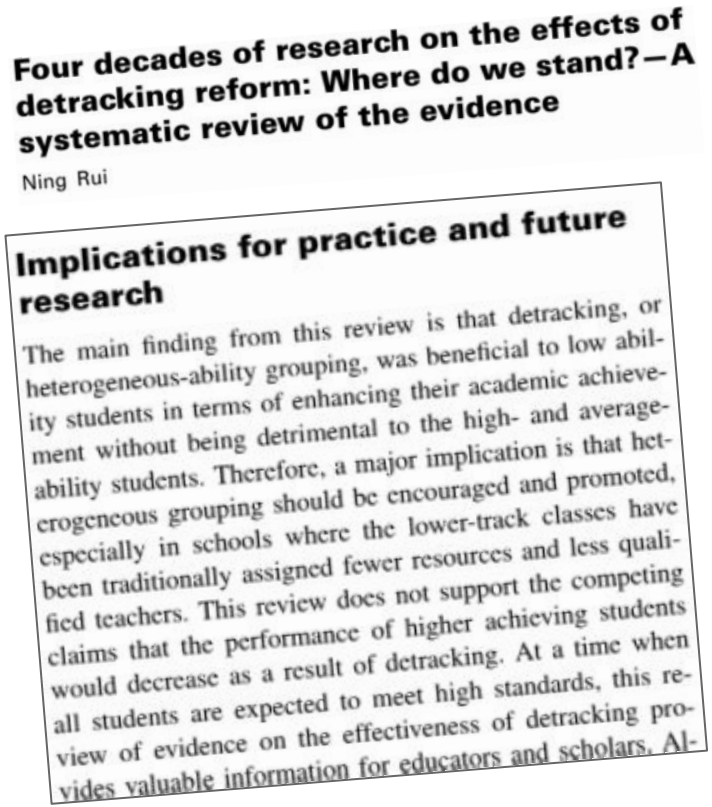
Research on Tracking- Homogeneous Grouping

"Achievement follows from opportunity." (Burris & Wellner, 2005)

Rui (2009) synthesized 4 decades of research on tracking/detracking in a meta-analysis: "The findings suggest that the detracking reform has appreciable effects on low-ability student achievement and no effects on average and high-ability student achievement. Therefore, detracking should be encouraged, especially in schools where lower-track classes have been traditionally assigned fewer resources."



Four decades of research on the effects of detracking reform: Where do we stand?—A systematic review of the evidence

Ning Rui

Implications for practice and future research

The main finding from this review is that detracking, or heterogeneous-ability grouping, was beneficial to low ability students in terms of enhancing their academic achievement without being detrimental to the high- and average-ability students. Therefore, a major implication is that heterogeneous grouping should be encouraged and promoted, especially in schools where the lower-track classes have been traditionally assigned fewer resources and less qualified teachers. This review does not support the competing claims that the performance of higher achieving students would decrease as a result of detracking. At a time when all students are expected to meet high standards, this review of evidence on the effectiveness of detracking provides valuable information for educators and scholars. Al-

Ability Grouping Research Continued...

Other researchers argue that tracking affects all students negatively, regardless of track. Boaler, Wiliam, and Brown (2000) concluded that students in *setted* (tracked) math classes in the United Kingdom experienced a *curriculum polarization* where high-tracked students were forced to move too rapidly through course material and low-tracked students experienced restrictions in their opportunities to learn. This was disadvantageous to both groups, and students in both tracks reported dissatisfaction with their placement.

Beth C. Rubin

Tracking and Detracking: Debates,Evidence, and Best Practices for a Heterogeneous World

WCER Working Paper No. 2009-6
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Tracking and Inequality:
New Directions for Research and Practice

Adam Gamoran

Because track location is correlated with traditional bases of socioeconomic disadvantage, tracking not only widens achievement gaps but also reinforces social inequality (Oakes et al., 1992; Lucas & Berends, 2002). In contrast to socioeconomic status, which has direct effects on track assignment, race and ethnicity affect track assignment indirectly. Minority students whose test scores and socioeconomic backgrounds match those of Whites are no less likely to be placed in high tracks (Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Lucas & Gamoran, 2002; Tach & Farkas, 2006). However, because minority students tend to reach high school with lower test scores and less advantaged socioeconomic circumstances, tracking works to the disadvantage of minority students and contributes to achievement gaps.

Position from NCSM- Math Leadership Organization

Tracking: Policies and Practices Widening the Opportunity Gap

"Tracking is the practice of dividing students into separate classes for high-, average-, and low-achievers."[1] In practice, these might be considered low or high tracks, or some other, similar categorization, and students might be placed into these tracks based on questionable methods using grades and placement exams, perceived ability through teacher recommendation, or non-academic expectations adults have for the students. Much of the research on tracking policies demonstrates the negative effects on certain subgroups of students by denying them access to rigorous coursework.[2]

More generally, a number of studies point to the influence course-taking patterns have on academic outcomes.[3] This influence is true for student subgroups like emergent bilingual students[4] and students from low income backgrounds, different racial and ethnic groups, and different genders.[5] It may disable students from pursuing whatever course of study interests them when they get to high school, college, career or beyond. Tracking becomes worse for students year-over-year, as each consecutive year in a track makes it more difficult to move out of that track.

1 Oakes, 2005
2 Lee & Bryk, 1988; Gamoran, et al, 1997; Cogan, et al. 2001
3 Lee, et al, 1997; Gamoran, 1997; Wang & Goldschmidt, 2003; Riegle-Crumb, 2006; Riegle-Crumb & Grodsky, 2010; Gottfried et al., 2014
4 Umansky, 2016; Thompson, 2017
5 Oakes et al., 1990; Riegle-Crumb, 2006; Long, et al., 2012; Palarady, et al., 2015

Policies and Practices Reducing the Opportunity Gap: Detracking

Detracking is the intentional practice of placing students into heterogeneous classrooms usually in an effort to reduce the opportunity gap and allow all students to learn mathematics at high levels. Detracking requires the interruption of policies that have led to the inequitable sorting of students into mathematics courses. If detracking is to happen, school districts and states must go through the difficult process of establishing a new vision for mathematics teaching and learning that dispels the culture of "low" and "high" students as well as "faster means smarter."

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