of desegregation mandates, residential segregation and private schools undermined the effectiveness of busing and revealed, its limitations in addressing systemic inequalities over time. Although the busing system fulfilled its functional role, it failed to change the discriminatory learning environment it sought to eliminate. As a result of this formidable challenge, it showed that truly equitable education requires holistic reforms, not isolated technical solutions, to address the deepest inequities in society. Busing's legacy underscores that to fulfill the full equality, there is still a long way to go, even more than 65 years after *Brown's* landmark integration decision.

The second chapter focuses on the experience on a school buses, and questions the idealized view of the yellow school buses as a fun experience for children. It examines the reality of long commute times experienced by 60 Bellwood elementary and middle school students who, as the participants of a desegregation program, spent

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over two hours each way taking the bus to attend schools in nearby districts. In spite of the fact that exhausting commutes deprived children of control over their journey and made meeting basic needs difficult due to bus rules, the author concluded that students used sounds, games, music, and creative expression to build community despite the noisy conditions. Although enrichment activities were attempted and adult power/supervision remained a constant pressure, it was ultimately questioned whether such lengthy commuting techniques truly conferred dignity and needs on students as their primary users experienced exhausting journeys with little agency each school day.

School buses design and futures are the focus of chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 examines the physical characteristics and design of school buses to determine how they are interpreted by students and what expectations they reflect. In the report, it is stated that the vinyl seats, lack of amenities, difficult-to-operate windows, and bare metal interior take precedence over comfort as a utilitarian means of transportation. It examines how the bus functions as a platform for educating students and shaping interactions on and inside the bus as well as outside of it. By using this “old” technology, this chapter emphasizes the importance of human relationships and analog interactions in learning, and argues that it allows us to reconsider what educational technology encompasses. The last chapter critically examines the role of school buses in American public education, and questions whether their operation and designs have actually improved students’ lives and experiences given the many hours they spend on buses each day. Though school buses emerged as a method of desegregation after *Brown v. Board*, it is unclear if this approach has provided equity for marginalized students. In addition, buses represent a “colonial technology” that transports students to schools built on stolen indigenous lands without considering indigenous voices or sovereignty. As a result, school buses do not meet the criteria for effective public transportation since they do not travel frequently or comfortably to desired locations and are not always affordable, when considering the costs of students’ time and dignity. The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted busing and highlighted its dysfunction, but there remains an opportunity to redesign transportation and school structure rather than simply returning to the status quo of unchanged busing which has done little to substantially address inequities in educational opportunity.

Analysis and evaluation

This book provides an in-depth examination of the history and legacy of school desegregation through busing programs, as well as a critical analysis of the role of school busing in American public education. It investigates the short- and long-term effects of busing on marginalized students, explores students’ lengthy commuting experiences, and analyzes the design of buses and how

they exert interactional influence. Due to transportation shortcomings, the work questions whether school busing truly improves students’ experiences or dignity. It also asserts buses represent outdated “colonial technology” and do not address systemic inequities over time. Therefore, the book emphasizes that achieving educational equality by isolated techniques is not sufficient. By reconsidering buses as an educational platform and reimagining transportation structures, the book presents an opportunity to further holistically reform the public education as a means of eliminating deep-rooted inequity and inadequacies that have been persisting since *Brown v. Board* for decades.

By historically reviewing the shortcomings of busing and asking whether busing really improves students’ lives, the book suggests that broader reforms in education, transportation, and community engagement are needed. By presenting thought-provoking issues regarding persistent inequities in public education despite policies such as busing, this important analysis will be of interest to readers seeking insights into education policy and reform. Therefore, the most impressive aspect of the book is the depth and breadth of its historical and critical analysis in evaluating efforts to desegregate schools through busing programmes. It impressively traces in extensive detail the short and long-term effects of busing on marginalised student populations over time. In addition, the book offers an insightful critique of how bus transportation models have influenced student experiences rather than simply fulfilling their functional role, and questions whether commuters truly uphold student dignity. By challenging assumptions about technical solutions and calling for far-reaching educational reforms, the book raises thoughtful implications that are still crucial to the pursuit of full equity that add considerable value.

This book appears to offer a more comprehensive analysis of school desegregation efforts through busing programmes compared to other similar works, as evidenced by several distinguishing factors. Its examination provides unprecedented depth in tracing both the short and long-term historical impact over 65 years since *Brown v. Board*. By taking a systematic view of the issues and calling for holistic reforms in education, transportation, and communities, the book presents a broader perspective compared to more narrowly focused policy analyses. The empirical examination of student experiences, such as lengthy commutes, adds context that has not been fully explored elsewhere. It also distinguishes itself by maintaining contemporary relevance through its implications for educational equity.

Conclusions and limitations

This book challenges the assertion that desegregation through transportation alone is sufficient to achieve full equity by examining both the historical role and limitations of busing, and suggesting that systemic changes are still

needed. The analysis suggests buses should enhance their comfort through redesign, and maximize their platform capabilities. Moreover, critiques of buses as “colonial technology” that do not include indigenous voices have implications for inclusive participation in reforming these structures. Hence, it emphasizes that equal opportunity continues to be a challenge decade after *Brown v. Board* by highlighting the ongoing challenges of equality. To address deep-rooted inequities in educational opportunities through a systemic approach that focuses on the well-being of students and to redress the historical wrongs, requires holistic, multi-pronged reforms in education, transportation, design, and community engagement, not just isolated technical solutions.

While the study offers a comprehensive critique of school desegregation efforts, some potential criticisms are that it could be strengthened by more direct empirical evidence and data to support its claims. Additionally, though arguing existing approaches are insufficient, it does not provide specific alternative policy solutions or frameworks. There is also a risk that the systemic view overlooks the complex policy trade-offs faced by different stakeholders. Applying current sensibilities to historical contexts may not fully account for the political realities that policymakers are confronted with. More direct comparisons to other analyses could reinforce the perspectives on various approaches’ limitations. Furthermore, while student experiences are discussed, they are not independently verified, and the proposed holistic reforms lack clarity on how to operationalize structural changes. In conclusion, while the book offers thoughtful insights, its arguments could be enhanced through additional evidence, clarified solutions, consideration of counterarguments, and more direct analytical comparisons according to this assessment.