Does Classroom Composition Matter? Tracking and Within School Diversity

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If diversity is a goal, we must

- Identify policies and practices that undermine diversity
- Key culprits:
  - ability grouping in primary grades
  - tracking in secondary grades
Why key culprits?

- Diverse schools resegregated by ability grouping and tracking:
  - African American, Latino, working class students more likely in lower tracks
  - White, Asian American, middle class students more likely in high tracks
Negatives of low tracks

- Separate and unequal education
- Long-lasting negative effects because each year students further behind
- Tracks reproduce social inequality in larger society
How tracking resegregates

- Early identification for gifted program, special education
  - Note: Black males in special education
- Savvy parents ‘work’ the system
- Track placements correlated more with race and class than with ability
Ability grouping and tracking

- Weaken the positive effects of attending diverse a school

- Undermine a school’s capacity for
  - Equity
  - Excellence
Example: The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (NC)

- From 1971-2002 CMS desegregating under *Swann*
- From 1970s to present, CMS tracks
- Tracking racially correlated
- Tracking undermined CMS’s ability to meet *Swann’s* mandate to provide equity and excellence for all students.
2nd Grade Language Battery and English Track Grade 8: Black Students
Figures 1 & 2 show

- CMS middle school tracks highly heterogeneous by “ability”
- Track placements racially correlated
  - 20% of top decile Blacks in gifted English
  - 75% of top decile Whites in gifted English
Evidence on the Benefits of Heterogeneous Classrooms

Benefits for

- English
- Social Studies
- Mathematics
- Science
- Elementary & secondary schools
Example # 1: Preuss School

- Charter School on UCSD campus
- All college prep curriculum
- 700 students 6-12th grade
- All low income families
  - 57% Latino
  - 6% White
  - 3% Other
  - 14% Black
  - 20% Asian
Preuss School  [con’t]

- Only rigorous courses
- Personalized learning environment
- For those without academic preparation
  - Intense academic support
  - Social support

- First graduating class
  - 80% 4 year college
  - 20% 2 year college
Example # 2: South Side High, New York

- 1987 Superintendent acknowledges tracking contributes to gap
- Goal: 2000= 75% Regents diploma
- Steps
  - Over 4 years, exclusive gifted program blended into each elementary classroom
  - Middle school English & social studies detracked
  - Middle school science & math reduced to 2 levels
Example # 2: South Side High [con’t]

- Multiyear plan to detrack the high school
- Results in South South High
  - By 2000 97% of students receive Regents diploma
  - 76% of Special Education students receive Regents diploma
  - 45% of graduates IB diploma candidates
Thank you!