

# ***We Must Stop Sorting Students: One Teacher's Experience with Detracking***

**Mark Ellis, Ph.D., NBCT, CSU Fullerton**

**David Rhodes, Lathrop Intermediate - SAUSD**

# Flow of Ideas

1. Quick history of tracking → detracking
2. Context of Dave's teaching
3. Detracking, slowly but surely
4. Student outcomes

# Early 1900s Pseudo-Science



Belief: Intelligence  
(including math ability) is  
related to race.

# Rationale for Tracking

## INTELLIGENCE TESTS AND SCHOOL REORGANIZATION

BY

LEWIS M. TERMAN; VIRGIL E. DICKSON  
A. H. SUTHERLAND; RAYMOND H. FRANZEN  
C. R. TUPPER AND GRACE FERNALD



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National Education Association*

**“...we have come to realize the necessity of a differentiated course of study for pupils progressing along each of the so-called tracks...We may refer to these as classes for the ‘gifted,’ ‘bright,’ ‘average,’ ‘slow,’ and ‘special’ pupils.”**

**(Lewis Terman, 1922, pp. 18–19)**

# Beliefs about Math Ability

“[The] increase in the school population has given us a wider sampling of the general public and hence has in all probability lowered the level of ability...”

Raleigh Schorling, NCTM President, 1926



# Effects of Tracking

Over 85% of U.S. schools track, and track assignment is strongly correlated with demographic markers.

Low-track students experience...

- narrow curriculum
- low expectations
- teacher-led lessons
- limited academic success

# What Must Change?

- Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2006; 2008)
- Access to Rigorous Curriculum & Supports (Burris, Heubert, & Levin, 2006)
- Opportunities for Reasoning and Sense-Making (Boaler & Staples, 2008)
- Socially/Culturally Relevant Learning (Battey, 2013; Berry & Ellis, 2013; Kisker, 2012)

***Policies and Practices Must Reflect New Beliefs and Understandings about Student Potential!***

# Context

## Lathrop Intermediate

- 90% low income
- 75% English learners
- Most densely populated city in U.S.
- 90+ gangs
- Declining enrollment
- Teacher staffing issues



***TONS OF  
POTENTIAL!***

# Student Work 2013-14

Probability Practice Problems.pdf - Adobe Reader

File Edit View Window Help

17 / 20

Tools Sign Comment

There are 10 counters in a bag: 3 are red, 2 are blue and 5 are green. If all 10 counters are mixed in a bag, what is the probability that Maxine will NOT pick a red counter?

11.00 x 8.50 in

14 - Statistics - Data ... Daily Agenda - Rhod... Probability Practice ... Screen Recorder 11:15 AM

Detailed description: This is a screenshot of a computer screen showing a PDF document in Adobe Reader. The document contains a probability problem. The window title is 'Probability Practice Problems.pdf - Adobe Reader'. The menu bar includes 'File', 'Edit', 'View', 'Window', and 'Help'. The toolbar shows various icons for navigation and editing, with a page indicator showing '17 / 20'. On the right side of the toolbar, there are buttons for 'Tools', 'Sign', and 'Comment'. The main content area of the PDF is enclosed in a dashed border and contains the text: 'There are 10 counters in a bag: 3 are red, 2 are blue and 5 are green. If all 10 counters are mixed in a bag, what is the probability that Maxine will NOT pick a red counter?'. Below the text is a large empty space for writing. At the bottom of the window, the dimensions '11.00 x 8.50 in' are visible. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows several open applications: '14 - Statistics - Data ...', 'Daily Agenda - Rhod...', 'Probability Practice ...', and 'Screen Recorder'. The system tray on the right shows the time as '11:15 AM' and various system icons.

# A little story...

*I've taught only at Lathrop Intermediate...*

- Student Teaching - Spring 2006
  - Observed “Honors” and “Everyone Else” Tracks
  - “To take students deeper into content”
- Teacher of Record - Fall 2006
  - Only the “Everyone Else” Track
  - Wanted them to go “deeper” too

# A little story...

- Mentor Teachers
  - Well respected, solid teachers
  - Need “Honors”
    - Motivation & Learning Behaviors
    - Test Scores
- Observations
  - “Everyone Else” increased at same rate
  - Feedback about scores & behaviors
  - *“What do I have to do to pass?” - Student*

# A little story...

- Detracked “Math Elective”
  - Jacobs, *Mathematics: A Human Endeavor*
- Research
- Ellis (in my ear)
- Difference & Deference
  - Opinions & Perspectives
- Staff Changes in 2009

# A little story...

- Thinking More
  - Equity & Access
  - Learning Behaviors
  - “Honors” vs “Everyone Else”
  - Research & Ellis (still in my ear)
- Conversations with Principal & Counselors
  - “Seeing is Believing”
  - “New” math department...2010
  - Confronting Peers & Fears
  - Detracked/Balanced Classes - Fall 2011 (7th Grade Only)

# Some Data...

## Math 7



# Change of Heart...

## 6th Grade Math Teacher - *The Skeptic*

- Behavioral Issues
- Engagement Issues
- Performance Issues
- Role Model Issues

# Change of Heart...

## 7th Grade Math Teacher - *The Realist*

- Raised the floor without lowering the ceiling
- Peer-to-Peer learning helps everyone
- Behavior issues minimized rather than concentrated

# Student Work 2014-15

SMART Ink

Period 1 - Expression 5  
File Edit View Insert Format Tools Add-ons Help


$$2a - b - 3a - b + 2a$$


Diagram showing algebra tiles for the expression  $2a - b - 3a - b + 2a$ . The tiles are arranged in a row below a horizontal line:

- White square:  $a^2$
- Purple square:  $a^2$
- Two vertical rectangles:  $a$  and  $a$
- White square:  $-a^2$
- Blue square:  $a^2$
- Two vertical rectangles:  $-a$  and  $a$
- Two small squares:  $-1$  and  $1$

Acrescast-O-Matic Start Screen Recorder

Acrescast-O-Matic Start Screen Recorder

00:00

8:34 AM

# Impact on Students

- Engagement
- Self-Efficacy
- Achievement
- Attitude

# Reflection on Process

- Awareness
- Evidence base
- Build allies (teachers and administrators)
- Start with the “willing”
  - Collaborate
  - Collect data
- Let others do the talking

**Thank you! Questions?**

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