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Tracking Inequality

Tracking Inequality, a journal publication by Samuel Lucas, looks at the event known as ‘tracking’ that occurs in schools. After conducting research on the subject and experimenting, Lucas offers his thoughts on the subject and its antithesis, ‘detracking’. That being said, there are several issues with the book that making following along and understanding it a challenging task.

To begin, it is best to define what tracking is. Tracking in school is the separation of a group of students based on their performance in certain or all subjects. AP, Honors, and Focus Groups are all examples of tracking, as well as College-Prep and courses described as Gen-Ed. The purpose of tracking is to measure the academic level of students and overall success of the school. Like every school related method, tracking has its flaws. Students in lower level courses were found to have less confidence in their abilities since they were deemed “not as smart”. Tracking also caused a classist system to develop in schools. Students at more advanced levels received more attention and support from teachers than their lower level peers.

Lucas offers detracking as alternative solution. Instead of dividing students up, have them all seen as the same level. In this manner, the students are not viewed as numbers to measure a school, and more as people who are there to learn. Lucas does point out though, that detracking fails students. It ‘removes the guideposts for students to know if they’re on the right path’ and instead forces them to believe they are all equally intelligent in certain subjects.

Lucas states his opinions on tracking and detracking, but the problem is, they constantly change and contradict each other. Trying to decipher the meaning behind most of thoughts is eerily similar to trying to understand a foreign language. It is very unclear what his true goals were in printing this (given he changes his mind on the subjects every couple of pages) nor do I recommend anyone to read this book because of it.