Putting Diversity Research to Work by Overcoming Practical and Political Challenges

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Desegregation

- In the Seattle and Louisville cases...
- US Supreme Court affirmed the importance of diversity in schools.
- But it made creating diverse schools much more difficult.
What are possible race conscious strategies now?

- SES balance
- Language balance*
- Test scores balance
  - Wake County, NC
- Targeting teacher resources
- Theme magnets
- Strategic siting of new schools
Detracking is a Diversity Tool

- Detracking is the process of moving a school toward mixed ability classes.
Detracking

- Requires holistic approach
  - Institutional--plan carefully
  - Instructional--equip educators
  - Normative--change beliefs
Challenge Teacher, Parent, and Administrator Beliefs about Tracking

- When do we begin to group students?
- How do we rationalize sorting students?
- How does sorting affect later opportunities?
- On what assessments do we base placement decisions?
- How accurate/valid are assessments?
- Do we assess effectiveness of placements?
Challenge Teacher, Parent, and Administrator Beliefs about Intelligence

- What is human intelligence?
- Is it one dimensional, multidimensional?
- Is intelligence fixed at birth?
- Is aptitude or hard work more important for successful learning?
- Is it possible to make lessons more accessible to all students?
- In what track do you want YOUR children?
Many educators want to but don’t know how to teach in heterogeneous settings. Provide training for…

- Complex instruction
- Multidimensional classrooms
- Intellectual role playing
Institutional Arrangements

- Detracking often meets resistance
  - Approach #1: Winning them over
  - Approach #2: Taking on critics
Winning them over

- Stable and committed district leaders
- Collect and disseminate data
  - Teachers, parents, community
- First: eliminate the lowest track
- Support, train, and encourage staff
- Support for struggling learners
- Earnest response to parents
Taking On Critics

- Approach similar to “winning them over”

- Cultivation of Political Support
  - Build a political base for detracking among parents of low-track students

- Challenge Beliefs
  - Gifted, average, remedial are acquired, socially constructed labels
Acknowledge the 1000 lb. Elephants

- Elites like tracking because their children benefit from their privileged status in the tracked system

- Detracking opponents’ fears of
  - Diluted quality of instruction
  - Undisciplined students
  - Cultural contamination
  - More competitors for top university seats
Navigating the Politics of Detracking

- School board strategies
- Central office strategies
- Building level strategies
- Secondary school strategies
School Board Strategies

- Commit to principles underlying detracking
- Develop comprehensive reform plan
- Engage the community so all have effective voice
- Public engagement about equity and excellence
- Have reasonable and rigorous detracking standards
Central Office Strategies

- Emphasize basis of detracking:
  - All children can learn,
  - All are entitled to high quality education
- Ensure every school has necessary support
- Incentives for teachers working with heterogeneous groups
- Work with local media
- Augment public relations office with office of community & parent relations
School-level strategies

- Provide teaching staff with knowledge and skills for heterogeneous classes
- Faculty study groups
- Parent advisory groups
- Disseminate information about detracking
Strategies for Secondary Schools

- Create smaller, personalized learning environments
- Phase out all lower level classes
- Provide academic support for students ill prepared for rigorous classes
- Provide college counseling
Practical Resources for Educators

Theory Into Practice

2006 Special Issue devoted to

Detracking and Heterogeneous Grouping

Volume 45 Number 1
Navigating the Politics of Detracking

By Kevin Welner & Jeannie Oakes

- Booklet available free
Thank you!