

Soc 458 Research Paper

There are various forms of tracking that occurs in most schools.

Tracking can be hard to point out, “although the separations created by tracking—the practice of sorting students into courses based on some measure or estimate of their academic ability (Oakes, 1985)—are less visible, their impact on student outcomes is far more profound” (Noguera, 65).

Thesis: Students that perform well on placement exams are upper to middle class students, who have had opportunities to advance their skills and have had a rich educational childhood. In return, upper class and middle class students are placed in the upper tracks filled with an environment of high achievement. Since this diffusion is creating a major source of discrimination that lasts for the duration of student’s educational career, we need to create a new system that fosters and improves all students’ knowledge and talent.

A common assumption about tracking is that students learn more or better with a group of students all at the same level, a homogeneous grouping. Hundreds of studies have been conducted in the last sixty years that have studied the effects of ability grouping and tracking on student’s learning. After long hours of studies, “the results differ in certain specifics, but one conclusion emerges clearly: no group of students has been found to benefit consistently from being in a homogeneous group” (Oakes, 7). Only a few studies show that students labeled as the brightest learn best when they are given an enriched curriculum, taught in a group of their homogenous peers; yet, most do not. Overall Oakes argues that we can be fairly confident that students on the top tracks are not being help back when they are in mixed classrooms (Oakes, 7). On the other hand, students on the lower end of tracks are consistently negatively affected by the tracking system. “We can be quite certain that the deficiencies of slower students are not more easily remediated when they are grouped together” (Oakes, 8). The assumption that students learn best when they are placed in groups with students that are like themselves

needs to be challenged because studies have found **results proving the opposite**. There is only one person that benefits from students being placed in homogenous groups, the teacher. Oftentimes it is easier to plan lessons for students that are all at the same academic level. Managing a classroom is also easier when students are all learning the material at the same speed. However, while planning lessons and managing a classroom can be easier for teachers with students all at the same level, I would argue that differentiated lesson planning for students of diverse backgrounds can be more beneficial for the students. **Students can learn from each other and be more prepared for the real world where people have to work with others that have different strengths and weaknesses.**

While there are many assumptions about the tracking system being beneficial for all students, tracking systems in place are not even evaluating all of the students' academic levels fairly and therefore hurting all students in the process. Regardless of whether schools have a well defined tracking system laid out in their school, teachers are judging and labeling their students as early as kindergarten. For example, the St. Louis school system provides teachers with a variety of information about the students before the beginning of the school year. Teachers receive parent's concerns about their students in the form of a "Behavioral Questionnaire," a list from the school's social worker about which students are receiving public welfare funds, and information either from experience or from other teachers about the students' older siblings. When kindergarten teachers assess the academic potential of their students, they do not receive any information from knowledgeable sources assessing the student's knowledge. Instead, they receive "social facts about the occupational status of the home, medical care for the

child, attitudes of other teachers, the child's behavior as seen by his parents, and the structure of his family—number of siblings, whether the child lived with one, both, or neither of his natural parents” (Rist, 66). I would argue that while this information can sometimes be useful, it is no way an accurate method of labeling a student into a certain track.