The Effects of De-Tracking on Students and Teachers

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A Thesis
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School districts use an array of methods to group students for their academic needs. In years past, many schools have tracked their students. This practice involves placing students in different classes according to their ability levels and past academic record. However, in recent years, some schools have decided to do away with this homogeneous grouping and instead "detrack" their schools, thus grouping students heterogeneously.

The researchers were initially drawn to the subject of tracking through a child psychology course they took together. After studying the topic for their class, they became more interested in how it played out in real schools. They learned that a local middle school had, in 1997, changed their language arts curriculum from one that was grouped homogeneously, or tracked, to one that is now grouped heterogeneously. The researchers wanted to learn how this change affected the administrators, teachers, and students at this school.

**Literature Review**

There are two sides to every coin, and so it is with the topic of tracking in education. One side is in favor of homogeneous grouping in which students are separated into different classes according to their ability, achievement level, and prior learning (Haury & Milbourne, 1999). The other end of the spectrum is in favor of heterogeneous grouping, sometimes referred to as "detracking," in which students of all abilities are placed in the same class (Wheelock, 1992).

Proponents of tracking argue that homogeneous grouping is advantageous to the higher-ability learners. According to Mills' (1998) analysis of recent research on grouping strategies, tracking provides teachers with the opportunity to provide advanced materials for higher-achievers. Gentry (1999) concluded from her research that placing high achievers together in one classroom aids in challenging those students. Loveless (1998) and George, Jenkins, and Morgan (1997) reported that teachers sometimes find it difficult to teach students with the broad range of achievement levels typically found in a heterogeneous environment. As Loveless (1998) explained, it is nearly impossible, for instance, for teachers to guide students through the plot twists of King Lear while simultaneously teaching phonics. Both Ascher (1992) and Stepanek (1999) claim that a slower pace in a heterogeneous setting will not challenge higher-achieving students, thus failing to meet their needs. In Sharon Cromwell's (1999) article on the debate over heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping, an anonymous teacher is quoted as saying:
That ideal [of heterogeneous grouping] is an ideal...Truth is, in our experience the low-end kids tend to pull down the high-end kids, rather than the other way around. The class pace slows, and the teacher has to in effect devise two lesson plans for each period, one for the accelerated students and another for those who have low skills (p.3).

These proponents of tracking feel very strongly that tracking higher-ability students allows these students a classroom setting in which they are pushed and challenged academically. They also feel that a detracked learning environment would slow down these higher-ability students, keeping them from reaching their full potential.

On the other side of the coin, proponents of detracking believe that a heterogeneous setting gives all students equal opportunities to learn, something that tracking denies lower-ability students. Marsh and Raywid (1994) observed that the longer students remain in tracked or homogenous grouped schools, the larger the achievement gap becomes between students in the higher and lower tracks. Students who get placed and stuck in low-level tracks are denied the opportunity to achieve their full potential (Cromwell, 1999) as they "are deprived of the opportunities to develop higher-level skills and study rich content" (Stepanek, 1999, p.2). While high track classes generally prepare students for college, lower track classes often feature a dull curriculum and high amounts of drill and practice in basic skills (Loveless, 1998). In addition, less experienced and less capable teachers are often assigned to teach the lower-track classes (Mills, 1998). Because many times low track classes are used as holding grounds for students with the most severe behavior problems (Loveless, 1998), teachers of the lower-track classes must battle against poor student behavior due to the absence of strong behavioral peer role models in the class (Mills, 1998). "These differences in learning environments particularly depress the academic achievement of poor and minority students, who are assigned disproportionately to low tracks" (Loveless, 1998, p.4). In this way, according to Lockwood (1996), and Oakes and Wells (1998), tracking separates kids along social and economic lines and, as a consequence, upholds segregation. Oakes (1985) asserted that students see tracking as a hierarchical structure and metaphor for their entire lives – those students at the top (upper track) come to believe that elite positions in life are merely their due, while those students at the bottom (lower track) come to believe that they have limited future roles in society. Thus, tracking reinforces social, racial, and economic differences in our American society.
Although there are strong opinions on both sides of the issue, the research on tracking remains inconclusive. According to Loveless (1998), there have been more than seven hundred studies conducted on the topic of tracking and none have been completely successful in resolving the issue. Slavin (1990), a critic of ability grouping, and Kulik and Kulik (1992), a proponent of ability grouping, have conducted meta-analyses of research on ability grouping, and they have reported similar results. Slavin (1990) looked across 29 studies, which included some 25,000 plus students. When looking at the individual studies some show effects that are slightly positive (+0.10) and some show effects that are slightly negative (-0.12). When all studies are combined together the slightly positive effects cancel out the slightly negative effects. This creates a median effect size of .00, indicating no effect. He found that ability grouping has little or no effect on achievement of secondary students, as measured by standardized tests. Slavin pointed out that as the assignment to the low-ability group is not detrimental to student learning and that there is no positive effect of ability grouping, not even for high achievers. Through his meta-analysis Slavin concluded that since ability grouping has no positive effects on student achievement, it should not be put into place in an academic institution.

Kulik and Kulik (1992) looked across a total of 129 studies in their meta-analysis. They examined findings on five distinct types of programs that separated students by ability. Two of these programs, multilevel classes and enrichment and accelerated classes, most closely resemble what is generally considered to be tracking. The program of separating students by ability in multilevel classes consists of dividing students into groups in the same grade (high, middle, and low). They found that the multilevel classes had basically no effect on student achievement levels. The average effect size in these multilevel programs, that included 56 studies, was 0.03. This is consistent with the effect of zero for ability grouping programs found by Slavin (1990). The program of separating students by ability in enrichment and accelerated classes is designed to give students who are high in aptitude richer, more varied educational experiences. Kulik and Kulik (1992) found that enriched and accelerated classes produced moderate-to-large positive effects on student achievement levels. The average effect size in accelerated classes for the gifted and talented was 0.87, indicating a large positive effect on achievement. Therefore, it seems that homogeneous grouping is advantageous for the gifted student population but has no effect (positive or negative) on student achievement in the average and lower ability groups.
While Slavin’s (1990) meta-analysis focused only upon the effects of ability grouping on student achievement, Kulik and Kulik (1992) also looked at the effects that some ability grouping programs had on students’ self-esteem. Thirteen of the 56 studies described effects of multilevel classes on student self-esteem. The average effect size was 0.19 for lower aptitude students, -0.09 for middle, and -0.15 for higher. They showed that the effects of grouping on self-esteem are near zero-overall, though they appear to be slightly positive for low-ability students and slightly negative for high-ability ones (Kulik and Kulik, 1992). This finding is contrary to the viewpoint of Oakes (1985), who claimed that tracking low-ability students has a negative effect on their self-esteem.

Most of the research that we reviewed looked at students and teachers only in a tracked setting. For this study, we chose to conduct research on students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the effects of a change from a homogeneous setting to a heterogeneous one. Specifically, we sought to find out how detracking affected students and teachers.

**Methods**

**Participants**

The researchers chose Midwestern Public Schools to conduct their research because they knew that the middle school in this district had changed its language arts program from one that was grouped homogeneously to one that is now grouped heterogeneously. They chose to conduct research in both the middle school and the high school since several years earlier some high school students had been in middle school during the time of the change. Participants included Midwestern Middle School students, language arts teachers, principal, and Midwestern High School students. The researchers selected the previously mentioned participants to gain insight into how they perceived the change from a homogeneous language arts curriculum to a heterogeneous one.

The researchers interviewed the middle school principal because of his involvement with changing the language arts structure from homogeneous to heterogeneous (see Appendix A for interview questions). The principal identified language arts teachers who had been teaching at the school when the change occurred, and these teachers were also interviewed. These teachers were interviewed because they taught at the middle school when language arts classes were tracked, as well as now, where they are detracked. In addition, teacher surveys were distributed
to all language arts teachers at the middle school (see Appendix A for interview and survey questions).

At the request of the researchers, the middle school principal suggested five middle school students who differed in their academic levels, and the researchers interviewed those students (see Appendix A for interview questions). The principal did not explain the criteria that he used to select the five middle school students who were to be interviewed. The student surveys were given to every language arts teacher in the middle school to pass out to their classes (see Appendix A for survey questions). At the high school, the guidance counselor suggested six students who had attended the middle school during the time of the change and who differed in academic levels. These students were also interviewed (see Appendix A for interview questions). The high school student surveys were given to one honors English class, one average English class, and one basic skills level English class (see Appendix A for survey questions).

**Instruments**

The researchers used three different surveys and four different interviews to obtain information. (See Appendix A for copies of all surveys and interview questions.) The middle school teacher survey consisted of five questions developed by the researchers, and the purpose of the survey was to gain insight into what teachers think about heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping and how they think the switch has affected their teaching styles and their students' learning.

Both the middle school and the high school student surveys consisted of five questions developed by the researchers (see Appendix B for charted results to the survey questions). The purpose of the student surveys was to gain insight on the students' views of homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping in the language arts program. The researchers wanted to know in which setting students feel they learn better and in which setting they feel more comfortable as a learner. The reason for surveying both middle school students and high school students was to see how their views differed and how they were similar. This was especially important since the middle school students have experienced only heterogeneous language arts classes and the high school students have experienced both heterogeneous and homogeneous classes.

During the middle school administrator interview, the researchers inquired about the administrator's reasons for changing the language arts structure, how the change was made, and the administrator's views on the outcomes of the change. During the middle school teacher
interviews, the researchers inquired about the teachers' view on tracking, the transition from homogeneous grouping to heterogeneous grouping, changes that have occurred with their teaching strategies since the change, and their perceptions of the outcomes of the change. During both the middle school and high school student interviews, the researchers inquired about the students' present language arts (or English) class and their perceptions of the effects of having students of different achievement levels present in the same classroom.

**Data Collection**

For both student surveys, middle school language arts and high school English teachers were given a packet of surveys with instructions and a stamped envelope addressed to the researchers. The teacher was instructed to delegate one student to collect the surveys when they were completed. Then that designated student was to place the anonymous surveys into the envelope addressed to the researchers, seal it, and return it to the teacher to drop into the mail. This method ensured confidentiality by keeping the teacher blind as to which students participated and what each student wrote in response to the survey. Of the 175 middle school student surveys passed out, 139 students responded. Of the 75 high school student surveys passed out, 61 students responded.

For the middle school teacher surveys, the researchers placed a survey and a stamped envelope addressed to the researchers into every language arts teacher's mailbox. The teachers were asked to complete the anonymous survey and drop it in the mail. Of the ten middle school teacher surveys passed out, seven teachers responded.

The middle school principal, six middle school teachers, five middle school students, and six high school students were interviewed. All interviews were conducted in a private room with only the researchers and interviewee present. The longer interviews were audio taped with the consent of the interviewee. Interviews lasted between five minutes and one hour.

**Data Analysis**

The researchers organized the surveys they received in the mail by middle school students, high school students, and middle school teachers. The researchers then tallied the responses to the five questions on each survey. These results were put into bar graphs (see Appendix B). Any written remarks that appeared three or more times were highlighted by the researchers to use in the results section if the comments applied to the topic.
The researchers listened to their audio tapes and analyzed their notes of all of the interviews and looked for emerging themes in the interviews. In the administrator's interview, the researchers looked for his main points and those that he spent the most time explaining. In the teachers' and students' interviews, the researchers looked for points that were made three or more times in different interviews. These points became the themes that the researchers focused on.

**Results**

**Middle School Interviews**

**Administrator**

The principal stood in favor of detracking the language arts curriculum at Midwestern Middle School. During his interview, this administrator spoke about three main issues: equity in education, preparation for the change from homogeneous grouping to heterogeneous grouping, and the successful results of the change.

His main argument for detracking was that educators should strive to provide equity in education; that is, every student is allowed the opportunity to receive a challenging education. Equal education, he claimed, was not present in a tracked curriculum. Citing a Carnegie Commission Position Paper (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1990), he said that students should receive equal access to high quality education, something only the upper track students receive in a tracked system. This administrator felt that the staff wasn’t servicing the students as well as they could be as a result of tracking the language arts curriculum. He saw that tracking became a self-fulfilling prophecy with the students. This resulted in a sad story for those students in the lower tracks because they, for the most part, didn’t reach beyond the low bar that was set in front of them.

He had spent time looking at research about the type of education that "gifted" students received and found that these students were exposed to high level thinking and the crucial application piece that connected what was being learned to how the students could use that knowledge. This administrator claimed that all students flourish in that type of environment. However, students on the average and lower tracks were not receiving the application part of the instruction. He said those students are often "drilled to death" about information that they never get a chance to apply to real-life situations. These students received the skills piece of the instruction but were not sure how or when to apply it. He claimed that a tracked system of
De-tracking education is "separate but not equal." Students at the low end of the track get "the short end of the stick" because of their learning differences, home life, and other things over which they have no control. All the while, the upper end of the track are being "taken care of" and, he said, wisely so because that is where the political power in a school system comes from. This wasn't fair, however.

The principal discussed how he had prepared himself and his staff for the change from homogeneous to heterogeneous grouping. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, he had begun research on how to improve the tracking situation at the middle school. Along with looking at research on the types of education offered to different groups, he looked at research on learning styles and meeting students' needs. He generously shared his findings with the staff and encouraged discussion about the issues. Thus, he began laying the groundwork for years ahead of time to prepare teachers for a change in the language arts structure. He wanted teachers and staff "speaking the same language" and knowing the terminology before implementing any new structure. He offered them a lot of information on Gardner's work on multiple intelligences. He said that educators and parents need to understand learning differences in order to reach the equality in education that he was striving for.

According to research by Wheelock (1992), this administrator did take the appropriate steps when he made the decision to detrack the language arts curriculum. Wheelock reviewed the responses of numerous educators from nearly two hundred and fifty schools. The educators responded to detailed questionnaires and interviews about the process of detracking. Wheelock said that for detracking to be successful there must be a strong relationship between the principal and the teachers. The principals, she wrote, should articulate the mission of the school in a variety of arenas and ensure that the mission is fulfilled. This administrator discussed how he had prepared teachers for the change years ahead of time through literature, adopting a common vocabulary, and sending them to workshops and in-services in which they were exposed to current research on detracking.

The administrator also shared his ideas about the success of the change. When asked if the change has been a success, the principal said he felt it is a success in progress, one that is always being improved upon by the teachers and staff. One way to measure the change's success, he said, was to look at standardized test scores. Although he said standardized test scores are not the sole way to measure success, they are helpful in tracking its progress. The
scores of Midwestern Middle School students on these tests have not dipped since the change in 1997. He also said that the test scores showed that 6-14% of students fell into the bottom quartile before the change but only 1-3% of students fell in that bottom quartile after the change to heterogeneous language arts classes. Therefore, the percentage of students in the bottom quartile has significantly decreased since the change. This decrease may be the result of the advantageous environment that a heterogeneous setting provides for low-ability students, the administrator said.

Another way to show that the change has been a success was through the students’ surveys of school satisfaction. At the end of every school year, students at Midwestern Middle School take a survey about their all-around satisfaction with the school. This administrator said that the results of these surveys have not swayed throughout the change. Another positive result of the change, he said, was that the staff has developed a common vocabulary as a learning community, and they also appear to accept risk as a common part of change. According to Ascher (1992), for detracking to be successful, teachers must learn risk-taking skills. Wheelock (1992) agrees, stating that "just as principals in untracking schools are called to be risk-takers, they must foster conditions for risk-taking among their staff" (p. 3).

**Teachers**

The researchers interviewed six middle school language arts teachers who have all been teaching since before the curriculum was changed from a homogenous structure to a heterogeneous one. Regardless of whether they were in favor of or opposed to heterogeneous grouping, the teachers’ responses, for the most part, seemed to agree. The majority of their comments fell into three categories: academic, behavioral, and social aspects of the change.

**Academic.** First, regarding the academic aspects of the change, the teachers talked most about the difficulty in meeting every student's needs in a class that has such a broad range of abilities. Since detracking the language arts program, a couple of teachers said that they have students of all levels whose needs they are not meeting. One teacher stated that she has a class with a reading level range from third grade to tenth grade, which makes it nearly impossible to expect her students to read the same book. It is especially difficult to support her lower-ability students. Some students need things broken down in small increments so that they can see their growth. This provides those students with self-motivation. For one teacher’s students who are more adept at acquiring information, the small incremental steps are way too slow. That, he said,
De-tracking is not fair to them. "If I move to the middle," he told the researchers, "I'm not reaching either side." With detracking, the teachers try to set their classes up to meet all of the students' needs, but he believes that it is in no way as efficient or effective as tracking the students.

Two teachers stressed that most sixth graders are concrete thinkers. But by the time they reach the eighth grade, 50-60% of those students become abstract thinkers. So, one teacher asked, how do you reach those students who are still concrete thinkers? This teacher offered that you must teach them differently than those abstract thinkers. Some of his "basic level" students need practice at sight words in order to progress in language arts. This activity, though, would be demeaning if done with the general population of a heterogeneous class. Therefore, this teacher cannot adequately meet the needs of those students and must resort to telling his classes, "If you're connecting with this, that's awesome. Or if this is over your head, don't worry about it."

One teacher said that she can meet her students' needs, even with the "higher" students. She gives them more work and holds them to a different bar. However, another teacher felt that she is losing students for whom the material is over their heads. She said that she can't possibly meet all of the students' needs. Three teachers mentioned that their higher students are often bored, while some of the lower students are lost and become behavior problems. One of those three teachers said that because the students are at different developmental levels, too often the higher students are teaching the lower students when the higher students should be going on and being challenged. There was frustration in the teachers' voices when they explained their struggle to teach successfully in a heterogeneous environment.

The teachers also discussed their difficulties in planning for heterogeneous classes. One teacher claimed that her preparation was easier with homogeneous grouping, and since the change, it has become more difficult to reach all the students in her classroom. She said that homogeneous grouping is a "breeze" to plan and manage because you have like-minded individuals in the classroom who, for the most part, learn in a similar way. Planning for a heterogeneous class is so much more difficult because she must reach all levels of students in the same classroom. However, another teacher believes it is easier to teach a heterogeneous class. He used to plan for three different tracked classes, which took much time. When classes were tracked, he prepared in a completely different way for the skills class than he did for the advanced class because their thinking ability is different. However, now as he plans for his classes that have all abilities, he aims toward the middle level. This planning, he said, is easier.
Finally, teachers discussed their views on the amount that students learn in the heterogeneous setting. One teacher felt that his students, on all levels, know less when they leave him in May than did those students who were tracked prior to the 1997 change. He said he doesn't do anywhere near the kinds of mental stretching that he used to when the classes were tracked. He said that he believes his students are prepared for high school but not nearly as prepared as those students who were taught in a homogeneous setting. Although the principal said that the standardized test scores show that, at least, the lower level students' scores have risen, standardized tests might not show the type of knowledge to which this teacher was referring. Also, with the heterogeneous classes, three of the six teachers said that they do not cover as much material as they could in years past. These teachers expressed their frustration in their inability to get through all the material that they used to cover before the change to a heterogeneous setting. Interestingly, all of the teachers, even those in favor of detracking, agree that there are negative academic effects associated with heterogeneous grouping.

**Behavioral.** Two teachers thought that detracking is especially good for lower-level learners because those students are now exposed to higher-level learners who model for them how to study and ways to learn. A teacher stated that he has noticed that his "lower" students are inspired and challenged by the "higher" students' study habits and behavior. He said that those who are better at playing the game of education model the behavior for the kids who do not have those models for success at home. However, he argued that it is not the responsibility of his more adept students to teach the less successful students. This, he said, is not fair to them. The way in which detracked classes are set up, though, he feels that he almost has to rely on students teaching each other. Teachers discussed behavior problems in their heterogeneous classes. Many teachers said that some students, especially lower-ability students, feel inferior academically and risk their self-esteem being harmed. When students struggle, behavior problems become a difficulty, another educator said, especially among those who are lower academically. They act out of feeling inferior on an academic level. Those students, she said, have the attitude of "I'd rather be called bad than stupid."

**Social.** Three social themes emerged from the teachers' interviews: students' self-esteem, the idea of social status in the classroom, and how teachers prepare students for the real world. Students' self-esteem, one teacher said, is a huge concern with most teachers. You cannot put a student who is behind with more advanced students because, she said, his self-esteem
would be destroyed. And to prevent that from happening to themselves, students hide that they're behind by not showing what they don't know. Another teacher said that students' self-concept can suffer in a heterogeneous class, especially when they feel academically inferior. Therefore, these teachers feel that heterogeneous grouping hurts students', especially lower-ability students', self-esteem.

Teachers also discussed the idea of social status in the classroom. Many teachers mentioned that students' attitudes often coincided with the track that they were in. For instance, the higher tracked students often had attitudes that they were better than the lower tracked students and vice versa. One teacher mentioned that more status is generally attached to the higher track and thus, social status becomes the students' focus, not the individual student's success and progress. Another teacher said that detracking has pushed aside the notion of there being higher status linked to the higher tracks. Now, he said, the "snobs are gone," and the students are not as "cliquish." For instance, two of the educators said there isn't the "better than thou" attitude from those students who would have been placed in the honors class. The stigma to being in the "dumb" class also no longer exists, and the students are better for it.

Finally, some teachers discussed the idea of preparing students for the real world. One teacher said that she prefers the heterogeneous classes because it is her job as a teacher to prepare students for the real world. Students need to work on their interpersonal communication skills and learn to get along with different personality types and learning styles. And within a heterogeneous classroom there is a diversity of learning styles and personalities that one may not find, three teachers mentioned, in a homogeneous setting. Because we are always going to have to work in diverse groups, heterogeneous grouping is more like real life than homogeneous grouping is. One teacher believes that the biggest problem with tracking is that students lack the opportunity to develop social skills. She has noticed in her detracked language arts classes that there is a sense of community, something that was lacking when classes were tracked. Another educator said that with all levels of students within the same class, the kids get to see "the other half of the world." In conclusion, it seems that all of the teachers recognize the social benefits of the heterogeneous grouping within their classrooms.

In summary, it seems that the way in which the change affected the teachers depended on whether they were concerned most with students' social needs or their academic ones. The two teachers who were in favor of homogeneous grouping were focused more toward the students'
academic needs. They are specifically concerned with meeting their students' needs on an individual level. This finding is consistent with Spear's qualitative study (cited in Mills, 1998) of how and why teachers think as they do about ability grouping. He found that teachers who are in favor of tracking are more subject-centered, focusing on students' academic needs. With tracking, teachers who are more focused on students' individual academic needs can challenge higher achieving students with faster paced and more demanding lessons as well as provide support and critical attention that lower achieving learners require (Mills, 1998).

Two other teachers seem to be focused equally on students' social and academic needs. It seems that they feel torn about whether to be in favor of homogeneous grouping and reach the students academically or to be in favor of heterogeneous grouping and do a great service to the students socially. These teachers recognize the social benefits as well as the academic pitfalls of heterogeneous grouping; thus, they are in the middle. The stigma attached to the tracked classes is gone, but these teachers still feel that they are not reaching all of the students academically, at least not like they did when they taught in the homogeneous structure. Their feelings are representative of the vast array of research completed about these two grouping strategies. As Haury and Milbourne (1999) put it:

one of the problems in attempting to make a decisive stand on the issue of tracking is the array of conflicting results from individual studies; despite all the debate over the issue of tracking, there has been no rigorous, large-scale study to provide a definitive accounting of the costs and benefits of tracking (p. 2).

As stated in the research, these teachers have not taken a definite stand on which is better for the students, homogeneous or heterogeneous grouping.

Finally, the remaining two teachers were in favor of detracking and were very focused on their students' social experience. Both teachers believe that grouping students heterogeneously is giving the students the most positive social environment, and reducing the focus on academic status differences. This goes along with Oakes (1992) who says that tracking often creates negative perceptions of lower-ability students that affect those students' self-esteem and self-perceptions.
Even though each teacher's focus may differ slightly from the next teacher, each seems to be doing their best to meet their students' needs, both academically and socially, given the current heterogeneous structure. It is interesting to note that the principal's justification for detracking the school centered on issues of educational equity; however, this equity theme was not even mentioned in the teachers' interview responses. Even the two teachers in favor of heterogeneous grouping focused on the social needs of their students. One might expect that they would have similar reasoning for their belief that heterogeneous grouping is the best learning environment for the students.

**Students**

As with the teachers, the middle school students' responses seemed to fall into the categories of academic, behavioral, and social effects. We found that the middle school students responded in similar ways and their interviews were fairly short (lasting only five to ten minutes in length). In regards to the academic effects that heterogeneous grouping has had on the students, all five of the students interviewed said that their language arts class is just about right when it comes to how challenging it is. When asked whether the whole class learns a lot in language arts class, many students said that students do learn a lot. Those who do not learn much, students said, choose not to learn. Two students said that the "lower" students hold up class for everyone else. This structure, one student said, holds some people back and keeps them from being challenged, which is not good preparation for high school. Sometimes, the teacher has to re-teach concepts a few times, leaving the students who do understand feeling bored. One student even mentioned that the instruction is too complicated for the "lower" students, and they get confused.

The students noted some behavioral effects that the current grouping structure has on them. Of the five middle school students interviewed, three of them noted that in the heterogeneous setting, the "lower" students get help from the "higher" students. One eighth grade student even said, "the lower students are inspired to do better by seeing the higher students in their class."

Also, students pointed out the social aspects of having heterogeneous language arts classes. Four students said that there aren't cliques in the class and everyone works together. An eighth grade student mentioned that you get to hear different opinions that you wouldn't if you were in a tracked setting. Two of the students who were interviewed mentioned that everyone
knows who the "high kids are and who the low kids are" even though they are in the same classroom.

Students and teachers seem to agree on most of the social and academic points, yet the students do not seem to feel strongly in favor of heterogeneous or homogeneous grouping. The students noticed both the positive and negative aspects of their current heterogenously grouping language arts classes. In conclusion, they seem comfortable in their classes.

**Middle School Surveys**

**Middle School Teacher Survey**

Teachers were given a survey of five inquiries to answer. (See Appendix A for survey and Appendix B for result charts.) Seven language arts teachers responded, and their answers were varied. These seven teachers have been teaching at Midwestern Middle School an average of 14.57 years.

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<th>No</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
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<td>1. Were teachers part of the decision to detrack?</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2. On the following scale, what’s your view of tracking? (0 = disagree; 10 = agree.)</td>
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<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3. Was preparation/support for detracking given to you?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4. Do you believe the outcomes of the detracking decision have been mostly positive?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It seems that the teachers' survey responses were right in sync with their interviews. For question one, a majority believe that they were not involved in the decision to detrack the curriculum, which is in line with the administrator interview in which he stated that it was ultimately his decision to change. In question two, the majority of the teachers responded that they disagree with tracking. Two teachers ranked themselves on the other end, being in favor of tracking. It is interesting to see that from question three, four teachers believe that they were given support and
preparation for the change. This goes along with what the principal said about preparing his staff years before the change. No teacher answered that they were not given preparation, although, interestingly, three teachers remained undecided. Finally, in their responses to question four, a majority of teachers believe that the outcomes of the change have been mostly positive. From the results of the teachers’ surveys, it seems that there is a general support of detracking among the teachers at Midwestern Middle School.

**Middle School Student Survey**

Middle school students from grades six through eight were given a survey of five inquiries to answer. (See Appendix A for survey and Appendix B for result charts.) The responses from the first two questions indicate that on the whole, most students feel that the level of difficulty and the pace of their class are just about right. Because some of the teachers had mentioned that some of the material is over the heads of the lower-ability learners, the researchers anticipated more students reporting difficulty. The actual results may indicate that students do not like to admit (even anonymously) that they are struggling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is your language arts class too easy, too difficult or just about right?</td>
<td><strong>Too Easy</strong> 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you feel you are struggling or the pace is too fast in your language arts class?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong> 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do you think all of the students in your language arts class are at the same or different achievement levels?</td>
<td><strong>Same</strong> 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you feel intimidated by other students in class because of their achievement level?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong> 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you feel held back from your full potential by other students’ level of achievement?</td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong> 18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In response to the third question, most students recognize that their language arts class is comprised of students of differing academic levels. Although students do recognize achievement differences in the classroom, there is no indication that there is any stigma attached to these
levels. For instance one student wrote the following comment on his survey: “I don’t think there should be tracking in schools, because you can tell it separates smart people from dumb people, and people get made fun of for that.” This comment indicates that this student feels that tracking could contribute to social discrimination, something he is not experiencing in his current class. Many of the teachers spoke to this issue. Their opinions agree with those of the students in that the arrogant attitudes are not much of a problem in the heterogeneous classes. Finally, in response to the last two questions, students do not seem to feel intimidated or held back by other students in their classes. Their responses are consistent with those of one teacher who said that she thought that she could reach all of her students’ learning needs in a heterogeneous setting.

For the most part, these results show that students do not think that they are struggling or being held back by other students. The students’ responses are consistent with the responses of the teachers who prefer heterogeneous grouping. Since these students have never experienced a homogeneous language arts class, they cannot compare homogeneous and heterogeneous classes like the teachers were able to do. Whatever the reason, it seems that, at least from the surveys, students are comfortable in their class of mixed abilities.

**High School Interviews**

There were six students interviewed at the high school level from three language arts levels: one from the upper track, three from the “average” track, and two from the lower track. The students from these interviews attended Midwestern Middle School when the change was made in the language arts curriculum in 1997 from homogeneous grouping to heterogeneous grouping. Once these students reached high school (Midwestern H.S.) the language arts curriculum returned to tracked or homogeneous, where there were three levels of language arts classes, as stated above. Though the middle school students’ and teachers’ responses seemed to fit into the categories of academic, behavioral, and social effects, the high school students’ responses seemed to fit only into the categories of academic and social effects.

Many of the responses from these high school students surfaced around the academic effects of tracking and heterogeneous grouping. Upper and average track students spoke only about the negative academic effects of detracking. One theme amongst upper and average track students was that the slower kids slow down the class in a heterogeneous setting. One student explained that slower students slowed him down so much during middle school that he became lazy in high school, and now he chooses to be in average tracked class because he does not want
to work hard. These upper and average students felt as if they were not being challenged. The upper track student, for example, explained that she was very upset with her detracked middle school class because she was a very hard-working student and wanted to be challenged. She said that she felt as if she were wasting an entire year of education. One average tracked student believed that students who can excel deserve an opportunity to excel even more. Although average and upper track students appear to feel that there are no benefits for themselves in heterogeneous grouping, they do see a benefit of low track students being challenged. In contrast to students in the other two tracks, lower track students spoke mainly about the negative academic effects of tracking. Interestingly, both lower track students stated that slower kids slowed them down within a tracked environment, which differs greatly from the upper and average track students who stated that slower kids slowed down the class within a detracked environment. The low track students explained that their lower track classes were not challenging. The other low track student felt as if he had been placed in the low track in high school and would be stuck there throughout his high school career. This student also identified a benefit of detracking when commenting that being in a detracked setting would allow slower kids the opportunity to compete more and be more challenged. As researchers we found it very intriguing that the upper and average track students spoke predominantly about the negative academic effects of detracking, while the lower track students spoke predominantly about the negative academic effects of tracking. This finding may suggest that the upper and average track students prefer learning academically in a homogeneous setting and that the lower track students may prefer learning academically in heterogeneous setting.

A number of these student responses also focused upon the social effects of heterogeneous grouping. The upper track student spoke only of the negative social effects of detracking. She explained that the lower students felt “stupid” because the higher students were bored and already knew the concepts. Two average tracked students explained that a tracked setting breeds cliques in high school, getting in the way of social interaction. These average track students focused on the positive social effects of detracking. One of these average track students explained that a heterogeneous setting made for more conversations, facilitated the development of students’ social skills, and helped students to learn about others’ characteristics. The other average track student explained that the heterogeneous setting prepared her better for the “big world.” She went on to explain that a heterogeneous setting would prepare her better for
college and for real life. Contrary to the upper and average track students who spoke only about the social effects of detracking, one lower track student spoke about the social effects of tracking. This lower track student made a very interesting comment. He said that being in the lower track bothered him because some of the students in the higher tracks at the school would tell him that he was in the “dumb English class.” He explained that those harsh words truly hurt his feelings. As researchers we again found it very interesting that the upper and average track students spoke only about the social effects of detracking, while the lower track students spoke only about the negative social effects of tracking. We believe that this suggests that upper track students would prefer the social environment of a homogeneous setting, while average and lower track students would prefer the social environment of a heterogeneous setting.

**High School Surveys**

A total of 68 students were surveyed at the high school level: 26 students from the average track, 25 from the upper track, and 17 from the lower track. These high school students were given a survey of five questions to answer. (See Appendix A for survey and result charts.) The table below summarizes the answers of the students from the three different high school tracks to questions 1 and 2 from the survey. We grouped those responses ranging from zero to three into the category for strongly disliked, the responses from four to seven into the category for neutral, and the responses from eight to ten into the category for strongly enjoyed. Within each category block are listed the number of responses from upper, average, and lower track students with the corresponding percentages indicated in parentheses.

**Table 3.1. Summary of responses to high school teacher survey (questions 1 and 2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. On a scale of 0-10 how would you rate your heterogeneous language arts classes?</td>
<td>0-3 (Strongly Disliked)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper -12 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average - 3 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower - 2 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. On a scale of 0-10 how would you rate your tracked language arts classes?</td>
<td>Upper - 1 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average - 2 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower - 5 (33%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey results indicate that the upper track students strongly disliked the heterogeneous class, but they strongly enjoyed the tracked class. When looking at the above table, one can see that upper track students have the strongest feelings against heterogeneous classes (48%) and for tracked classes (76%). According to the research of Kulik and Kulik (1992), these upper track students are the ones who suffer the most academically from heterogeneous learning. These results parallel the comments of the upper track student interviewed who was very adamant about learning better in a tracked setting. The responses to the first two questions indicated that the average track students were predominantly neutral regarding both heterogeneous (61%) and tracked (56%) classes. However, one third of the average track students indicated that they strongly enjoyed the tracked classes, while only 22% expressed a preference for the heterogeneous classes. This differential might suggest that average track students prefer the tracked class. Some of them had very positive things to say about tracking, while others had very negative things to say about tracking. The lower track students’ results indicated that they were primarily neutral in their feelings toward heterogeneous classes (53%), and evenly distributed in their feelings on tracked classes (33% for all three categories) suggesting that they were neither strongly for or against tracked classes.

Table 3.2. Summary of responses to high school student survey (questions 3-5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Within which class did you learn better?</td>
<td>TRACKED CLASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HETEROGENEOUS CLASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper – 20 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper – 4 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average – 9 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average – 10 (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower – 8 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower – 9 (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Which class was better tailored to your</td>
<td>TRACKED CLASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>academic needs?</td>
<td>HETEROGENEOUS CLASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper – 19 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper – 4 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average – 12 (63%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average – 7 (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower – 6 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower – 11 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If you could choose would you rather be</td>
<td>TRACKED CLASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a tracked or a heterogeneous English class?</td>
<td>HETEROGENEOUS CLASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper – 18 (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upper – 5 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average – 10 (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average – 9 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower – 5 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower – 11 (69%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The responses to question three indicated that only upper track students thought that they learned much better within a tracked class, while average and lower track students were pretty evenly divided in declaring which class they thought they learned better in. For question four most of the upper track students (83%) and average track students (63%) reported that the tracked setting tailored more to their academic needs than did the heterogeneous setting. In contrast, most of the lower track students (65%) believed that the heterogeneous setting tailored more to their academic needs. Thus, overall, most of the students surveyed thought that a tracked class tailored more to their academic needs. The responses to question five clearly indicate that upper track students would rather be in a tracked class and lower track students would prefer to be in a heterogeneous class. The average track students, however, were pretty evenly split on this question. In the high school student interviews we saw that the average track students believed their academic needs were met better in a tracked setting, while they felt that their social needs were met better in a heterogeneous setting. Thus, it is not surprising that the average track students are split on which grouping arrangement they prefer.

**Summary/Conclusions**

What do these data say about how the change from homogeneous to heterogeneous grouping has affected the students and teachers at Midwestern Middle School? We found that regardless of their stance on homogeneous grouping, most participants agreed on how the change affected the students. Most of the teachers and students agreed that the change has brought with it social benefits, such as the near elimination of social status being linked directly with the tracks students are in. Therefore, it appears that de-tracking has lead to an improved social environment in classrooms. Furthermore, most teachers agreed that they cannot cover as much material in their heterogeneous classes as they could in their homogeneous ones, and as a result they believe the students do not learn as much. Though not mentioned by any of the teachers whom we interviewed, many educators today question the goal of racing through textbooks "covering" and brushing over as much material as possible; rather, they believe teachers should slow down to "uncover" material, allowing for students to unveil new worlds. In other words, quality of coverage is regarded by some as more desirable than quantity of coverage. One point that the teachers disagree on is whether planning for de-tracked classes is more difficult. It is interesting that the teachers who favor tracking consider planning for tracked classes to be more difficult, while those favoring de-tracking believe planning for de-tracked classes to be more
difficult. This might suggest that teachers will put more effort into whichever approach they favor. The students identified several ways in which they were affected by de-tracking. First, they said that sometimes the higher ability students can help the lower ability students, but at the same time, they said that often the lower ability students slow down the pace of the class for other students. Also, some students feel they are not being challenged in the de-tracked classes. Finally, many students commented on the social benefits of de-tracking. For example, some students said that they enjoyed having a variety of opinions within the same class.

We also found that teachers and students who were in favor of homogeneous grouping focused on academic benefits while those who were in favor of heterogeneous grouping focused on social benefits. Those teachers who were in favor of tracking said that they cannot challenge students as much as they could when the classes were tracked. Instead of the higher ability students being able to go on to do more challenging work, they were being asked to assist the lower ability students. Although some teachers frowned on this practice, it should be noted that helping other students to learn material is often a challenge in and of itself and may even further the helpers’ understanding of the material. In fact, the students seem to like the idea of helping each other. The teachers in favor of de-tracking said that the heterogeneous class is more like the real world, which aids in developing students’ social skills. Among high school students who have experienced both heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping, high-tracked students prefer tracking while the lower-tracked students prefer de-tracking. Like the middle school teachers, the high school students from the higher tracks also focused on the academic benefits of tracking. They felt that they learn more in a tracked environment. These higher ability students said that they are challenged in tracked classes and bored in heterogeneous classes. In contrast, the lower tracked students did not say much about the academic or social benefits of detracking. Rather, they commented mostly about the negative social aspects of tracking, which apparently pushed them to favor de-tracking. For average students, the choice between tracking and detracking does not appear to matter much; they seem able to function satisfactorily in either setting. Average students saw the academic advantages to tracking and social advantages to detracking. When asked which they preferred, the average students were evenly split.

It is interesting that, although middle school teachers saw self-esteem as an issue within a detracked classroom, the middle school students did not see it as an issue. Those middle school teachers in favor of homogeneous grouping felt that teaching to such a wide range of abilities in
a detracked setting would destroy the self-esteem of many students, especially those who would fit into the lower track. For example, one of these teachers explained that some of his low level students needed practice at sight words to progress in language arts, but he felt that it would be demeaning to the general population of students to teach this in a detracked class. It is likely, however, that this type of activity would be demeaning to middle school students regardless of whether they were in a tracked or detracked setting. The students would disagree with these teachers’ ideas. Throughout the students’ interviews, there was no mention of students having self-esteem issues because of de-tracking. Some of the students explained that some of the “lower” students would get help from the “higher” students. One student even explained that “the lower students are inspired to do better by seeing the their students in their class.” Apparently students and teachers have different perceptions on how students are affected by de-tracking.

Finally, our research revealed that the Midwestern Middle School principal and teachers had different concerns when it came to homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping. The principal spoke much about educational equity, particularly academic equity, while the teachers said hardly anything about that topic. The principal stressed the importance of exposing students to the same high level thinking content and activities, including the application piece. Although some teachers, especially those in favor of tracking, focused on academic effects, they did not appear to be concerned with academic equity in the same way that the principal was. They spoke primarily about the need to challenge the higher ability students. Other teachers, especially those in favor of de-tracking, spoke mainly about the social benefits of de-tracking. They never cited academic equity as a concern.

Limitations

One limitation of this research is the small number of students that were interviewed. It would have been interesting and helpful to gather more opinions from more students. Another limitation is the amount of time spent on some interviews. Because of scheduling conflicts, some interviews were under tight time constraints. It would have been helpful to have more time to gain a better understanding of participants’ feelings. A third limitation of this research is that some of the terminology used for the student interviews and surveys may have caused some confusion since it may have been unfamiliar to some participants.
Implications

One implication drawn from this research is that when a school plans to de-track a curriculum, it might be desirable for teachers and administrators to develop a common vision to achieve. The principal at Midwestern Middle School focused heavily on educational equity, a theme that did not come up in any of the teachers’ responses. The teachers focused on academic and social aspects of grouping, items about which the principal spoke little or nothing. It seems it would be helpful to have everyone on the same page so that everyone’s actions are striving to meet the same goal.

The research raises a question: are we sacrificing academic endeavors for social ones with heterogeneous grouping? It also made the researchers wonder which is more important, the social or academic aspect, and what the goal of a teacher should be. The participants agree on most of the ways in which the change has affected the students; however, there are differences in their views of tracking. Some teachers feel that they are giving their students an education in academics and also in social behavior and interaction within the heterogeneous class. Others think that they could be doing a better job at academically preparing their students in a different setting. If the participants agree that detracking has positive social affects on students and some negative academic affects, then does detracking sacrifice academic pursuits for social ones?

Finally, this study suggests that there is a need for additional research and observations of both tracked and de-tracked classes in order to gain further understanding of how detracking affects students and teachers.
References


Appendix A
Surveys and Interviews
Middle School Administrators Interview Questions

[2-3 Administrators]

- What were the reasons behind the decision to detrack?
- How was the decision to detrack made? Who was involved?
- What type of preparation/support were the teachers given?
- Do you think this has been a successful change? Why? Or why not?
- Why has only language arts been detracked and not math and/or science?
Middle School Language Arts Teacher Interview Questions

(2-3 per grade = 6-9 teachers)

- What is your view on tracking? Explain or give reasons.
- What part, if any, did you play in making the decision to detrack?
- Do you feel that this preparation and support were adequate? Why or why not?
- Have your teaching strategies changed since detracking? If so, how?
- Do you think this has been a successful change? Why? Or why not?
- What have been the most positive outcomes of this change? Why do you think so?
- What have been the most negative outcomes of this change? Why do you think so?
- What do the students think of the change? What makes you think so?
- Is detracking supported by parents and teachers? What makes you think so?
- Would you prefer old or new system? Why?
- Why has only language arts been detracked and not math and/or science?
Middle School Student Interview Questions

[4 students]

- Is your language arts class too easy, too difficult, or just about right? Why do you think so?
- Are there any advantages to [good things about] having students of different abilities in the same class? Explain.
- Are there any disadvantages to [problems with] having students of different abilities in the same class? Explain.
- Do you feel you learn a lot in language arts? Why or why not?
- Do you feel the entire class learns a lot in language arts? Why or why not?
High School Student Interview Questions

[4 students; 2 lower track, 2 upper track]

• Do you prefer to be in English classes with other students who are at your same academic level or with students who are at different academic levels? Why?
• How did you feel when your middle school language arts class switched from "same ability" to "differing ability" classes? Why?
• How did you do in the changed class?
• Did you learn better in the "same ability" or in the "different ability" classes? Why?
Detracking Middle School Teacher Survey
(B1)

This is an anonymous survey, your name is not required.

The following is a survey regarding the change from homogeneous language arts classes (also known as “tracking” or ability grouping) to heterogeneous classes (also known as “detracked” classes) that took place at Mattawan Middle School a couple of years ago. This survey will aid in the research of the senior honors thesis of Jake Bultema and Kristen Scranton who are both education majors at Western Michigan University.

- What year did you begin teaching language arts at Mattawan Middle School?

- Were teachers part of the decision to detrack? YES  NO (circle one)

- On the scale below, what is your view of tracking?
  (Totally disagree) 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 (Totally agree)
  Explain your reasoning below.

- Was preparation and/or support for detracking given to you? YES  NO (circle one)

- Do you believe that the outcomes of the detracking decision have been mostly positive? YES  NO (circle one)
  Pleases explain your reasoning.

If you wish, please elaborate on any of the questions above or give any comments you may have regarding tracking at Mattawan Middle School.

Special Note – Please return this survey in the attached stamped envelope at your earliest convenience. Thanks for your time.
Detracking Middle School Students Survey

This is an anonymous survey, your name is not required.
There are no "right" answers to this survey, the researchers merely want to hear your honest opinion.

- Is your language arts class too easy, too difficult, or just about right? (circle one)
- Do you feel you are struggling or the pace is too fast in your language arts class? YES  NO (circle one)
- Do you think all of the students in your language arts class are at: (circle one of the following) SAME  or  DIFFERENT achievement levels?
- Do you feel intimidated by other students in class because of their achievement level? YES  NO (circle one)
- Do you feel held back from your full potential by other students' level of achievement? YES  NO (circle one)

Extra Comments:

Thank you for your time and honesty.
Detracking High School Students Survey
(B3)

This is an anonymous survey; your name is not required.
There are no "right" answers to this survey, the researchers merely want to hear you honest opinion.

When you were attending Mattawan Middle School, the language arts curriculum switched from same ability classes (ie. Honors, average, and basic levels) called "tracked" classes to classes that had different abilities in them (called heterogeneous classes.)

TRACKED = SAME ABILITY
HETEROGENEOUS = DIFFERENT ABILITY

The following survey is about this change that you experienced.

Rate the following (0= completely disliked; 5= neutral feeling; 10= completely enjoyed):
- 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 Heterogeneous language arts classes
- 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 Tracked language arts classes

• Within which class did you learn better? (circle one)
  TRACKED CLASS or HETEROGENEOUS CLASS
  Why?

• Which class was better tailored to your academic needs? (circle one)
  TRACKED CLASS or HETEROGENEOUS CLASS

• If you could choose, would you rather be in a tracked or a heterogeneous English class? (circle one)
  TRACKED CLASS or HETEROGENEOUS CLASS
  Why?

Comments:

Thank you for your time and honesty.
Appendix B
Charted Results
How middle school students feel about the level of difficulty in their current language arts class

Figure 1.1: Middle School Student Survey Question One

Do middle school students feel they are struggling/pace is too fast in their language arts class

Figure 1.2: Middle School Student Survey Question Two
Whether students think that all students in their language arts class are at the same or different achievement levels

Figure 1.3: Middle School Student Survey Question Three

Whether students, because of their achievement levels, feel intimidated by other students in class

Figure 1.4: Middle School Student Survey Question Four
Whether students feel held back from their full potential by other students' level of achievement

Figure 1.5: Middle School Student Survey Question Five
Whether or not teachers felt they were involved with the decision to detrack the language arts classes

Figure 2.1: Middle School Teacher Survey Question One

On a scale of 0-10, what are the Middle School language arts teachers' views of tracking?
Whether or not teachers felt they were given preparation/support for detracking

Figure 2.3: Middle School Teacher Survey Question Three

Whether Middle School teachers believe that the results of detracking have been mostly positive

Figure 2.4: Middle School Teacher Survey Question Four
HONORS HS ENGLISH: On a scale of 0-10, what are the high school students' views on heterogeneous language arts classes?

Figure 3.1A: HS Student Survey Question One

AVERAGE HS ENGLISH: On a scale of 0-10, what are the high school students' views on heterogeneous language arts classes?

Figure 3.1B: HS Student Survey Question One
BASIC SKILLS HS ENGLISH: On a scale of 0-10, what are the high school students' views on heterogeneous language arts classes?

![Bar chart]

HONORS HS ENGLISH: On a scale of 0-10, what are the high school students' views on a tracked language arts class?

![Bar chart]
AVERAGE HS ENGLISH: On a scale of 0-10, what are the high school students' views on tracked language arts classes?

BASIC SKILLS HS ENGLISH: On a scale of 0-10, what are the high school students' views on a tracked language arts class?
HONORS HS ENGLISH: Which class did students feel they learn better?

Figure 3.3A: HS Student Survey Question 3

AVERAGE HS ENGLISH: Which class did students feel they learned better?

Figure 3.3B: HS Student Survey Question 3
BASIC SKILLS HS ENGLISH: Which class did students feel they learned better?

HONORS HS ENGLISH: Which class is better tailored to students' academic needs?
AVERAGE HS ENGLISH: Which class is better tailored to students' academic needs?

Figure 3.4B: HS Student Survey Question Four

BASIC SKILLS HS ENGLISH: Which class is better tailored to students' academic needs?

Figure 3.4C: HS Student Survey Question Four
HONORS HS ENGLISH: Would you rather be in a tracked or heterogeneous English class?

![Bar Chart]

Number of Students

Figure 3.5A: HS Student Survey Question Five

AVERAGE HS ENGLISH: Would you rather be in a tracked or a heterogeneous English class?

![Bar Chart]

Number of Students

Figure 3.5B: HS Student Survey Question Five
BASIC SKILLS HS ENGLISH: Would you rather be in a tracked or heterogeneous English class?

Figure 3.5C: HS Student Survey Question Five