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# Putting Diversity Research to Work by Overcoming Practical and Political Challenges

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# Desegregation

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- 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?

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- **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

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



# Detracking

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- **Requires holistic approach**
  - **Institutional--plan carefully**
  - **Instructional--equip educators**
  - **Normative--change beliefs**



# Challenge Teacher, Parent, and Administrator Beliefs about Tracking

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- 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

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- **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?**



# Classroom Practices

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- 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

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



# Winning them over

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- **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

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- 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

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- 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

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- **School board strategies**
- **Central office strategies**
- **Building level strategies**
- **Secondary school strategies**



# School Board Strategies

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- **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

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- **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

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





# Strategies for Secondary Schools

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- **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

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- **Theory Into Practice**

2006 Special Issue devoted to

***Detracking and Heterogeneous  
Grouping***

Volume 45 Number 1



# Navigating the Politics of Detracking

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By Kevin Welner & Jeannie Oakes

- Booklet available free
- [http://www.idea.gseis.ucla.edu/  
publications/detracking/index.html](http://www.idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/detracking/index.html)



**Thank you!**

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