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Teach Right: Classroom Leveling, Tracking, and Ability Grouping

Why is it that millions of kids are agonized because of their educational experience? How can schools be ameliorated to help students learn better and see school as a more positive place? Maybe they are taking excessively difficult classes, or maybe they are instead much too easy and fail to challenge students. High schools with unleveled classes hurt all the students in the school. Leveling, having both more and less demanding curriculums, is a common educational structure in American schools, although it is rarely introduced before the start of ninth grade. The system is used to separate students who plan to go to college and those who plan to join the workforce or military and gives students the ability to determine what they should and or want to do in high school and subsequently their future. High school education needs to provide all students with the opportunity to have higher-level classes so that they can excel to the best of their learning abilities or if desired, fall behind.

One aspect of anti-level principles is that all students should be treated equally and put in the same level classes. However, because of this, students will not be able to distinguish themselves from their peers and demonstrate their profound academic ability.

Many students, after transitioning to college, say there is a large gap between college and high school coursework. To minimize this gap, a solution for many students is to take more difficult classes in high school. Often students believe that taking advanced classes helps them to “identify your strengths and weaknesses in certain subjects and work to improve them before starting college” (Get Schooled). Taking advanced high school courses helps students get into better colleges and thus prepares them for their futures. “Colleges look for students who took the most challenging courses available to them who performed well in each class. ...They may also look favorably upon students who seek challenge outside of school; for example, by taking community college courses or AP courses online” (College Data). People who want to learn and push themselves to do the best that they can and take the hardest courses that they can are those who get accepted into highly-ranked educational institutions. Colleges look at the depth of academic material high schoolers worked through, and the amount of specialization students had. This system also benefits students who do not desire to attend college and try as hard as they can in education but instead wish to take the vocational track. These students can learn the bare bones and have a good intellectual base while not having to push themselves to catch up with their peers as they would in a democratic equality educational system (one in which the curriculum is identical for every student); leveled classes work to the benefit of each student regardless of their academic abilities.

Leveled courses are academic environments in which students can develop their own fundamental and unique capabilities, individual interests, and possible future career opportunities. Students can focus on what subjects they enjoy the most and at what level

to begin to understand what their ideal future career would look like and how attainable it would be. “Courses like these [AP and Honors classes] can introduce you to topics and ideas not covered in the regular classroom...This range of subjects allows you to explore your interests and develop new passions. You may even discover the subject that will become your college major or the focus of your career” (College Board). With this, students, if so desired, can undertake more difficult coursework and begin to concentrate their academic efforts on specific fields of interest. On the other side of the argument pushing for single-level classes, students are constrained to the small scope of the less expansive courses that can bore kids and hurt their academic performances. Work in high school honors and advanced placement classrooms can be just as difficult as college material and provide students with the grit and work ethic that they need to go into their anticipated college experience. The College Board explains that “Honors and college-level courses can help you learn the skills and habits you'll need for success in college and beyond. They'll allow you to develop stronger writing skills, problem-solving abilities, time-management skills, discipline, and good study habits” (College Board). The effort students put in is what they get out of a course. Harder courses mean more effort and more effort means more opportunities for growth and development. Lower achievers also benefit from this system as they are not expected to complete as much work as naturally gifted students and retain information at a slower pace suitable for their own specific needs. In addition, extending the ceiling and giving harder work to the higher achieving students prevents them from falling short of their individual potential. The leveling system is beneficial to each and every student.

Single-level education is ineffective as it treats each student the same way despite the major differences between them. Just like every person is different, every curriculum should be too. Curriculums should be built around individuals' needs rather than simplifying them for everyone and grouping students into one large, disorganized cluster. A 2003 Roeper Review journal article by Carol Tieso states, "flexible ability grouping, combined with appropriate curricular revision or differentiation, may result in substantial achievement gains both for average and high ability learners." To get the most information out of each class students need to be with people they are on equal footing with. Students can learn better and work well together this way. The National Research Center for the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) encourages leveled classes and believes that "students in these settings can obtain an entire year's worth of extra academic growth when compared to their peers in typical settings. Furthermore, the NRC/GT asserts that little evidence can be shown that any student (even low achievers) is actually harmed by ability grouping" (WrightPsych.com). Ability grouping is beneficial to the advanced students as they can work alongside other smart kids but also for the less advanced students as they, working alongside high achievers, learn less. It's beneficial for lower-level students to be with peers on their same level because "low achieving students who are placed into ability-leveled groups do not have any negative social repercussions. Instead, low achieving students may actually prefer to work with students who share similar academic needs and enjoy being in classrooms where they are not the only student who is struggling" (WrightPsych.com). Leveling is good because there are no negatives. The higher-ability students can learn high-level material with other smart kids and the lower-ability students

can work at their own pace with people at their level thus preventing embarrassment, anxiety, and stress as they don't feel the need to be on par with other talented children. Equal education for every student has extreme, almost communist, ideals. Just like capitalism which has worked well despite major wealth gaps in the U.S., high school leveling lets people who may need extra help fall into lower classes, and people who naturally excel go up to higher, more advanced groups. Extending the ceiling and lowering the floor allows students to find where they fit into our education system and teaches kids without forcing upon them an inadequate or strenuous curriculum.

High school class leveling is essential as it provides students with the opportunity to excel or do the required minimum depending on whether they would like to take the vocational or college track. Schools need to have different curriculums for different levels of students and give them the choice of what and to what extent they want to study.

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