

TRACKING Discussion— Project RENEW

Dyad: When you were a student what did you notice about tracking or grouping procedures? How were students separated in your school or classrooms? How did it affect you? How did it affect your classmates? What terms were used to describe the process then? What terms are used now?

Jeanne Oakes in *Tracking and Ability Grouping in American Schools: Some Constitutional Questions* suggests that the following assumptions underlie the practice of tracking:

1. Students differ greatly in academic potential.
2. Separation is necessary to manage the difference.
3. Academic aptitude characteristics are stable and not generally alterable.
4. Classification can be accurately and easily accomplished.

Journal write or dyad (you choose): What do you think about these assumptions?

Some educators claim that some forms of tracking/grouping improve achievement. Others claim that tracking/grouping has the following effects.

1. Different groups or tracks have substantially different educational experiences (both content and method of instruction). The lower groups experience lower quality instruction.
2. The various kinds of interventions designed to compensate for the initial disadvantages brought into school by some children (particularly the poor) decline in number and variety with successive years of schooling.
3. Disproportionate placement of students of color and poor students are found in the low groups.
4. Students in lower groups have lower self-esteem and lower career goals.
5. The level of the group in which a child participated most regularly in the primary grades is highly predictive of track placement later.
6. In general there is a steady decline in both the variety of teaching methods employed and the amount of teacher support, feedback, and corrective guidance provided with progression through the grades. This decline in desirable pedagogical techniques is greater for the low groups.
7. Research has not demonstrated that the grouping and differential treatment that accompanies it have led to gains in student achievement for students in any ability level.
8. The classification process is rarely well-defined or consistently carried out. The placements are often based on standardized test that may not be appropriate (especially for students with language or cultural differences) or administered or used inappropriately. Many decisions are based on subjective information.

[Compiled from *A Place Called School* by J. Goodlad, (chapter 5, "Access to Knowledge") and *Tracking and Ability Grouping in American Schools; Some Constitutional Questions* by J. Oakes.]

Discussion

- What do you think?
- How do we help students with different learning styles, different preparations, different language skills, different mathematical experiences without resorting to practices that provide inferior mathematics education to certain students?

Julian Weissglass

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