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Institutional inequality : a case of educational tracking

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San Jose State University, 1993

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Institutional Inequality:
A Case of Educational Tracking

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the
Department of Social Science
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Mary Etta Marshall
December 1993

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ABSTRACT

INSTITUTIONAL INEQUALITY: A CASE OF EDUCATIONAL TRACKING

by Mary Etta Marshall

The purpose of this thesis is twofold: (1) to examine the reproduction of social class in the U.S. through the subtle mechanism of three-tier curriculum tracking, and (2) to establish a base of information from a case study representative of curriculum tracking in a public educational institution. The primary focus is on the purpose and effect of tracking, the opportunities or lack of opportunities to learn, and both the resulting formations of consciousness and class reproduction. This research suggests that reproduction exceeds mobility across class lines, and that the class reproduction that occurs is a product of curriculum tracking within public schools.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The most important and subtle mechanism in the reproduction of social class in the United States is the public educational institution and its three-tier curriculum tracking system. The three-tier tracking system can be defined as the dividing of education into three levels at every grade with elites at the top tier, the middle class at the middle tier, and the poor and most minorities at the bottom tier. Differences in funding and of schooling opportunities are the main inequalities that are found in the tier system. Tier tracking is produced and maintained through a large number of frequently used IQ and achievement tests which contain cultural bias and influence on items that cause the tests to measure something other than that for which they were designed.

Tracking is the placement of students for instruction with others of alleged equal or matched ability (homogeneous groups) (Nieto, 1992, p. 308). The mechanism for sorting and directing students into class destinations is curricular tracking. An elite maintains the top tier through a system of private schools from pre-school to the university.

The middle tier is the general education track managed through routines of lecture and worksheets. The bottom tier is the special education track managed with basic skills kits. I argue in this thesis that the majority of poor and minority citizens occupy the middle and bottom strata of society generation after generations (Bowles & Nelson, 1974, p. 39-51) because economic inequality has

been institutionalized (the structure of dominance reproduces and legitimates itself) through the education system.

Statement of the Problem

The specific problem is the continued use of curriculum tracking in an increasingly heterogeneous society. It would appear that this system has seen its day in a changing society, and in the face of increased international economic competition. The idea that educational opportunity should be distributed according to race and/or class is in direct contradiction to both changing international economic competition and the egalitarian principles on which this nation was founded. A new vision of finding the best and brightest of American citizens to keep the country competitive in the new global economy must be found. Creating better and more evenly allotted educational opportunities should become a focus of national concern, which can help move the country toward a competitive course. Future international economic competitiveness, socioeconomic stability, and justice are necessary in the United States for an effective economic position in the twenty-first century.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to collect data about curriculum tracking in American public schools. The research design is a case study which was conducted at a San Jose area secondary public school. This particular school was selected because of its representation of ethnic and socioeconomic groups. The public school students in this case study enjoy above average socioeconomic status, as compared to the state as a whole. This secondary school has a racial composition of: 34.8% European American; 34.6% Asian immigrants and Asian

American; 20.5% Hispanic immigrants and Hispanic American; 7.7% African American; and 2.4% Native American. The administrators and tracking staff requested anonymity in exchange for access and data. The data collected were analyzed to answer the following questions:

1. Does the public education system produce curriculum tracking or ability grouping?
2. Does the curriculum tracking process produce opportunity for all students?
3. Is there a socioeconomic component to the tracking process?
4. Does the tracking process eliminate or maintain inequality of social class?

Definition of Terms

Classism. Discriminatory beliefs and behaviors based on differences in social class, generally directed against those from poor and/or working class backgrounds (Nieto, 1992, p. 306).

Cultural capital. The knowledge that is associated with the dominant group, which thus has the most status in a society. As defined by Bourdieu, it can exist in three forms:

1. dispositions of the mind and body;
2. cultural goods such as pictures, books, and other material objects (computers); and
3. educational qualifications.

Cultural capital is the best hidden form of the hereditary transmission of capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 246).

Curriculum. The organized environment for learning in a classroom and

school. The curriculum includes:

expressed elements usually written down in the form of goals, objectives, lesson plans, and units and are included in educational materials such as textbooks, and

hidden elements i.e., the unintended messages, both positive and negative, in the classroom and school environments (Nieto, 1992, p. 306).

Deficit theories. Theories that hypothesize that some people are deficient in intelligence and/or achievement either because of

genetic inferiority because of their racial background or because of cultural deprivation because of their cultural background and/or because they have been deprived of the cultural experiences and activities deemed by the dominate culture to be indispensable for growth and development (Nieto, 1992, p. 306).

Educational equity. Beyond equal educational opportunity, educational equity is based on fairness and promotes the real possibility of equality of outcomes for a broader range of students (Nieto, 1992, p. 306).

Eurocentric curriculum. Curriculum that focuses on the values, life styles, accomplishments, and worldviews of Europeans and/or European Americans (Nieto, 1992, p. 307).

Intelligence Quotient (IQ). The results from intelligence tests which are said to predict performance in schools and reflect the degree to which children have mastered middle class cultural symbols and values (Taylor, 1989, p. 189).

Minorities. The distinctions made between different kinds of minorities. caste-like or involuntary minorities. Those incorporated into a society against their will. In the United States, this term generally refers to Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Puerto Ricans, all

of whose ancestors were either conquered or enslaved.

voluntary or immigrant minorities. Those who have chosen freely to emigrate to another society (Ogbu, 1986, p. 169-170).

Multicultural education. A process of comprehensive and basic education for all students. Multicultural education challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, gender, etc.) that students, their communities, and teachers represent. Multicultural education should permeate the curriculum and instructional strategies used in schools, as well as the interactions among teachers, students and parents, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education furthers the democratic principles of social justice (Nieto, 1992, p. 307).

Multicultural education is a child of the civil rights movement, led by African Americans, that was designed to eliminate discrimination in housing, public accommodation, and other areas. The leaders of the civil rights movement, such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Daisy Bates, represented the American democratic ideal stated in such important American documents as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. The civil rights leaders of the 1960s and 1970s used the Western ideals of freedom and democracy to justify and legitimize their push for structural inclusion and the end of institutionalized discrimination and racism (Banks, 1991, p. 32).

Minority status. People treated as lower in social ranking and subject to domination by other (racial, economic or power) segments of the population (Landis, 1977, p. 431).

Social stratification. The division of people into layers or ranks. The source of the ranking may be one or a combination of factors: wealth, power, prestige, race, sex, age, religion, and so on (Landis, 1977, p. 434).

Tracking. The placement of students for instruction with others of alleged equal or matched ability (homogeneous groups) (Nieto, 1992, p. 308).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Role of Educational Institutions in the United States

The role of public educational institutions in the United States includes preparing each generation of students to gain skills and knowledge that will equip them to support themselves and their families, as well as to become productive citizens who are able to participate in the democratic process. Social ascription in the society is a practice which is in direct contradiction to the achieved productive citizen status that is to be cultivated in the educational institution. There are status groups in American society, and education is among the major institutions that define how people remain or become members of a status group.

Educational theory has historically asserted the power of the educational system to foster social equality and allow mobility upward into status groups in the United States. This view is based on Dewey's notion of the egalitarian function of the educational system; however, theoretical studies framed by both theory and practice question this liberal faith in the egalitarian power of the educational system:

A review of educational history hardly supports the optimistic pronouncements of liberal educational theory. The politics of education are better understood in terms of the need for social control in an unequal and rapidly changing economic order. The founders of the modern U.S. school system understood that the capitalist economy produces great extremes of wealth and poverty, of social elevation and degradation (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 27).

Bowles and Gintis, who are economists, indicated that much of the content of education over the past century and a half can only be construed as an unvarnished attempt to persuade the "many" to make the best of the inevitable. There are theorists, however, who would oppose Bowles and Gintis (1976), and who argue that inequality benefits society in general.

Higher status group positions are said to be held by the most "qualified" and competent people, and inequality is seen as needed. Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore in 1945, amended by Davis in 1948, devised a functionalist theory of inequality and stratification. Talcott Parsons also produced an important functionalist theory of inequality and stratification. The Davis and Moore hypothesis clearly and plainly states the functionalist view of inequality, which finds that stratification is essential to meet the needs of complex social systems. In other words, from a perspective that considers society as akin to an organism, this theory reasons that the organism has needs that must be met if it is to remain healthy. Included among these needs is that the most important positions or jobs in the society must be held by the most qualified and competent people. Inequality and social stratification are considered outcomes of processes where the need is met. Parsons' functionalist theory focuses on the norms and values of a society, which are internalized by people through the socialization process including education.

These theories and ideas support a system of structured inequality, whereby the inequality is not random but follows a pattern, displays relative constancy and stability, and is backed by ideas that legitimize and justify it (Heller, 1969, p. 4). When class or status placement is primarily hereditary and people are placed in positions in a stratification system because of qualities beyond their control (i.e., race, sex, or class), this is ascriptive status, not an achievement status (Kerbo,

1983, p. 12). There are theorists who regard ascriptive status as inefficient and by nature counterproductive in yielding the most "qualified" and competent people from all classes. This form of structured inequality, however, serves status groups steeped in the European cultural ethos. It is common knowledge (Persell, 1977, p. 88; Boykin, 1986, p. 57; Oakes, 1990, p. 3) that most minorities and the poor fare quite badly in the educational institutions of the United States.

Once socialized into the mores of the dominant culture the education system determines access to positions and to particular types of knowledge (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 129; Giroux, 1983, p. 174). The educational institution is the main mechanism used to transmit the European cultural ethos as societal mores. Students are socialized to view U.S. culture as a European homogeneous model rather than as the heterogeneous model that it is (Nieto, 1992, pp. 211-212; Hirsch, 1987). This is another problem for students in the education system, because ethnocentrism is subtly transmitted rather than cultural relativism, which suggests that each culture be judged from its own viewpoint without imposing outside standards of judgment:

The educational institution serves to sustain and reinforce the values, behavior and ideas of the dominant culture. Acquiring the correct and legitimate cultural values, social behavior and psychological association of ideas; the institution through its 'Charter' or legitimized position grants privileges and rights (Meyer, 1971, p. 572).

Contemporary U.S. society has an educational system that is a highly developed institution. Education has expanded and created a network of legitimating effects. First, education functions in society as a legitimating "theory of knowledge" defining certain types of knowledge as extant and as authoritative. It also functions as a "theory of personnel," defining categories of persons who are to be treated as possessing these bodies of knowledge and forms of authority.

Second, education confirms both elites and citizens (Meyer, 1977, p. 66).

Formal educational systems are theories of socialization institutionalized as a network of rules at the collective level:

It has a network of rules creating public classifications of people and their knowledge. Education controls and defines which individuals belong to these categories and possess the appropriate knowledge. And it defines which persons have access to valued positions in society. Education is a central element in the public biography of individuals, greatly affecting their life chances. It is also a central element in the organization of society, constructing competencies and helping create professions and professionals. This institution clearly has an impact on society over and above the immediate socializing experiences it offers the young (Meyer, 1977, p. 55).

This institution recreates a significant portion of the inequality present in society. Control of accreditation and access to the skills and knowledge to gain it are important in the systematic process of denial of opportunity (Gintis, 1971, p. 245). People in modern societies are allocated to work roles on the basis of years and types of education, apart from anything they have learned in schools. Education is thus more a selector, sorter, and allocator than it is a socializer (Meyer, 1977, p. 58).

The Structure of Public Education—Residential Segregation

The educational system in the United States does not allocate opportunities directly to individuals. It provides them to groups of students, first through districts, then schools and then through classrooms. The economic segregation of the communities in which students live and go to schools can have the effect of channeling students into particular social class outcomes. The American public school system is primarily established along residential lines which means students generally go to their neighborhood schools; however, neighborhoods are usually

segregated by race and/or class. Residential segregation is made even more ominous by the fact that it helps to insure school segregation. Colclough and Beck (1986) describe three major demographic trends which have considerable impact upon education: (1) an absolute decline in central city population with, (2) the poor, black and less educated remaining in central cities, and (3) the higher income, highly educated whites moving to the suburbs. This trend has remained constant in recent years and the movement of more minorities to the suburbs has not changed these patterns or their consequences for education. Some results of these trends for schools include economic differences and the stigmatizing of some schools:

Residential segregation along race and class lines creates a differentiated school system with schools reflecting the homogeneity of the areas in which they are located. United with organizational selection and differentiation within schools (ability and curriculum tracking), small initial differences in achievement become accentuated over time, producing a cumulative schooling experience that results in a greater dependency between social origins and academic performance with each additional year in the system (McPartland & McDill, 1982, p. 86).

Studies on the effects of race and class structure provide data consistent with a pattern of mechanisms operating independent of the education system:

The intergenerational transmissions of social and economic status operates primarily via noncognitive mechanisms, despite the fact that the school system rewards higher IQ, an attribute significantly associated with higher socioeconomic background (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 121).

Thus further data suggest that the race and class segregation of school communities is another mechanism causing class inequalities to be forwarded from generation to generation (Giroux, 1983, p. 188).

Curriculum Tracking

The most effective mechanism, however, for sorting and routing students into social class destinations is curriculum tracking (Oakes, 1990; Lee, 1986; Lee & Bryk, 1988). Evidence suggests tracking is highly class-based in its selection procedures and not a product of student "choice" or ability. Studies demonstrate that factors like motivation and ability have only limited effects on track placement and that tracking primarily fosters the illusion of fair results and meritocratic competition (Clark, 1961; Weis, 1988; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Moreover, once in a particular track (especially a lower one), students' chances for mobility are negligible. Tracking has been shown to have considerable impact on educational outcomes such as college plans and attendance.

Many outcomes of track placement have been found. Some studies indicate that children in a college preparatory track, or a higher track, improve in academic achievement over the years, while those in the lower track perform at increasingly lower levels (Rosenbaum, 1975; Persell, 1977). These data indicate that tracking works to reinforce class differences:

Tracking serves to perpetuate stratification and inequality among students beginning at an early age. This is accomplished through its selection and allocation procedures and also through a psychological process of legitimating difference and segregation among students (Colclough & Beck, 1986, p. 322).

The three mechanisms, public and private schooling, the communities in which schools are located, and curriculum tracking are cited by Colclough and Beck (1986) as fostering class reproduction which perpetuates social class inequalities.

People of the world are becoming less isolated through the use of mass communication technologies. The valuing of technical skill, and the acceptance of it as a valid basis for distributing rewards, is a quality we expect to find in the

modern person. But the poor and minorities are denied access early in their schooling to a good grounding in mathematics, science and now computers. Low income children often have few ways to learn computers either because their families cannot afford to buy them, their schools cannot afford them, or they are tracked into classes that do not teach these skills:

During the elementary grades, the science and mathematics experiences of children from low-income families, African American and Hispanic children, children who attend school in central cities, and children who have been clustered, in low-ability classes differ in small but important ways from those of their more advantaged and white peers. By the time the students reach secondary school, their science and mathematics experiences are strikingly different (Oakes, 1990, p. vi).

This highly selective system of ability grouping does not enhance achievement in the technical skills even for those students in advanced courses. Additional data suggest that students' access to science and mathematics knowledge varies with their race, social class, and neighborhood, and with the judgments educators make about their intellectual abilities (Oakes, 1990, p. 44).

Tracking of minority students at the elementary and secondary levels eliminates the bulk of these students from positions of competition in the professions. This practice is done by placing students for instruction with others of allegedly equal or matched ability (homogeneous groups) (Nieto, 1992, p. 70). The process is achieved by tracking minority students away from possible acquisition of this knowledge and any chance to compete for the technical or professional positions in society.

Opportunity and Inequality

The path to higher educational attainment begins very early. Students from higher income families are more likely to have a home environment that provides

the material resources which foster intellectual skills they need to do well in school. They receive toys, books and computers that give them an early advantage, and they are more likely to see their parents engaged in activities like reading and writing, thus the image emerges that these are valued skills (Bourdieu, 1986). By the time students are in school the process of separating (tracking) one track from another becomes even clearer. An important factor in this process is teacher expectations; several studies (Jackson & Cosca, 1974; Campbell, 1984; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Persell, 1977) show that teachers expect more of students from higher social class backgrounds, and the differential treatment of students in terms of teacher expectation leads to better performance among these students.

Legitimate Function of Public Education

Education is legitimated in society by giving status to the educated. The educational institution is legitimized because people allow it to represent a reality which is passed on from generation to generation:

Education is seen as an allocating institution . . . operating under societal rules which allow the schools to directly confer success and failure in society quite apart from any socializing effects (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p. 56).

The educational system is the foundation for legitimizing economic inequality by providing a seemingly open, impersonal, and symbolic meritocratic mechanism for assigning individuals to unequal economic positions (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 107). The educational system promotes and encourages the belief that economic success depends essentially on the possession of technical and cognitive skills, which the school is organized to provide in productive, fair, and unbiased manner on the basis of meritocratic principles (Brim, 1969). Beneath the pretense of

meritocracy, however, lies the reality of an educational system geared toward the reproduction of economic relations unrelated to technical requirements and efficiency (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 108). The most effective element in the educational institution is the popular belief in its legitimacy. Schools must offer the potential of success to its students. The students must believe, and think that others believe, that the school has this capacity. A major element in the reproduction function of education is the legitimation of preexisting economic disparities. Therefore, efforts to produce egalitarian goals through the use of the educational system are not only weak but in direct conflict with and contradiction to the reproduction function of education:

Throughout history, patterns of privilege have been justified by elaborate facades. Dominant classes seeking a stable social order have consistently nurtured and underwritten these ideological facades and, insofar as their power permitted, blocked the emergence of alternatives. This is what we mean by 'legitimation': the fostering of a generalized consciousness among individuals which prevents the formation of the social bonds and critical understanding whereby social conditions might be transformed (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 104).

Structural Inequality

The inability of the U.S. educational system to promote equality is to be expected in view of the purpose it serves (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Spring, 1972; Apple, 1979). The form of economic inequality is set in the economy itself, through market and property institutions which cause wide inequalities in income from property, in the basic relations between businesses, and in uneven development, which causes racial and sexual disparities. Nieto in her discussion of education and economic inequality employed the political economy framework articulated by Bowles and Gintis, Spring, and Apple.

The structure of the schools was explained as keeping the poor in their place by teaching them the proper attitudes and behaviors for becoming good workers, and of keeping the dominant classes in power by teaching their children the skill of management and control that would presumably prepare them to manage and control the working class. Schools therefore reproduced the status quo and not only reflected but actually maintained structural inequalities based on class, race, and gender (Nieto, 1992, p. 195).

The structure of the public education system is designed to reproduce the existing social classes through the process of intergenerational status transmission.

The intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic status functions chiefly through noncognitive methods (dispositions of the mind and body; cultural goods, such as pictures, books, and other material objects; and educational qualifications), even though the schools reward higher IQ's, a phenomena demonstrating a bond with higher socioeconomic background (Bourdieu, 1986). Intergenerational status is a form of social mobility, and is found by comparing the occupational position of parents and their offspring (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 102). The education system plays a central role in maintaining the existing system of inequalities (Nieto, 1992, p. 29), and particularly in maintaining the public's acceptance of the inequalities.

The Political Economy of Education

Philip Wexler, a sociologist, asserts that there has been a strong tendency to compartmentalize the sociology of education and political economy, a tendency that needs to be reversed (Wexler, 1987). Thus, this section attempts to apply a political economy approach to the sociology of education. The connection between economics and education corresponds to the dynamics of class relationships. Both the economic system and the education system are layered

corresponding to class distinctions. The education system has tier tracking while the economic system has worker segmentation in the labor market. The education system produces a product fashioned to fit predetermined economic positions. The chief function of the public education system is to fashion profitable types of worker consciousness and behavior:

Thus it is clear that the consciousness of workers—beliefs, values, self-concepts, types of solidarity and fragmentation, as well as modes of personal behavior and development—are integral to the perpetuation, validation, and smooth operation of economic institutions (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 127).

This worker consciousness and behavior conditioning is accompanied by the selective system of ability grouping. The combined conditioning and ability grouping produces a splintered or fragmented consciousness legitimated through a pretended meritocratic framework. This splintered or fragmented consciousness is developed through ability grouping where only small portions or fragments of students' intelligence and creative ability are developed or nourished; moreover, these are selectively developed depending on the students' likely position in the labor market.

Tiered levels of education feed workers into tiered levels within the occupational structure and, correspondingly, tend toward an internal organization comparable to levels in the hierarchical division of labor (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 132). Profitable types of worker consciousness and behavior correspond to the partitioning or segmentation between and within primary and secondary labor markets (Reich, Gordon, & Edwards, 1973, p. 359-365; Aronowitz, 1973, p. 408-409; Bluestone, 1970, p. 15-35; Wachter, 1974, p. 637-680). The primary sector contains the privileged members of the labor force. It is governed by larger capital intensive oligopolistic manufacturing and extractive firms, job security, on-

the-job training, some chance for promotion, high productivity per labor input, and labor unions—good wages and benefits. The secondary sector consists of jobs that do not possess high skill level. It is governed by smaller, less powerful, more competitive firms, and contains low job security, low productivity per labor unit, less powerful unions, if any, low annual wages, and few opportunities for advancement or training. It is also heavily occupied by women and other minorities (Wachtel, 1984, p. 208; Ford, 1988, p. 140). Students' consciousness and behavior is shaped and conditioned through the tier tracking process in order to correspond to the needs of the economic system in its primary or secondary labor market (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 132).

The contribution of education in the United States to inequality is such that it is related to the nature of the economic system. Thus public education has been designed and managed to function as a service to the economic system (Apple, 1982, p. 43; Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 11; Carson, 1978, p. 79). The education of the public is dominated by the needs of the corporate economy rather than by human needs and development. Education, race, sex, and social class are factors in the system of the corporate economy which often are used in reducing the creative power and unity of workers. Economic inequality is a structural aspect of the capitalist economy and does not derive from individual differences in skills and competencies (Thurow, 1975, p. 165). While the extent of inequality is subject to change in the structure of the economy, it is hardly susceptible to amelioration through educational policy (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 56).

The institution of education in the United States has several major elements in its structure and can be understood in terms of the capitalist system's need for reserve armies of skilled labor, for legitimating the technocratic-meritocratic

perspective of certain groups, for reinforcing the divisions of groups of workers into stratified status groups through internal sorting, and for the conditioning of youth to the social relations of being in a subordinate or superordinated position in the economic system through tiered teaching (Persell, 1977, p. 12; Nieto, 1992, p. 72; Tyack, 1966, p. 34). Education as a total institution is an important factor in the conditioning of future workers for the social control necessary for the functioning of the economic system (Edwards, Reich, & Weisskopf, 1986, p. 244).

Schools and Democracy

Education is crucial to a participatory democracy and its theory of consent. However, the systematic control of citizens through educational institutions is in direct contradiction to a free and participatory democracy. Giroux, in referring to the school reform movement instigated by the 1983 Nation at Risk report, states that:

In my judgment, the new public philosophy fails not only in its analysis of U.S. schools and the nature of the existing crisis, but also in its inability to provide a vision that takes seriously the kind of thoughtful participation in sociopolitical life that is expected from citizens in a democratic society. Moreover, this version of public philosophy places undue emphasis on specific cognitive and technical outcomes. This emphasis represents an ideology that undermines the importance of prompting in this society the development of critical public spheres where the capacity for learning is not reduced to economic or technical considerations (Giroux, 1984, p. 190).

Citizens are unable to make truly informed decisions without an adequate democratic education. Giroux criticizes (1984) the "new" public philosophy which attempts to link the outcomes of education solely to the needs of the business community. He argues that this philosophy towards education undermines efforts to equip students with the skills necessary to analyze the sociopolitical processes

at work and in society. The hidden curriculum in schools effectively teaches "essential" norms and ideological distinctions to students, norms and distinctions "required" by the labor market. Giroux's research tended to confirm part of the arguments put forth by other political economists that a major economic role of the school was just this hidden agenda (Apple, 1982, p. 43). Bowles and Gintis (1976) indicate that this covert teaching brings the social relations of the economy into the classroom and is differentially distributed. In essence, rather than one public school system in advanced capitalism, there are two. Each of these systems teaches different norms, values, and dispositions depending on students' social class and economic trajectory. The contradiction here is an alleged democratic citizenry educated to suit an economic system (capitalism) rather than a political system (democracy). Democratic citizens must be informed and educated enough to reason and make critical decisions having as their concern the common good:

Offering little or no critique of how existing social, political, and economic institutions may contribute to the reproduction of deep inequalities in this society, the new philosophy is generally silent about how schools might be influenced by such institutions in reproducing larger structural inequalities. In effect, what is missing here is an understanding of how power, ideology, and politics work on and in schools so as to undermine the basic value of community and democracy (Giroux, 1984, p. 191).

Participatory democracy is highly dependent upon an informed citizenry, without which the nature of the democracy changes. Education can encourage personal development and economic equality, while integrating youths into adult society only under one condition: a complete extension of democracy to all parts of the social order (Giroux, 1984, p. 193).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

There are two competing hypotheses about educational tracking. First, students have very different abilities that demand different and separate schooling, and that stratification is essential to meet the needs of complex social systems. Second, education in the United States reflects the nature of the socioeconomic system, and that public education has been designed and managed to function as a service to the economic system. I attempt to adjudicate between the two hypotheses.

This research examined the correspondence between institutional inequality, specifically, educational tracking in the United States and the opportunity to learn. Four crucial, and related concerns framed the procedure. The first was to assess whether the public education system produces curriculum tracking or ability grouping. The second concern was to assess whether the curriculum tracking process produces opportunity for all students. The third concern was to assess whether there is a socioeconomic component to the tracking process. The fourth concern was to assess whether the tracking process eliminates or maintains inequality of social status.

The first concern, focusing on whether the public education system produces curriculum tracking or ability grouping, examined what tracking actually is and how the process is conducted. Tracking is defined as the placement of students

for instruction with others of equal or matched ability. The tracking process is conducted and justified by an elaborate system of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests and other measures of cognitive performance. The course of these tests saturates the public school system from kindergarten through 12th grade. Student placement is based on IQ tests and another important factor: teacher expectation. Once in a particular track especially a lower one, students' chances for mobility are negligible.

The second concern, focusing on whether the curriculum tracking process produces opportunity for all students, examined what is meant by opportunity and describes the tracks. Opportunity is defined as providing the same resources and chances for all students. The curriculum track has three tiers; the top tier and highest income status receives the most opportunities, the bottom tier and lowest income status receives the least opportunities. The process of separating students along tracks where opportunity is imbalanced demonstrates a lack of opportunity for most students.

The third concern, focusing on whether there is a socioeconomic component to the tracking process, examined whether the three tier structure reflects the U.S. social class structure. The top tier of the track is often called the Gifted and Talented Education (G.A.T.E.) program, and the students typically come from higher income homes of a professional socioeconomic status. The middle tier of the track is the general education program, and the students often come from middle income homes of middle management and skilled labor status. The bottom tier is called the special education program, and the students often come from low income homes of lower skilled labor and unskilled status families.

The fourth concern, focusing on whether the tracking process eliminates or maintains inequality of social status, examined intertrack opportunity and mobility.

The testing or IQ measurement becomes the legitimizing document for ability grouping. This ability grouping and placement is critical to the students' opportunities to learn and grow. The teaching materials are set for each tracking tier.

The purpose of this study is to examine the educational system, specifically its tracking component's aid in the reproduction of social class.

Subjects

This research examined a secondary public educational institution in San Jose, California. The sampling frame surveyed consisted of respondents who are administrators, teaching staff and teaching aides. These educators and aides were selected because in a public school they are responsible for assessing and maintaining the three tier curriculum tracking system.

The physical appearance of the school's landscaping is clean and orderly, although it showed evidence of the drought of the 1980s. Signs of fresh painting and well groomed yard work are apparent. The interior of the buildings are just as clean and orderly as the outside. There are student election notices and flyers displayed; however, all appear on corkboards, not on the buildings. The physical structure is a single level California ranch style with tennis courts, baseball fields, and football fields. The facility is composed of twelve buildings assembled to provide areas of quadrangles or yards.

Among the respondents were ten administrators: an associate principal of education programs, an associate principal of administration, two assistant principals, and six counselors. The respondents giving the most detailed data were sixty teachers, fourteen of whom were minorities. Critical data were also gathered from the six teaching aides. These educators and aides were selected

because they are responsible for assessing and maintaining the three tier curriculum tracking system.

Procedure

The method of research is a qualitative case study developed from a review of the literature. Three main sources were designed to collect data: a brief questionnaire, informal interview questions, and complete observation.

A review of the literature revealed a similar work, The American Educational Structure and the Reproduction of Social Class, written in 1982 by J. McPartland and Edward McDill. Their work identified residential segregation along race and class lines which creates a differentiated school system with schools reflecting the homogeneity of the areas in which they are located. McPartland and McDill (1982) used questionnaires and interviews of administrators and teachers to reach their findings that organizational selection and differentiation within schools (ability and curriculum tracking) cause small initial differences in achievement to grow over time. Their findings claim that this further produces a cumulative schooling experience that results in a greater dependency between social origins and academic performance with each additional year in the system.

A recent study by Jeannie Oakes, analyzing secondary data obtained through the National Science Foundation's 1985-1986 National Survey of Science and Mathematics Education, provided an opportunity to examine the distribution of specific features of schools and classrooms which may affect the learning opportunities of different students.

The brief questionnaire that is attached was assembled from those questions provided in the Appendix in Qualitative Research for Education (Bogdan &

Biklen, 1992). The questions were pre-tested and evaluated by conducting a pilot study with a small sample group of educators and aides. Clear interpretation and uniformity were the primary criteria for question selection. The questions were assembled with a focus on a review of the literature and selected to assess the learning environment. This list of questions included three areas: the learning situation, teacher-student relationships, and discipline and control. The questions were formulated considering events and experiences which would be common to most of the educators such as access to resources and ability assessment.

Informal interview questions were formulated to gather experiences shaped in the particular context of the educational institution. Initially, a list of 20 questions was developed; however, this list was reduced to 15 questions since some were unclear, while others proved redundant. Time was an important factor, because most respondents were concerned that it would take too much of their time. Interviews were conducted intermittently at the school site, in classrooms, offices, lunchroom chats, and at after-school coffeehouse conversations. Some of the interview questions were developed to test the consistency of the literature review, others were developed to focus and define information collected in field notes. School experiences alone are not enough in qualitative analysis. These informal interview questions were designed to grasp the factors and complexities that shape school experiences such as racially imbalanced classes and disciplinary control. The tendency of minority students to wind up in the same classes as those with disciplinary problems are an example of qualitative information designed to measure what stood out as important concerning educational tracking and the opportunity to learn.

The third source of data collection was developed from complete observation notes. The overall survey was conducted during a period spanning six

months in early 1992 during which individuals were interviewed. The interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes each. Five questions were left open-ended to allow the subject flexibility. Occasionally, subjects would take longer while responding to questions and give impromptu responses delivering additional data. The observation notes served to capture the natural setting and the human exchange within its own context of social and cultural patterns. The interview notes and observation notes, the literature review and questionnaire served as a framework. All interviews were conducted by the author.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The study collected data about the patterns of tracking or ability grouping at the secondary level and examined educational professionals' views about the imbalance of the system.

The administrators were helpful in data collection concerning racial composition and the socioeconomic compositions of the school. The teaching staff aided data collection in the area of high and low achievement on the part of students. The teaching aides helped in revealing class and cultural barriers which the administrators and teachers thought had minor impact. "These students are bad kids," and, "the students can't be helped," for example, are comments made by the teaching staff about special education students. The teaching aides also viewed staff comments such as, "language difference is a problem, it slows my class down," as a problem itself. The students' knowledge of another (non-European) language is not considered an asset but a problem until they master the "real" language of schooling.

Tracking and Ability Grouping

The tracking process is justified by an elaborate system of IQ tests and other measures of cognitive performance. These tests start at the pre-kindergarten level and are called developmental tests. The course of these tests permeates the public system from K-12. The data collected in the informal interview process revealed that all subjects clearly acknowledge the existence of an institutionally

produced and maintained tracking system. The associate principal of education programs and the associate principal of administration acknowledged the systemic use in American public education of IQ tests and other measures of cognitive performance in the placement of students for instruction with others of alleged matched ability. This alleged matched ability is used to lock students into a specific path called a track of curriculum (Meyer, 1977, p. 58; Colclough & Beck, 1986, p. 322; Nieto, 1992, p. 70).

This secondary school has a racial composition of:

34.8% European American

34.6% Asian American

20.5% Hispanic American

7.7% African American

2.4% Native American

The total student population was 1850 comprising grades 9-12, which is an average population in San Jose high schools. The informal interviews with the teaching staff produced explanations regarding low achievement on the part of students. Teachers often explained student low achievement as typified by "these students do not try hard or care, and consequently fail through the lack of their own effort." The teachers relieved themselves of any responsibility concerning low achievement on the part of students. One commented that "teachers give fair and equal commitment to all students, and try as hard as they can to instruct." The teachers view low achievement as an "individual choice and due to personal inadequacies." These ideas and views are called deficit theories comprising genetic inferiority and cultural deprivation. Those who adhere to these views are often unconscious of the consequence to students. Racism in teachers and judgments about students' ability and the corresponding placement in

homogeneous ability groups can affect student experiences and teacher expectations. One African American female teacher explains her circumstances:

The attitudes of the teachers are a problem. I hear what they say in the teachers' cafeteria. They call the kids animals; don't think the kids can do the work; hold low expectation. I'm not saying the kids are angels, but the racism is incredible. We need to train more Blacks and Hispanics to be teachers. It's a class and race thing, a double indemnity. The kids are different by race and class from the teachers. If they exclude me because of race, think of how race and class influence how they treat the kids.

Another African American female, a teacher of science, revealed her point of view:

These indiscreet comments reflect the overall attitude espoused by many of my colleagues during my teaching career. . . . Racism is the underlying subliminal problem that plagues the public school system. Many teachers have the attitude of the Great White Missionary coming to teach the natives.

High achievement on the part of students was explained in opposite terms, "these students try hard and care. Their high achievement is an individual choice and due to personal effort"; however, a teacher of English/Literature claimed "their effort and commitment given [as to all students] is the primary reason for high achievement on the part of students."

The questionnaire revealed that teachers by 65 to 35 percent agreed with the policy of tracking or ability grouping as measured by objective tests and past grades. Teachers also agreed by 70 to 30 percent that students' placement in classes is an accurate reflection of their ability range, and that whether classes are heterogeneous or homogeneously grouped, the criterion for such grouping is ability based.

The public education system produces a tracking system that is supported by the majority of the seventy-six school personnel. Administrators and teachers

strongly agree or agree with ability grouping and the "objective" tests used to define the groups.

Tracking and Opportunity

The opportunities for learning systematically are limited or removed, creating an underclass designed by the institution. There is rarely any inter-tier mobility once the tier is set, making this a near caste system. While schools do not produce inequality, three tier curriculum tracking maintains and perpetuates a structure of socioeconomic inequality which originates in the general economy and society. Schools are public insofar as their resource base derives largely from property and income taxes. Inside heterogeneous public schools opportunity and resources are dispensed unevenly, with the most qualified teachers and best materials assigned to the top tier.

The data collected revealed that the curriculum tracking process does not produce opportunity for all students. Two critical opportunities for learning are the time students spend in class and teaching strategies and materials. The top tier (G.A.T.E.) is taught by master teachers who possess master's degrees (a district requirement) and lead their respective departments. Another teacher said that "G.A.T.E. students spend more time on learning activities and less time on discipline, socializing, and class routines. These students are expected to spend more time doing homework." The course catalog indicated the following:

G.A.T.E. program students will study both classical and modern fiction. They will learn the characteristics of literary genres and analyze good narrative writing. They will write essays and reports based on library research. They will focus on vocabulary designed to prepare them for the college entrance exams.

In contrast, students in the middle tier (general education) are taught by the general teaching staff. "These students are given set routines of lecture and

worksheets." The course catalogue continued as follows:

the students at this level will study collected or anthology works of fiction. They will learn to write the general secondary book report. Other writings may be required that need not necessarily require reports based on library research.

Likewise, students in the bottom tier (special education) are taught by special education credentialed teachers. A special education teacher explained that, "these students are denied extracurricular activities and generally find their classmates unfriendly. Discipline is a problem and generally disrupts the class and the learning process." A teacher, in an attempt to be discreet, revealed her point of view:

I do not expect these students to learn the same skills. The student in the lower level classes receive xeroxed exercises, workbooks and commercially produced basic skills kits. Students' reading is limited to easy-to-read stories that do not require more than the basic skills. Vocabulary and any library research work is totally out of consideration.

This three tier structure is an echo of the class structure. This echo is reflected in the homogeneous grouping of students and people in both the three tier structure and the class structure, respectively.

The administrators (associate principal, two assistant principals and two counselors) acknowledged that "classes are not balanced and the imbalance is reflective of the school racial composition." Other responses demonstrating a lack of opportunity for all students were openly admitted. The African American female teacher of science stated that she observes "the two majority groups dominate the advanced placement (G.A.T.E.) track, while the three non-model minority groups dominate the general education and special education track." This pattern is indicative of minority status as a whole and is a manifestation of the ascriptive and preparatory role of the public school system. Minorities

occupying the middle and bottom tracks consistently and clearly create a pattern of questionable educational equity.

European American teachers were more defensive and cautious in their responses to questions about student opportunities and their role in the process. When questioned about equality of opportunities, a European American female teacher stated that "opportunities are equally distributed and frankly I'm puzzled as to why you ask that question." Another European American male, a teacher of science, revealed his belief that "opportunity is equally allotted to all. [Pause.] I suppose other teachers have told you this." The majority of the teachers expressed the view in the questionnaire that "students are placed in classes as an accurate reflection of their ability range." In defense of their roles as dispensers of opportunity, the teachers by an 82 to 12 percent margin state in the questionnaire that "the individualized teaching that does occur is offered to all students showing a need." Six percent stated that they "did not know." They went further in the questionnaire to express the view that "all students have contact with their teachers," although this was a very divided response: 60 percent to 40 percent. These responses generated defensive and carefully articulated answers.

The questionnaire generated the most consistent answers in the area of discipline. This is a clear indicator of inequality of opportunity. In the questionnaires and the interviews, teachers produced a pattern indicating that they felt all students were not treated equally. The teachers responded in the questionnaire by 65 to 35 percent that "there is no independent complaint system through which students can bring grievances against the staff for problems." There was an equally divided response to the question of punishments; minority teachers stated that "the nature of punishment in the school is not the same for all students with the same offense." The teachers went on to express the view that

"minority students' behaviors tend to elicit punishment for some students and not others." These teachers by a consistent 72 to 18 percent majority did not believe that equal opportunity extended to the disciplinary system. There were 10 percent who stated that they "did not know." The data results indicate sharply that in terms of tracking and opportunity, the area of discipline produces an imbalance.

The response to the questionnaire and the interview process often generated similar answers, even when the same question was modified. The teachers disagreed by a slim 55 to 43 percent majority that the punishments and rewards of the school approximate punishment and reward systems in society. This point was asked directly on the questionnaire and modified in the interview, adding academic rewards, athletic rewards or other rewards. Also in the interview, exactly to whom the rewards go was modified.

Tracking and Class

The curriculum tracking process is a reflection of the political economy of the larger society. The public school in this case study has above average socioeconomic status students, as compared to the state as a whole. The administrators stated that "this status is slipping as a result of the economy and due to immigrant students transferring in, reducing the racial segregation of the school." In response to further inquiries concerning socioeconomic status the associate principal revealed that "most of the students come from homes of a professionally trained socioeconomic status."

The socioeconomic status of parents often affects the communication that occurs between the school and parents. The administrators were reluctant and defensive in response to questions concerning school personnel and parental exchange. These same administrators stated that "the communication that occurs

between school personnel and parents depends on the parents' socioeconomic level and education." This attitude was discreetly revealed in a modification of an interview question several times. "The low income and immigrant parents of some of our students are just unaware of the necessity of their participation and communication with the school." An assistant principal offered the following: "I used to attempt to speak with some of these people about their children; however, the low income parents don't care and the immigrant parents have language and comfort problems." These views are one dimensional; they were also, by definition, hierarchical. The idea that the school personnel should meet the parents halfway and try to understand the socioeconomic barriers dwell on both sides. The opportunity to meet with these parents was exclusively available at school, rather than in the student's home. The educational level of parents and cultural differences such as Asian languages were mentioned as social interaction problems. Both administrators and the teaching staff pointed to their jurisdiction as the school site only, a bureaucratic response on their part, stating that "another catch on parental communication depends on the parents' comfort level with school personnel, and with language and culture." The associate and assistant principals revealed that this became such a problem that recently they had been allotted monies for the hiring of tutors/aides to help with language and cultural barriers.

These socioeconomic barriers act as a form of classism which seeps into the interaction between the public institution and its function of educating the public (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p. 121; Giroux, 1983, p. 229). Observation data revealed that between classes and during cafeteria and library times students consistently mingled with their track group regardless of race. The students involved in student government consistently mingled with other student

government participants. These students are G.A.T.E.-tracked and disproportionately European Americans and Asian Americans from higher socioeconomic status families. The socioeconomic component to tracking is that the school system is one of several institutions which serve to perpetuate the structure of privilege. The responses from administrators and teachers alike were that "they were working as hard as possible with the structure at hand." Inequality from a socioeconomic point centers around cultural capital or the notion of getting out of public education what you bring to it (Bowles & Nelson, 1974, p. 39-51). If you bear a socioeconomic status that nearly matches the school, you will do quite well.

The teachers disagreed whether "they have a choice of curriculum materials used, like texts or other reading materials." The materials are maintained for a Eurocentric curriculum and the further the student's cultural capital diverges from this path, the more difficult the effort. A European American male history/government teacher, as well as an African American male math teacher, expressed the view that "structural constraints and lack of right to determine their instructional materials often interfere with their efforts to inform the majority student group of significant contributions of all Americans, or to use outside materials for this purpose as well as motivate minority student groups."

The majority of teachers and teaching aides feel they cannot adequately teach as they wish, due to structural constraints. A European American male English/literature teacher explained constraints:

Teachers need flexibility to adapt the curriculum to their own classes. We need to be able to try ideas and methods that extend beyond the formal policy for the entire school. This autonomy empowers teachers to enliven instruction and make teaching less like working in a factory where someone else prescribes each step, Taylorism, you know.

Several other teachers were asked about this and most readily agreed. The teaching materials are specified for each tracking tier. Students in the top tier (G.A.T.E.) track have better learning opportunities. They spend more time on learning activities and less time on discipline, socializing and class routines. Teachers expect students in high level classes to spend more time doing homework. Students in the general education track receive the learning opportunities of people preparing for office clerks, blue collar jobs and union level workers. Students in the special education track have learning tasks that most often include memorizing or copying answers and taking quizzes (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 127). These students eventually are in and out of the work force.

An administrator explained that "the associate principal of education programs and the student's entry track from middle school determines the tier that a student will occupy." The associate principal, when asked about this, revealed that "there is rarely any inter-tier mobility once the tier is set, except at the behest of the associate principal, making this a near caste system."

The results of this data analysis suggest that tracking does not eliminate inequality of social class; however, the process is maintained by a K-12 systematic measurement of "cultural capital." The testing or IQ measurement becomes the legitimizing document for ability grouping (Bowles & Nelson, 1974, p. 39-51). Such ability grouping and pupil placement is critical to a student's opportunities to learn and grow. The opportunities for learning systematically are limited or removed, creating an underclass designed by the institution.

The results suggest that this San Jose area secondary school may be representative of similar public school systems in the United States. The school does not produce inequality; however, the data demonstrate that it maintains and perpetuates a structure of socioeconomic inequality which originates in the general economy and society.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study addresses two competing hypotheses about educational tracking. The first is that students have very different abilities that demand different and separate schooling, and that stratification is essential to meet the needs of complex social systems. The second is that education in the United States reflects the nature of the socioeconomic system, and that public education has been designed and managed to function as a service to the economic system. The findings of this study lend support to the second of the two competing hypotheses. The educational system channels its assets to students through schools they attend, and this process results in specialized and unequal opportunities to learn, in specialization that is clearly related to race, social class, community, and in ability judgments.

The Purpose and Effect of Tracking

The traditional purpose of educational tracking has two basic assumptions as its foundation. The first assumption is that students have very different abilities that demand different and separate schooling. The second assumption is that tracking placements are accurate, fair and easier for the teaching staffs (Oakes & Lipton, 1990, p. 155).

The review of the literature and the results of the data clearly demonstrate that these are the traditional views of tracking proponents (Oakes & Lipton, 1990, p. 155; Nieto, 1992, p. 24). The most extreme view is that many students lack the

intelligence to master knowledge. The problem is that these assumptions rest on preconceived opinions about people as groups. Therefore, values and views of questionable origin blend with good intentions and proceed to lock children into opportunity and developmental levels.

The first assumption concerning differences suggests a negative connotation and becomes legitimized by systematically testing the cultural identity, not the innate abilities of the students. Differences do exist among children; however, the effectiveness of putting students from their earliest years in school into separate classes to accommodate these differences is not supported by research (Nieto, 1992, p. 21). The second assumption concerning fairness and easier teaching is indicative of people taking structural arrangements for granted. The structure of tracking is believed to help individualized instruction, yet results in labeling and lowered expectations.

The data collected as a result of the questionnaire, interviews, and observations of students mingling between classes and during breaks with their track-groups, revealed a more thorough and complete distinction being made as a result of tracking. The views and opinions of the respondents claim tracking is merit based; however, students mingling between classes and participation in student government and sports disproportionately reproduce race and class lines.

The inequality is immediate and is in some cases, like among African American students, a preconception. Tracking has not been shown to be beneficial to the majority of students. Most students are in the middle and lower tracks and experience clear and consistent disadvantages from tracking. Students who need more time and attention to learn get less. These same students who have the most difficulty learning in the existing structure have fewer of the best teachers. Their work time and workload demands are held to a minimum. These

patterns are not beneficial and only build on and further inequality over time. The students at the San Jose area secondary school who experience high school from the lower or special education track receive basic education exposure and the vocational track. One of three obviously concerned teachers stated that:

some of my students have not gotten even decent jobs as a result of their training. They barely gain the skills to find jobs or access to further education. In fact, as a result of the tracking process most of my students say they're turned-off to education.

The associate principal made it clear that these students' placements are nearly caste-like. Intertrack transfers are rarely allowed despite the students' ability. The associate principal of education programs commented on the tracking system as an impediment to student achievement and mobility. The students enter the school with their track set at the middle school level.

The interviews with the administrators and the teachers revealed that there are notable exceptions. Several teachers mentioned a particular student who "was capable, even bright, but bothersome, sometimes politically argumentative." This student after a verbal confrontation with an administrator became inspired and moved from the lower special education track to the middle, and then on to the higher G.A.T.E. track, where he promptly won a student leadership position, and still remained challenging but a high achiever. These teachers went on to say that they believed this student was tracked into special education based on behavior patterns even though his intellect was obvious. This was a particular case of inequality and one of the reasons these teachers and administrators requested anonymity in exchange for the information and my right to observe.

Opportunity to Learn

Students in ability grouped classes have access to very different types of

knowledge. Track levels construct tiers between their opportunities to develop intellectual skills. Students in the higher tier G.A.T.E. program are more likely to study the subjects and skills the colleges require. The high standards of the course work at the G.A.T.E. level promotes critical thinking and problem solving skills. Opportunities to learn center around two critical points which are the time children spend in class and teaching strategies. Students in the G.A.T.E. program have better opportunities on both points. The learning opportunities are structured in ways which give the best chances to those who have already had the best chances. In the higher level classes more time is spent on learning methods and less time on discipline, socializing, and class routines.

The students in the middle tier general education program are likely to study some of the subjects and acquire some of the skills the colleges require. Students at this level acquire vocabulary skills based on the level of their private reading habits. The middle level course content promotes belief and acceptance of reality. A major element in the blending function of education is the legitimization of preexisting economic disparities. The students in the middle tier (general education) track are predominately of middle income working class status. The hidden curriculum in schools effectively teaches "essential" norms and ideological distinctions to students, norms and distinctions "required" by a labor market.

Students in the lower tier special education program, on the other hand, rarely, if ever, get these types of knowledge. Since lower level special education classes delete so much important knowledge, students maintained even for short periods at this level can miss the experiences they need to reenter and succeed in higher classes. The students in the special education classes at this school are of a lower socioeconomic status and are disproportionately minorities. Even though

the non-model minority populations total only 30.6%, they total 67% of the special education classes along with another 6.6% of the student population assessed as limited in English proficiency. Opportunity is pushed up the learning track instead of down the learning track to the students who have the most difficulty learning.

Fragmentation and Class

The review of the literature and the results of this study suggest that the American public school system produces a splintered or fragmented consciousness. Again, this is developed through ability grouping where only small portions or fragments of students' intelligence and creative ability are developed or nourished; moreover, these are selectively developed depending on the students' likely position in the labor market. The public consists of a multicultural populace that has an educational system which uses a monocultural curriculum. This curriculum is Eurocentric and central to the fragmented consciousness of the public. The multicultural nature of the society is not addressed through the educational institution other than superficially. Instead, students are given a monocultural curriculum structured to ferret out those who are resistant consciously or unconsciously to its instruction.

The ferreting process is methodical and systemic, using IQ tests and curriculum tracking. The IQ tests are based on deficit theories which are blended with values and views of questionable origin. The minority and poor students are seen as having come from weak gene pools (Jensen, 1975), or from unworthy family patterns (Banfield, 1968; Moynihan, 1967). Values, views and theories of this type undermine the educational and social system producing a fragmented consciousness. This mental fragmentation is compatible to labor market

segmentation and classism. In distorting John Dewey's idea of the "social continuity of life," by integrating new generations into the socioeconomic order, schools function to justify and reproduce inequality rather than correct it.

The social class structure retains its form through the educational system which reproduces the relationships of dominance and subordination in the economic arena (Bowles & Nelson, 1974, p. 39-51). Along with the tiered structure of education there is a corresponding tiered structure in the labor market. Each tier in the education system produces students fashioned to fit corresponding tiers in the labor market. Students in the top tier of the education system are taught critical thinking and problem solving skills. The top tier or primary segment of the labor market correspondingly requires self-direction. Students in the middle and bottom tiers of the education system are taught belief and acceptance of "reality" as taught. The lower portion of the top tier or primary segment of the labor market, as represented by entry level white collar and blue collar union workers, and the bottom tier or secondary segment of the labor market correspondingly require the workers' acceptance of rule following and conformity to external authority. The educational system is a primary element in the reproduction of the prevailing class structure of society. The reproduction of the socioeconomic system depends on the reproduction of consciousness.

The purpose and effect of tracking produced expected and unexpected patterns. The expected pattern was that schools segregate students in order to try to provide profitable types of worker consciousness and behavior to meet the needs of a complex social system. The unexpected pattern is that schools prepare large numbers of deskilled and unskilled workers in an era of growing global economic competition. The limited opportunities for all students to learn under the conditions of segregated track levels are a contradiction in a period of

heightened international economic competitiveness, and are not equal in time applied or in teaching strategies.

The contradictions of purpose, effect, and opportunities all lead to a fragmented consciousness among the workers. This condition then provides an environment compatible to labor market segmentation which is the segregating of the labor market. In the education process, seemingly based on merit, students are prepared through the tracking systems of schools to assume positions in an already segmented labor market. The purpose of U.S. schools is, then, to produce a product—workers—who are tracked, thus controlling their opportunities to learn. The U.S. education system actually produces fragmented skill and education levels that match all too well a segmented labor market.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was (1) to examine the reproduction of social class through the subtle mechanism of three tier curriculum tracking system and (2) to establish a base of information from a case study representative of curriculum tracking in a public educational institution. The primary focus is on the purpose and effect of tracking, the opportunities or lack of opportunities to learn, and both the resulting fragmentation of consciousness and class reproduction.

The three tier tracking system was defined as one dividing the education system into three levels at every grade with an elite as the top tier, the middle class at the middle tier, and with the poor who were mostly minorities occupying the bottom tier. Differences in funding and schooling opportunities are the main inequalities that emerge in the tier system. Tier tracking was produced and maintained through a number of IQ and achievement tests which display cultural bias and measure socioeconomic status which influence item responses causing the test to measure social class.

The case study form was chosen for this project in an effort to seek a detailed examination of one setting. The subjects requested anonymity repeatedly for themselves and their institution. They remained anonymous because, although the good news of the school is deserved, the bad news is largely systemic. The educators were generous enough to give me access, which aided my research about curriculum tracking at a single site public institution.

Gathering information about three tier curriculum tracking in a public school required descriptive research. A three-step gathering procedure was used to collect data, which were recorded and analyzed, in a case study of a San Jose area secondary school. The results were presented from three sources of qualitative research, a brief questionnaire, informal interview questions, and (field notes) complete observation. The results were in narrative and quotation form as appropriate to qualitative research.

The purpose and effect of tracking were found to be contradictory. The purpose of curriculum tracking typically is presented as meeting societal needs and also is said to fit students' ability and comfort level. In IQ testing, however, the students' ability is not assessed, only the students' cultural group. The students' comfort level will not be enhanced when they are stigmatized at the lower track in special education classes. The data demonstrate that the effect of tracking is to reproduce class levels and maintain the inequality that exists. The opportunity for students to learn equally is not occurring. Students in ability grouped classes have access to very different types of knowledge.

Recommendations

The research's significance is that it demonstrates that "class reproduction" exceeds mobility across class lines and that the social class reproduction that occurs is a product almost exclusively of curriculum tracking within schools. Educational policy makers must work to correct the current system because all members of society pay when pupils are not effectively prepared to be productive citizens. The more society and the world move toward mass communication through the advancement of science and technology, the more science and mathematics learning opportunities must be made available to all. Changing from

curriculum tracking will help ensure that any move away from ability grouped classes will be toward a reality based education. Providing more equitably allotted educational opportunities as a focus of national concern can help the country become more competitive. Future international economic competitiveness, and socioeconomic stability and justice are necessary if we are to have a stable society in the twenty-first century. The importance of stimulating public concern around the educational institution suggests the need for policy changes.

There are several policy recommendations which would serve to further expand the efforts to stimulate public concern about educational opportunities and the educational institution. First, we must call attention to the problem by concentrating our focus on uneven learning opportunities, issues of educational quality, future economic competitiveness, and socioeconomic equity. Second, we must establish teacher training and empowerment (decision making) by creating a rigorous teacher education program to improve the overall quality of the field and by changing the authority structures which maintain teachers' status as skilled workers who have little control over resources, program organization, content, and methods (Nieto, 1992, p. 296). Third, we must provide more equitable opportunities, and resources should be allocated to establish practices aimed at improving opportunities and distributing them more fairly. Finally, we must create a multicultural education where educators work to remove all biased instructional materials that misrepresent the lives of any citizens. By corresponding to the relations of production and division of labor based on class, race, and gender, schools bring into the education process the key elements of institutional inequality.

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APPENDIX

Instructions: Either a pen or pencil may be used to complete this questionnaire. Most of the questions may be answered by simply placing an X in the appropriate box. However, you may write in additional comments whenever you wish to do so.

Learning Environment

1. In this first section, the focus is on how you feel about the learning situation. Beside each of the statements listed below, please indicate whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD), or don't know (DK).

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>DK</u>
a. Classes should be structured according to ability range as measured by objective tests and past grades	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
b. Students are placed in classes as an accurate reflection of their ability range	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
c. Students readily volunteer answers in discussions with each other as well as to the teacher	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
d. Students know they will be rewarded for effort and therefore are responsive to the reward system	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
e. Whether classes are heterogeneous or homogeneously grouped the criterion for such grouping is ability based . . .	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

2. In general, how do you feel about teacher-student relations in the process of learning? Please indicate beside each whether you agree (A), disagree (D), or don't know (DK).

	<u>A</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>DK</u>
a. Teachers have a choice of curriculum materials used, i.e., texts, other readings, etc.	[]	[]	[]

- b. The main instructional material revolves around the use of texts, with other materials used for "enrichment" ☐ ☐ ☐
- c. The teaching devices on the walls and ceilings are reflective of all students . ☐ ☐ ☐
- d. The individualized teaching that does occur is offered to all students showing a need A D DK
☐ ☐ ☐
- e. All students have contact with their teachers ☐ ☐ ☐
3. As a general rule, how do you feel about discipline and control in your teaching environment? Please indicate whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD), or don't know (DK).
- a. Control is prominent in the day-to-day operation of the school and classes SA A D SD DK
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- b. There is an independent complaint system through which students can bring grievances against the staff for problems ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- c. The nature of punishment in the school is the same for all students with the same offense ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- d. Certain students behaviors tend to elicit punishment for some students and not others ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- e. The punishments and rewards of the school approximate punishment and reward systems in the larger world ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐